KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR on how UCLA put him on a path to success

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THE INSIDER’S VIEW

WELCOME FROM ATHLETICS DIRECTOR

Dan Guerrero

In years past, UCLA has been known as the school of Champions Made Here. We are proud of our student-athletes who have gone on to achieve great things, they make a difference in society, they receive the tools and become versatile, engaged individuals who use their abilities to produce victories beyond the fields of play.

I know, I know, every school likes to say this. Our students and student-athletes go on to achieve great things, they make a difference in society, they receive the tools they need to succeed at life and so on and so forth. But imagine, if only someone had compiled actual data to back up this notion. If only there was some type of empirical evidence that showed what an incredible special place UCLA is really.

Well, as it turns out, this past January, the New York Times published an extensive study entitled “Mobility Report Card: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility” by a team of economists from The Equality of Opportunity Project.

Good timing for this column, right?

Before we go to that study, however, let’s recap what we all know — last year, UCLA was the most applied-to four-year university in the nation with more than 119,000 students seeking admission for fall 2016. This record for number of applications, which included more than 97,000 prospective freshmen and more than 22,000 prospective transfer students, lasted all of one year.

In December 2016, preliminary data indicated that 102,000 high school seniors applied for admission to UCLA for fall 2017, a staggering total that makes UCLA the first school ever to exceed 100,000 freshmen applicants. And again, these are just freshman applicants, the deadline for transfer applications was extended to Jan. 3, 2017, with data yet to come. On top of all of these, in each of the last two years, admissions has the opportunity to review the most geographically, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse applicant pool in our school’s history.

So why do so many people from all walks of life want to come to UCLA?

It boils down to one word — opportunity.

According to The Equality of Opportunity Project’s study, UCLA’s median parent income is the lowest among the nation’s elite universities while the share of its students from bottom fifth income families (those who made about $20,000 or less per year) was the highest among these same universities. Overall, among the elite universities, UCLA has the highest percentage of low and middle income students in the country, approaching approximately 20 percent. What’s more, UCLA ranks first among this group in the madly mobility index — a measure reflecting both access and outcomes that represents the likelihood a student at UCLA moved up two or more income quintiles.

Thus, for transfer students, the opportunity to pursue his basketball passion while receiving a world-class education that would one day ultimately enable him to realize his dreams. Neither of his parents graduated from high school, yet he helped them realize their dreams by being the first in his family to earn a college degree.

In short, not only does UCLA provide access, it provides upward mobility later in life.

Athletics is a microcosm of this standard which permeates the university. Nearly 75 years ago, student-athletes were provided access to UCLA and left to break color barriers in professional baseball and football. More than four decades have passed since a student-athlete was given access to UCLA on a full athletic scholarship, establishing a new standard of gender equity in intramural athletics. We've had student-athletes come to UCLA from afar; poverty became academically ineligible in the middle of the 20th century, and only to graduate on the Athletic Director’s honor roll. Yet UCLA would not be the UCLA it is today without these trailblazers.

The theme that most commonly came up in our discussions was the trailblazing, pioneering spirit of those who had come before.

Mentioned specifically were names like Jackie Robinson, refusing to be out when the Major Leagues wouldn’t let him in; like Ann Meyers, who at a time when the nation was questioning women’s sports, earned the first full athletic scholarship awarded to a female, like Kenny Washington, one of the first African-American college football stars who, after graduating UCLA and being passed over by the NFL due to a discriminatory ban, reintegrated the league in 1946; like Arthur Ashe, who among his numerous feats, was the first African-American man to be ranked as the No. 1 tennis player in the world; and like Coach John Wooden, whose ‘Pyramid of Success’ taught us winning really has nothing to do with the score and everything to do with the process.

It’s this lineage of names and an ethos of breaking through barriers that color UCLA’s unique view toward athletics and create student-athletes who are more than just winners — they are invested in their academics, involved in their community and become versatile, engaged individuals who use their abilities to produce victories beyond the field of play.

I know, I know, every school likes to say this. Our students and student-athletes go on to achieve great things, they make a difference in society, they receive the tools they need to succeed at life and so on and so forth. But imagine, if only someone had compiled actual data to back up this notion. If only there was some type of empirical evidence that showed what an incredible special place UCLA is really.

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STAR FRESHMAN LONZO BALL DRIVES TO THE HOOP BEFORE A SELLOUT CROWD AT PAULEY PAVILION ON FEB. 9, AS NO. 9 UCLA WIPED OUT A 19-POINT DEFICIT TO DEFEAT NO. 6 OREGON, 82-79. (PHOTO: SCOTT CHANDLER)

INSET: UCLA’S WIN CAME ON A NIGHT IN WHICH THE PROGRAM HONORED LEGENDARY HALL OF FAME SPORTS BROADCASTER DICK ENBERG, WHO CALLED UCLA BASKETBALL GAMES IN PAULEY PAVILION FOR NINE SEASONS UNDER HEAD COACH JOHN WOODEN. ENBERG, WHO ADDRESSED THE UCLA FAITHFUL AT HALFTIME, CALLED GAMES FOR THE BRUINS IN EIGHT OF COACH WOODEN’S 10 CHAMPIONSHIP SEASONS. (PHOTO: KATIE MEYERS)
FLANKED BY CHANCELLOR GENE BLOCK (LEFT) AND ATHLETICS DIRECTOR DAN GUERRERO (RIGHT), KAREEM ABDUL JABBAR IS RECOGNIZED AT PAULEY PAVILION DURING HALFTIME OF UCLA’S GAME AGAINST ARIZONA ON JAN. 21. THE EVENT WAS DUBBED “KAREEM ABDUL JABBAR DAY” BY THE ATHLETICS DEPARTMENT IN HONOR OF ABDUL JABBAR RECENTLY RECEIVING THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM. (PHOTO: KATIE MEYERS).
Volunteer coach Jordyn Wieber, who won gold at the 2012 Olympics, cheers on 2016 gold medalist and Bruin freshman Madison Kocian during the team’s season-opening win against Arkansas at Pauley Pavilion on Jan. 18. In her first collegiate meet, Kocian won the all-around and three individual events. She and teammate Kyla Ross, a teammate of Wieber at the 2012 Games, made history that day by becoming the first Olympic gold medalists to compete in an NCAA women’s gymnastics meet. (Photo: Don Liebig)
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CATCHING up with KAREEM

ABDUL-JABBAR WAS ONE OF JUST A FEW FORMER PLAYERS WHO SPOKE AT JOHN WOODEN’S MEMORIAL SERVICE ON JUNE 26, 2016 AT PAULEY PAVILION

(© 2010 Don Liebig)

By Chris Foster

I t has been 50 years since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar made his varsity debut for UCLA, scoring a then-school record 56 points in a 105-90 victory over USC on Dec. 3, 1966 in Pauley Pavilion. Three months later (Feb. 25, 1967), he scored 61 points vs. Washington State in Pauley to set the current Bruins single-game scoring mark.

He excelled on the court to earn adoration and awards. He led John Wooden’s Bruins to three NCAA Championships (1967, 1968, 1969) and was named the Naismith National Player of the Year three times. He won six NBA titles with the Milwaukee Bucks (1971) and Los Angeles Lakers (1980, 1982, 1985, 1987, 1988), was named the league’s Most Valuable Player six times with the Milwaukee Bucks (1971) and Los Angeles Lakers (1980, 1982, 1985, 1987, 1988), was named the league’s Most Valuable Player six times and is the NBA’s all-time leading scorer (38,387 points).

Abdul-Jabbar was a charter inductee into the UCLA Athletic Hall of Fame in 1984. His No. 33 UCLA jersey was retired in 1990, and in 1995 he was enshrined into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. ESPN named him the greatest college basketball player of all-time.

But Abdul-Jabbar’s journey has extended beyond the basketball court. His success on the court is littered with awards. He led John Wooden’s Bruins to three NCAA Championships (1967, 1968, 1969) and was named the Naismith National Player of the Year three times. He won six NBA titles with the Milwaukee Bucks (1971) and Los Angeles Lakers (1980, 1982, 1985, 1987, 1988), was named the league’s Most Valuable Player six times and is the NBA’s all-time leading scorer (38,387 points).

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A legendary Bruin once taught the world that success isn’t defined by wins and losses, but by peace of mind from doing your best, leaving it all on the court. Even if your court is a chemistry lab, the space shuttle or a balance beam. A protégé of John Wooden, UCLA Women’s Gymnastics Head Coach Valorie Kondos Field first teaches her team to become the best people they can be, knowing academic and athletic excellence will follow. Since 1991, it has—culminating in six NCAA championships, but, more importantly, over 100 young Optimists ready for the world.

VAULTING STUDENTS TO A LIFETIME OF SUCCESS.

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WHO WILL YOU MOTIVATE?

UCLA.edu/optimists
Q: WHAT LESSONS DID YOU LEARN FROM BEING PART OF THE NO. 1 COLLEGE BASKETBALL TEAM IN AMERICA? EVERYONE WAS OUT TO KNOCK UCLA OFF.

KAJ: When you’re at the top of the mountain, you’re a clear target for all those trying to take your place. In sports, as in the movie “Highlander,” there can be only one. As I mentioned earlier, preparation was everything with Coach Wooden and he taught us how to prepare for all the teams that would come at us. That level of preparation imbued us with enough confidence that we believed we could beat any team that came at us. But he also taught us that sports isn’t real life. In sports, there’s room at the top for only one team, but in life there’s plenty of room for others and we should do everything we can to help those others reach the top. That’s what made the man so brilliant.

Q: LOOKING BACK, WHAT IS THE MOST SATISFYING THING YOU ACCOMPLISHED OFF THE BASKETBALL COURT?

KAJ: The usual doors that athletic fame brings: endorsement deals, cameos in movies and TV shows, meeting other famous people. What’s important is what you do with those opportunities. I have no problem with athletes who use their fame to make as much money as they can. Good for them. But I think they also need to use their fame as an opportunity to help the community so that others have more opportunities to succeed.

Q: WHAT DOORS HAVE BEEN OPENED FOR YOU BECAUSE OF BASKETBALL?

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Q: PLANS, OR HOPES, FOR THE FUTURE?

KAJ: I want to expose kids from different countries to what's good about American culture. I traveled around the world on behalf of the U.S. and met hundreds of energetic and hopeful children. I wanted them to know that America is their friend and that our culture is diverse and inclusive.

Q: THINKS ON THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM?

KAJ: I hope I'm remembered as much for what I did on the court as what I did off the court. It's what I like sports fans to remember most. What I played as hard as I could every game throughout my college and professional careers. I didn't make excuses when we lost and I didn't take credit when we won. My pleasure came during each game, while I was in movement with my team, and we were playing together like a great jazz band, riffing on notes during our solos, but ultimately harmonizing as a unit. It's hoped that whenever I'm mentioned in the future to remember me for basketball, remember me in mid-play, when I've just made a spontaneous move that sent me leaping up, my body a soaring jazz solo by John Coltrane. My moment of mastery. That's where I was happiest.

Q: FROM A BASKETBALL STANDPOINT, HOW DO YOU WISH TO BE REMEMBERED?

KAJ: I hope I'm remembered as much for what I did off the court as what I did on it. But what I'd like sports fans to remember most is that I played as hard as I could every game throughout my college and professional careers. I didn't make excuses when we lost and I didn't take credit when we won. My pleasure came during each game, while I was in movement with my team, and we were playing together like a great jazz band, riffing on notes during our solos, but ultimately harmonizing as a unit. It's hoped that whenever I'm mentioned in the future to remember me for basketball, remember me in mid-play, when I've just made a spontaneous move that sent me leaping up, my body a soaring jazz solo by John Coltrane. My moment of mastery. That's where I was happiest.

Q: YOU OFFERED A STRONG MESSAGE AT THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION. HOW BEST CAN YOU CONTINUE TO STRESS DIVERSITY AND UNITY?

KAJ: The next four years under the Trump Administration will be a challenge because there’s a clear backlash against civil liberties and rights. His choices for his cabinet and White House staff prove that. The hope of the Trump Administration, at every window sill, is that there’s a perception that they will increase the economy so no one will notice that Planned Parenthood is being defunded, that blacks’ voting rights are being restricted, the LGBT community is being harassed, and so forth. Basically, it’s an attempt to buy America’s conscience. We have to tune our voices every time they try to make us all invisible. We may end those four years hoarse, but we will end it with integrity.

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Richard, Susan, Erik, and Cassidy Najarian are passionately committed to UCLA and supporting Bruin student-athletes through the Wooden Athletic Fund. Richard earned his BS in Electrical Engineering at UCLA in 1982, and was a four-year member of the UCLA Men’s Water Polo team. He met his future wife Susan (UCLA ’81) while both were undergrads, and they have been die-hard Bruin fans and supporters since. Following in his father’s footsteps, their son Erik (UCLA ’16) was also affiliated with UCLA Men’s Water Polo as a player and a team manager, while their daughter Cassidy, now attending Southern Methodist University, graduated from Palos Verdes High School where she was a CIF champion soccer player. A Vice President of Marketing for GainSpan Corporation, Richard has been in the wireless semiconductor industry for over 16 years, using his UCLA education to develop wireless connectivity solutions at several Silicon Valley technology startups.

Playing water polo for then UCLA Head Coach, Olympian, and UCLA Athletics Hall of Fame Inductee Bob Horn, Richard was named to the All-America list in 1979. He firmly believes that good coaching and being part of an athletics program instills values that are key to success beyond the classroom and the field of play. Richard further believes that it builds leadership, discipline, personal commitment, and teaches one how to work effectively with others, which are just a few of the qualities that build character and lead to success. For these reasons, the Najarians have been donating back to UCLA Men’s Water Polo since the late 1980’s. They became Wooden Athletic Fund members in 2015, already increasing their support one membership level.

“I have so many memorable moments with regards to UCLA, the most recent being watching my son Erik’s water polo team win the 2015 NCAA National Championship—UCLA’s 113th national title. I know that today’s student-athletes face tremendous challenges both in and out of the classroom. The Wooden Athletic Fund represents a tangible connection to UCLA and its 700+ student-athletes who directly benefit from the opportunities it provides. As a former student-athlete, the Wooden Athletic Fund allows me to give back to my school and support aspiring student-athletes to reach their goals.”

The Wooden Athletic Fund is committed to honoring the educational and athletic legacy of Nell and John Wooden.

Together, members of the Wooden Athletic Fund team provide invaluable support for all UCLA student-athletes and every gift has a positive impact on their ability to succeed in the classroom, in competition and in the community.

This funding is directed to the people, places and programs that need it most, allowing UCLA Athletics to act quickly to enhance the student-athlete experience, retain coaches, and seize opportunities.

Richard, Susan, Erik, and Cassidy Najarian Invest in Tomorrow’s Champions Today.
By Michael Ventre

Dreams

TEAM USA TO GLORY IN OLYMPIC SOFTBALL.

AS BRUINS WHO HELP LEAD LISA FERNANDEZ WITH SOFTBALL BACK IN THE OLYMPICS IN 2020, UCLA LOOKS TO ADD TO ITS TRADITION OF GREATNESS

HALSTEAD (RIGHT) HOPE TO JOIN UCLA COACH (LEFT) AND DELANEY SPAULDING (LEFT) AND PAIGE HAULSTED (RIGHT) AFTER THE THREE BRUINS HELPED TEAM USA CAPTURE THE WBSC WOMEN'S WORLD SOFTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP IN 2016

For us to have our sport eliminated kind of truly blindsided us,” she explained. “People have given a lot of preparation to have that one moment in their career when they're at their best, barring injury,” she said. “That's what the Olympics do,” she added. “The Olympics draw people from every walk of life. It's a once, true, three-week period when everybody's eyes are not on a sport but on patriotism. I think that's the impact the Olympics have. It's about representing your country.”

Paige Halstead has that dream, especially now that it's possible again. UCLA's star shortstop/outfielder is also a member of the national team and is in position to compete for a spot on the 2020 team.

“I think about it all the time,” she admitted. “It's definitely always in the back of my mind. I've definitely a dream Trea, which would be an amazing one if it came true. I think everybody dreams about that.”

Fernandez believes that, when it comes to both Delaney and Paige, theirs are not pipe dreams.

There, of course, softball went away, at least the Olympic variety.

But before it did, Fernandez came away with some indelible memories of her experiences that are as fresh today in the UCLA assistant as they were then.

“One of my favorite memories and experiences when I was competing was after the '96 Olympics,” she recalled. “I was back at UCLA and I had this person walk up to me who was a professor and basically said, 'I'm not a sports fan. I don't watch sports. But I do watch the Olympics. And I just want to say thank you for representing our country.' I'm like, 'Oh my gosh. For the first time ever I was able to impact someone who wasn't even a fan of the game and a fan of sports.'”

“That's what the Olympics do,” she added. “The Olympics draw people from every walk of life. It's a once, true, three-week period when everybody's eyes are not on a sport but on patriotism. I think that's the impact the Olympics have. It's about representing your country.”

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On Delaney: “She is exceptional. I mean she is by far one of the best shortstops in the college game right now, and she's come at the right time. I've been lucky during this period due to the future, and they're the ones who are going to compete for that 2020 spot. I think she's got a tremendous amount of experience. Being able to perform in some of the most pressure moments, she is always able to produce.”

On Paige: “She is the future. She is a physical specimen when it comes to her height, her strength, her build, the arm that she has. She continues to work on wanting to develop her game. She's someone who has been in that Olympic system, that national team system as well. When you talk about behind-the-plate arm strength, she is outstanding. It's exciting to see how much she has grown and continues to grow.”

It's difficult to quantify exactly how much having softball in the Olympics again will help the UCLA program in particular. The Bruins have always managed to attract top talent in the sport and surely will continue to do so. The Olympics are a nice every-four-year extravaganza, but the yearly accomplishments of the softball squad in Westwood serve as enough advertisement for the public as to the merits of the program.

Yet Fernandez recognizes that there is something very special about the Olympics, and that quality seeps down into the UCLA athletic aquifer.

“When you have the opportunity to prepare and you have four years to plan for your preparation with the talent you have, then you can plan your six-year course. And it's then that you make your move.”

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NOT A WOODEN FUND MEMBER YET?

The Wooden Athletic Fund is proud to honor the 8,513 donors who generously provide invaluable support for all UCLA student-athletes and honor the lasting educational and athletic legacy of Nell and John Wooden. Every gift has a positive impact on UCLA student-athletes’ ability to succeed in the classroom, in competition and in the community.

2017-18 MEMBERSHIPS AVAILABLE NOW

The Wooden Athletic Fund is striving to reach 10,000 members in support of UCLA student-athletes and membership begins at just $100.

in time. Our sport managed. We fought and figured out a way to get back in. Japan played a big part, since the Games will be played in Japan.

"For right now it’s been huge for us in terms of monarchy and publicity that we can build off of," added Fernandez. "It helps that our athletes have been on Olympic teams. It’s a major platform that reaches millions."

Spaulding for one is stoked. She had that little-girl experience: most softball players have, of gaining amazement at the Olympic Games and dreaming big.

"It makes me very excited," she said. "When I was growing up, I watched the Olympics with my dad. He would wake me up because of the time difference. I would wake me up in the middle of the night, or early morning, to watch softball games. Now that softball is back in the Olympics, it’s a cool moment. It’s pretty awesome."

Most of the world has viewed at some point the moment of glory for Olympians, when they stand on the podium and listen to national anthems. The gold medalist beams, the silver and bronze recipients also enjoy satisfaction over a goal that has been reached. But relatively few over the years have actually had that experience. Fernandez recalls the feeling.

"For me I really put a lot of expectations and a lot of pressure on myself in order to represent my country," she said. "So there wasn’t a day I was training or preparing that I wasn’t thinking about what I was going to do to win a gold medal. To have that thought in your mind every single day for four years, it takes its toll.

"For me, to be able to push myself to the limit in training and preparation, to make sure I was going to be the best I could be coming into the Olympics, that was it," she continued. "When I won the gold medal, the first thing was a sense of relief. I did it. I did the job. I completed the task. I completed the goal that I set out four years ago to accomplish. For me as an athlete, my biggest fear was to disappoint. And I never wanted to not live up to the expectations that my coaches, my teammates, my fans had of myself as a player. That motivated me to make sure I was prepared, to make sure I was ready to go."

That thinking is why USA softball has been so successful in the Olympics, and why the UCLA program is supremely proud of the part it has played in that success.

"She is the future. She is a physical specimen when it comes to her height, her strength, her build, the arm that she has. She is outstanding. It’s exciting to see how much she has grown and continues to grow." - Assistant Coach Lisa Fernandez

"She is the future. She is a physical specimen when it comes to her height, her strength, her build, the arm that she has. She continues to work on wanting to develop her game. She’s someone who has been in that Olympic system, that national team system as well. When you talk about behind-the-plate arm strength, she is outstanding. It’s exciting to see how much she has grown and continues to grow."

Assistant Coach Lisa Fernandez

**Olympic Dreams**

**Paige Halstead, UCLA’s Star Catcher/Outfielder, is in position to compete for a spot on the 2020 team. (Photo: Joshua Gateley)**
SEIA was recognized as a Forbes Top 100 RIA Firms by 10-Year Growth 2016, Los Angeles Business Journal Largest Money Management Firms Ranked by Assets Managed 2016, and Financial Times Top 300 Registered Investment Adviser List 2016.

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Micah Ma’a does remember the balloons. “My parents showed me the pictures,” he recalled.

UCLA’s talented sophomore relies on that as evidence where his volleyball career began. Lisa Strand-Ma’a, his mother, recalls so much more. The small apartment in Honolulu’s Kamehameha School, where her husband, Pono Ma’a, ran the dorms and the school’s intramural program, became an arena.

Micah and his older sister would bat balloons back and forth. It was serious stuff. There was no one, no referee, no scorekeeper. But that small apartment might as well have included a national television audience.

“They always played to win,” said Lisa. “Micah just had this great energy. I don’t think he ever felt 5 years old. It was like, ‘I want to play.’”

It was a small glimpse at the volleyball DNA Micah totes around.

“Volleyball is engrained in the culture,” Pono added. “It wasn’t a outbound question. She literally grew up in volleyball.”

By then, he was already digging into the family business.

“Everything in my family revolves around volleyball,” said Micah. He was not about to walk away from the family business.

Micah played football and basketball and baseball, and even dabbled in water polo, at Punahou School — “I always had a ball in my hand, even when I was sleeping,” he said — but volleyball was an easy career choice.

“If you’re from Hawai’i, it can be difficult to make it in sports,” said Micah, who is 6-3, 180 pounds. “People in Hawai’i are not physically gifted. You don’t go around thinking, ‘Oh, I’m three inches taller.’ We’re just gifted. You don’t go around thinking, ‘Oh, I’m three inches taller.’ We’re just gifted. You don’t want to play Monopoly with him,” said Lisa. “You’ll stay up all night.”

“But there was an unyielding force lurking behind that focus. As a freshman basketball player at Punahou, Micah would hustle 6-foot-7 senior DeForest Buckner, now a defensive end with the San Francisco 49ers.

“In practice, he asked to guard DeForest and the coach would tell him that wasn’t going to happen,” recalled Pono. “Micah would be like, ‘No, no, I’m going to do this and I’m going to do it.’”

It was another skill rooted in the family. Family gatherings often became volleyball courts, with friends and family playing all night.

“Micah started when he was 7, 8,” said Lisa. “He was already digging into the family business.”

“We wanted our kids to try everything,” said Lisa. Volleyball, though, was part of the family. Micah started at a 7-year-old, playing on his older sister’s club team. “We needed help,” recalled Lisa. “As a youth player, Micah was part of a Kula Ulukoa club team that won six consecutive national AAU-group championships from 2008-13. There was a focus to Micah’s approach that made him extremely competitive. Lisa saw that when her son was little in a youth baseball league where parents pitched to the kids.

“He was playing shortstop and the first ground ball, he threw it to first,” Lisa said. “The next ground ball, Micah just ran it over to first.”

“They always played to win,” said Lisa. “Micah just had this great energy. I don’t think he ever felt 5 years old. It was like, ‘I want to play.’”

Micah brought that focus to UCLA last season. He was named to the AVCA (American Volleyball Coaches Association) All-America First Team after helping the Bruins reach the Final Four for the first time since 2006.

“Micah has this social awareness where he understands intuitively where his teammates are emotionally,” UCLA Coach John Speraw said.

Speraw saw that up close and personal in the third match last season. Pono and Lisa met as freshman at Hawai’i, where they became stars in college volleyball. Pono was selected first-team All-American in 1986 and second-team in 1984. Lisa led the women’s team to its first two NCAA championship matches, in 1983 and 1984. Both spent time on the AVP Tour, maintaining a level of celebrity in Hawai’i. Pono has coached club teams in Hawai’i. Lisa works as a broadcaster for University of Hawai’i women’s games.

“The Hawai’i volleyball community has ‘an intense internal strength,’” said Speraw.

“There’s a different sense of humility, as well as a sense of family and selflessness. The players coming out of there are really strong, not just in the game, but in the way they handle the game,” Speraw added.

Micah would hear stories about his parents’ athletic prowess from family friends. By then, he was already digging into the family business.

“Your parents showed me the pictures,” he recalled.

“Micah interjected, saying, ‘Hey, we’re going to do this and we’re going to do that.’ All the other guys were nodding their heads. I told my assistant, ‘OK, I’m three inches taller. We’re just small guys.’”

Speraw added.

“Micah started when he was 7, 8,” said Lisa. “He was already digging into the family business.”

“‘We wanted our kids to try everything,’” said Lisa. “We wanted our kids to try everything.”

It was another skill rooted in the family. Family gatherings often became intense volleyball tournaments, particularly when visiting Lisa’s family in Santa Barbara. Her twin sisters, Kelly Van Winden, was an All-American at Cal Poly and was raising volleyball prodigies as well. Both her daughters earned college scholarships — Adlee Van Winden, who played for the Cal Poly women’s team, and Torrey Van Winden, who is a freshman on the UCLA women’s team.

The Van Windens had a beach court in their backyard.
“We’d played two-on-two until the sun went down and we’d start again when the sun came up,” Micah said. The parents tried to tamp things down, insisting that no score be kept. As Micah is quick to point out, “That wasn’t going to happen.” It didn’t matter where the families were, a game could break out at any moment.

“We were in Lake Tahoe one time and the ski lifts were sold out,” Lisa said. “There was a volleyball in the car — there’s always a volleyball — and there were the kids in their snow gear playing in the parking lot.”

Such round-the-clock training honed Micah’s skills. He was considered one of the top players in Hawai‘i as a senior at Punahou.

“You could see the athletic ability, but you see that in a lot of kids,” Pono said. “Micah had a cognitive understanding of the big picture — passing, setting, hitting. That separated him.”

Speraw saw that as well.

“Not many players are so in control of what they’re doing that they can worry about what others are doing,” he said. “His vision of the game is unique.”

Micah was set on leaving home and Speraw, as the U.S. National Team coach, offered what others universities couldn’t.

“I want to play volleyball past college,” Micah said. “Coach Speraw is the best to learn from with his knowledge and experience. There is a long list of things that make him special.”

The adjustment to UCLA took some time.

“The L.A. lifestyle compared to home is pretty different,” Micah said. “Things are a little more fast-paced. People are always like, ‘go, go, go.’ It was kind of draining.” Volleyball made assimilating easier.

The Bruins had not been to the NCAA tournament since winning their 19th NCAA championship in 2006. Two weeks into the 2016 season, UCLA had the look of a contender. The Bruins beat eventual national champion Ohio State and Penn State in the Pac-12/Big Ten Challenge.

Micah was named first-team All-Mountain Pacific Sports Federation after helping UCLA finish second behind top-ranked Brigham Young. The Bruins lost to Ohio State in the NCAA Semifinals.

“I heard it had been a long time since UCLA went to the Final Four,” Micah said. “Helping us do that was great.” But it left Micah chasing one more balloon.

“Winning the title,” Micah said. “It’s not a one-day-at-a-time kind of thing, it’s an everyday kind of thing with that goal in mind.”
MARK YOUR CALENDAR
FIVE UPCOMING EVENTS TO ATTEND

MARCH 5 — DODGERTOWN CLASSIC
Big time college baseball returns to Dodger Stadium again this year, as the UCLA Bruins will headline the Dodgertown Classic on March 5 at Chavez Ravine. The Bruins will take on crosstown rival USC in the second half of a doubleheader at 3 p.m. The first game that day features Michigan and San Diego at 11 a.m. The Dodgertown Classic dates back to 2010 when Vanderbilt, Oklahoma State, UCLA and USC kicked off the event.
Ticket information can be found online at www.dodgers.com/classic.

MARCH 12 — GYMNASTICS VS. NORTH CAROLINA
Led by legendary head coach Valorie Kondos Field, the UCLA gymnastics team will host its final home meet of the 2017 season on Sunday, March 12, as ACC foe North Carolina heads to Pauley Pavilion. It will also be Senior Day for Bruins Angi Cipra, Peng-Peng Lee, Mikaela Gerber, Hallee Mousset and volunteer coach Emily Werber. UCLA features a star-studded lineup which includes the only two Olympic gold medalists to ever compete in NCAA women’s gymnastics in Olympians Madison Kocian and Kyla Ross.
Time: Noon / Tickets: $16 general admission.

MARCH 12 — SOFTBALL VS. TEXAS
If you want the chance to take in two UCLA events in one day you can do just that on March 12, as following the gymnastics meet at Noon (see above), the Bruin softball team hosts Texas at 4 p.m. UCLA will be coming off a 19-game road swing when it hosts the Longhorns, as it marks the first of nine straight home games for the Bruins. UCLA returns eight starters from a 2016 team that made their second straight trip to the Women’s College World Series, and also have a standout freshmen class looking to make their mark in 2017.
Time: 4 p.m. / Tickets: $8 general admission ($5 youth)

APRIL 22 — WOMEN’S WATER POLO VS. USC
The crosstown showdown between UCLA and USC will be renewed in the pool on April 22, as the Bruins and Trojans are set to tangle in women’s water polo at UCLA’s Spieker Aquatics Center. UCLA’s lineup is significantly bolstered in 2017 by the return of U.S. National Team players Rachel Fattal, Alys Williams and Kodi Hill, all of whom redshirted in 2016 while helping Team USA qualify for the Olympic Games in Rio. Both Fattal and newcomer Maddie Musselman were part of the U.S. team that ultimately won gold in Rio, and both players will play a significant role in helping UCLA aim for its eight NCAA Championship in Indianapolis, Indiana, this May.
Time: 1 p.m. / Tickets: Free

APRIL 29 — FOOTBALL SPRING SHOWCASE
Fans looking to get an up-close-and-personal look at the UCLA football can do just that on April 29, as the team hosts its annual Spring Showcase at Drake Stadium beginning at 1 p.m. The Spring Showcase marks the last practice of the spring for the Bruins, who will not convene again on the field until fall camp in August. The day is typically highlighted by a post-practice autograph session where fans can also meet and take pictures with their favorite players.
Time: 1 p.m. / Ticket Info: 310-UCLA-WIN.
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¹ SunPower 345W compared to a Conventional Panel (250W, 15.3% efficient, approx. 1.6 m²), 9% more energy per watt, 0.75%/yr slower degradation. BEW/DNV Engineering “SunPower Yield Report,” 2013 with CFV Solar Test Lab Report #12063, temp. coef. calculation. Campeau, Z. et al. “SunPower Module Degradation Rate,” SunPower white paper, 2013. See www.sunpowercorp.com for details.

² Rebate terms: Before offer rebate costs will vary, depending on system specifications. Only available for new, first-time customers. Please check with your SunPower installer to confirm participation in the offer. This offer may not be applied to quotes on existing proposals or past purchases. Please allow 6-8 weeks for processing. Other terms and conditions apply. Visit www.sunpower.com/uclaathletics for more details.
MARK CORMANY
UCLA GRAD HAS RETAINED CLOSE TIES TO HIS ALMA MATER

Growing up in Tustin, California, his dream had always been to attend UC Santa Barbara. Yet when he was a senior in high school and it came time for him to fill out his application to the University of California, he purposely left the box blank where your school choice needed to be checked off. He returned to that section of his application later to give it more thought.

"Sports were too important for me to go to a school that didn't have them. I want to go to bowl games, Final Fours, and tailgate parties," he said. "I thought, one day I'll be a middle-aged man and if I go to [UC] Santa Barbara I won't have any of those things to connect me to the school I attended."

This was the reasoning that changed Mark Cormany’s decision; a decision he never for one second regretted.

"Looking back, deciding to go to UCLA was the wisest decision I ever made," said Mark.

There is no shortage of topics Mark can discuss relating to UCLA and how much earning his undergraduate degree there meant to him, nor can he deny the huge impact it has made on his life. During high school he attended UCLA games with friends and saw firsthand the connection between one’s school and the passion shown by the fans who attended.

"I saw these middle-aged people [at games] who were so passionate about where they went to school," said Mark. "In the back of my mind I thought, 'I want that passion and that connection.'"

After graduating from UCLA with a degree in Political Science in 1986, Mark realized very quickly that his UCLA degree reaped a great deal of continued access to the university. Invitations to seminars and presentations often came in the mail; he could get a library card, a recreation card, and any number of other alumni-related privileges. Mark, as he did during his undergraduate years, continued to attend football and men’s basketball games, but would buy tickets with his friends without much regularity.

"I decided that I wanted to get better seats to the games I was going to," said Mark. "I could go to StubHub or other places for tickets, but I knew this wasn't the connection I wanted to UCLA. I had gone to the Final Four in 2006 and decided I wanted to be more connected to the school and sit with UCLA fans in better seats and not have to put my whole itinerary together myself."

During his 2006 trip to Indianapolis for the Final Four, Mark met Brian Smith, Assistant Athletic Director for Major Gifts, and inquired how to go about becoming more connected to his alma mater.

"I started doing the math on how to get better seats, and then the Pauley [Pavilion Renovation] project came up," said Mark. "That's when I really..."
MARK CORMANY
UCLA GRAD HAS RETAINED CLOSE TIES TO HIS ALMA MATER

started getting involved, and Brian helped me maneuver through the donor levels and corresponding benefits. After making a gift to the Pauley campaign, I started donating to the Wooden Athletic Fund. This connectivity through WAF keeps me connected to this university, and I started giving at the Director’s Circle membership level. Now, my favorite UCLA activity is attending the Director’s Dinner.”

The Director’s Dinner is an exclusive, annual dinner where attendees dine at a different UCLA venue each year with every UCLA head coach and top administrators in attendance. Through these dinners, Mark, like many guests, got acquainted with head coaches other than the two he already knew — football and men’s basketball — and a whole new appreciation for coaches and other teams took hold.

“I met Adam [Wright, men’s water polo head coach] at my second Director’s Dinner and we hit it off,” said Mark. “I got to know him better and traveled to Budapest with the water polo team and really got to know the student-athletes. I gained an appreciation for different sports and how hard all the coaches work with recruiting, coaching, travel and all the other things they have to do. I’ve also gone to several UCLA softball golf tournaments so I’ve gotten to know Kelly [Inouye-Perez, head softball coach] and other head coaches like Val from gymnastics and Derek Freeman from men’s golf. So it’s been fun branching out into other sports.”

Through his membership in Director’s Circle, Mark’s benefits jumped tenfold. He has been invited to go on away football trips and the annual donor football trip. These travels not only pushed Mark to see new places he never would have thought of going to before, but gave him a newfound respect of what it takes to run an athletics department.

“I get a glimpse into the running of an athletics department, but it has made me really proud of UCLA’s integrity,” said Mark. “I respect the process and celebrate the wins and I don’t hang onto the losses because I see so much of the human component involved. When I was a student, UCLA won three Rose Bowls and a Fiesta Bowl. We also lost to Irvine in the first round of the NIT. But I went to every game regardless, and winning or losing will never change my commitment to UCLA.”

This way of thinking was most likely passed on to Mark by his father. The sacrifices that his parents made so that he could earn a college degree was never lost on Mark, and he wishes that his dad, who passed away in the mid-1990s, could see him and the man he has become now due in large part to his UCLA degree and ensuing relationships.

“I played baseball and basketball in high school, and our football team never won any games, yet my Dad would attend all of our football games. His attitude was, ‘If you don’t suffer through the hard times, you haven’t earned the right to appreciate the good times.’ I feel that same way. Because my Dad worked weekends, we went on only one family vacation. I was 10 years old, and on our way, he took me to an ASU baseball game in Tempe and said, ‘Mark, this is a place you might consider going to college one day.’ He would also pull me out of school every so often to take me to a UC-Irvine baseball game. ‘We would bond at these games, but his message was clear that college was going to be part of my life. Education was stressed because my Dad never had the opportunity to go to college.’

Mark majored in Political Science at UCLA but always had a business emphasis in classes he took. Some years after he graduated, he worked at PacifiCare for a number of years, then decided to build his own business. His new business model was devised as an uncertain and daunting point in his life. In the late 1990s, Mark was diagnosed with cancer. While recovering from surgery, he decided he wanted to have his own company and not work for anyone else. Since he had known many brokers from being in the health care business, he was able to start his own company, and in 1997, French Cormany Insurance was born.

“I grew my business by acquiring other businesses from people who were going to retire or leave the health care field,” said Mark. “One of the first guys whose business I bought was Bob French, who was a mentor to me. My ego isn’t such that I need to have my name all over the place, and I liked French Cormany, so that became my company’s name. I am an insurance broker who handles employer benefits for companies — selling insurance is a really small part. So I guess I’m not your typical insurance sales guy.”

Mark has generously donated to the new Wasserman Football Center on campus as well as to the campaign to name the Terry Donahue Pavilion at the Rose Bowl.

“I sit in the club seats at the Rose Bowl, and when I take the escalator up, I can see my name on the list of those who contributed to the Terry Donahue Pavilion. I love seeing it there because it makes me proud to know I had a small something to do with it. But my ultimate goal is to be part of the 1919 Society.”

The 1919 Society is the Athletic Department’s elite membership group that recognizes the individuals who have contributed $1,000,000 or more in their lifetimes to UCLA Athletics.

“It’s my ultimate goal, because I think for a guy with my background, who became a self-made guy, what would be more awesome than giving $1,000,000 to your alma mater?”

Making a big difference in young lives

The UCLA Kid Captain program recognizes pediatric patients who are facing serious illnesses with exceptional courage, strength and determination. UCLA Athletics and UCLA Mattel Children’s Hospital are proud to join together with Bruins everywhere to create special memories for these amazing kids.

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