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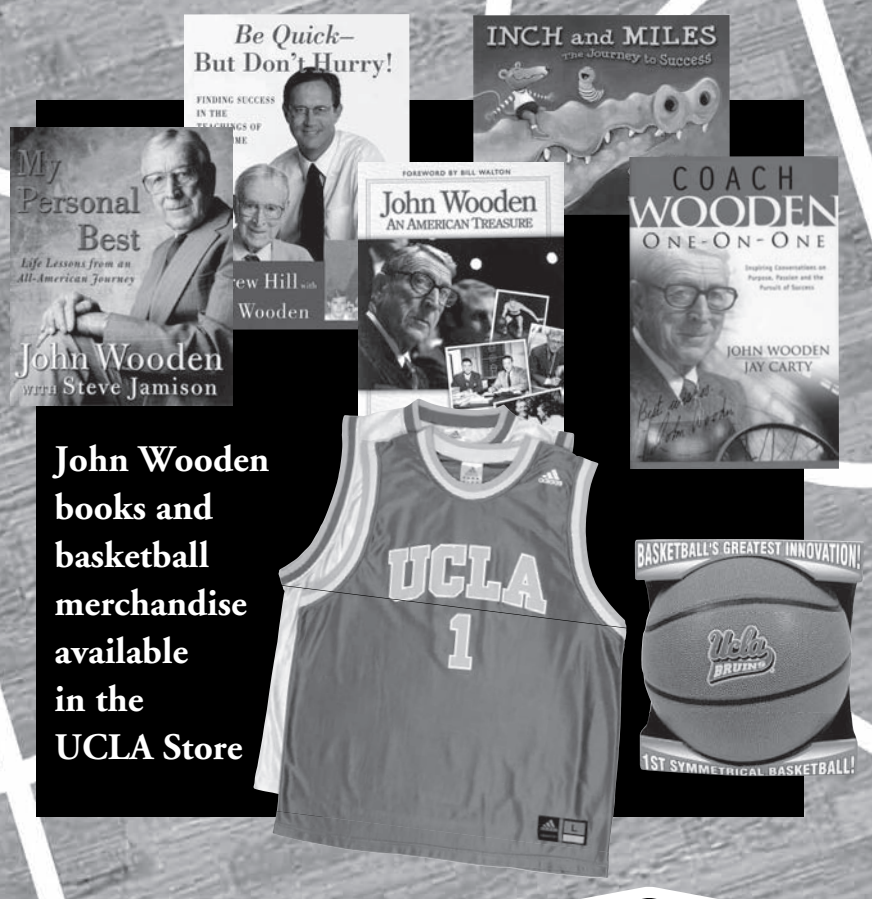


Meet the Legend

John Wooden

Wednesday, January 18
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B-Level Ackerman Union

Arrive early! The line will be cut off appropriately to end the event at 6pm. Legendary UCLA Basketball Coach John Wooden will sign books, basketballs and even t-shirts.



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GUERRERO ... *The Insider's View*

Happy New Year! Here's hoping 2006 brings great recruits, high graduation rates, bountiful contributions, lofty grade point averages, soaring ticket sales, goals, touchdowns, runs, points, birdies, victories, and championships. Good thing I don't have a one-track mind.

In this issue I promised to continue my discussion on intercollegiate athletic finances. Last month, I addressed income. On the subject of expenses, did you know that …

- The annual cost to fund one full in-state athletic scholarship is approximately $18,000 and an out-of-state scholarship is approximately $36,000?
- We pay the Rose Bowl 8% of our home football gate and TV income as stadium rent?
- A single charter flight for the football team can cost as much as $240,000?
- UCLA's annual Pac-10 Conference dues are nearly $500,000?
- We pay to have our football helmets certified for safety each year?
- Our 2005 home football opponents received $1.5 million in guarantees?
- Our annual utility bill from the campus exceeds $300,000?
- We buy gum, shoelaces, chlorine, oars, newspaper ads, diamond dry, video servers, rings, recruiting meals, textbooks, barbells, plane tickets, and pay for shoulder surgeries, knee surgeries, finger surgeries, elbow surgeries, and every other orthopedic surgery?

AND did you know our annual fertilizer and pesticides bill exceeds $120,000? Those are just a few examples of where our money goes. Broken down into broad categories, it looks like this:

EXPENSES ($43 million)

- Operations Budgets for all sports (including salaries) — 47.1%
- Sports Support Services/Administration (includes such areas as sports medicine, equipment room, academic support, life skills, facilities and maintenance, development, marketing, technology, media relations, etc.) — 30.4%
- Grant in Aid (Scholarships) — 17.7%
- Business enterprises (Primarily camps) — 4.8%

Much of the above is predictable, making budget forecasting reasonably straightforward. Some big ticket items, however, like grants-in-aid, can have unforeseeable spikes, complicating life for our Associate Athletic Director for Business Affairs and making long-term predictions unreliable. As registration fees and room and board continue to rise, so does the value of an athletic scholarship. Fees have increased by approximately 80% since my hire as Athletic Director in 2002. This fact alone has placed extraordinary pressure on our department to generate additional income. Additionally, costs for team travel (especially football) have increased significantly, largely as a result of the rise in fuel costs. Balanced with the mission to be nationally competitive in every sport, yet run a fiscally sound program, you can see why we monitor our expenditure patterns very closely and spend a great deal of time exploring new revenue streams. I can assure you that we don't raise ticket prices or ask for donor levels to be increased on a whim. UCLA competes at the highest level of intercollegiate athletic competition and very few schools, if any, do it better. I know what you expect from this program—it's what I expect as well. But the cost of doing business, as you can readily see, is escalating...and we pay for this excellence, in large part, through gate receipts and donations. Without the help of our donors and season ticket holders — the total of which we hope to steadily increase — our success would not be possible. Again, I say thank you.

As I write this, our Fall sports season has come to an end. A 10-2 football season exceeded all expectations, and with the preliminary reports on recruiting indicating a stellar class, football '06 will be electrifying once more. Kudos to the Fall sports student-athletes and coaches. A number of sports sponsored by UCLA were represented in NCAA post-season competition (women's volleyball, men's and women's cross-country, and mens' and women's soccer). Women's Soccer made another great national championship run and will no doubt win the title down the road. We are proud of the efforts of all of our Fall sports teams, with a special congratulations to all of those student-athletes and coaches who earned post-season accolades. The list of all-conference performers, All-Americans and coaches of the year continue to grow. The Winter sports are now in full swing, so I expect to see you at gymnastics, a swim meet, and of course, men's and women's basketball. I'll be the one wearing the green visor, punching the calculator, and counting the attendees.

Go Bruins!

Dan Guerrero

Dan Guerrero

From the Editor:

The desire to help a seriously injured current student-athlete brought back the name of Mark Caso, whose UCLA athletic career nearly ended 25 years ago because of a freak accident.

Luck strikes three times: the student-athlete's injuries proved not to be as career-threatening as initially believed, Caso turned out to be living locally and, after re-connecting with him, Bruin Blue discovered he would make an excellent choice for the regular Bruins in the Real World feature.

During the Holiday Season, families gathered and celebrated, and supported their own in the spirit of generosity and kinship. Caso's enthusiastic offer to help an injured Bruin (whom he had never met) proved once again that the Bruin Family extends far beyond campus and the competitive arena.

Go Bruins,

rb

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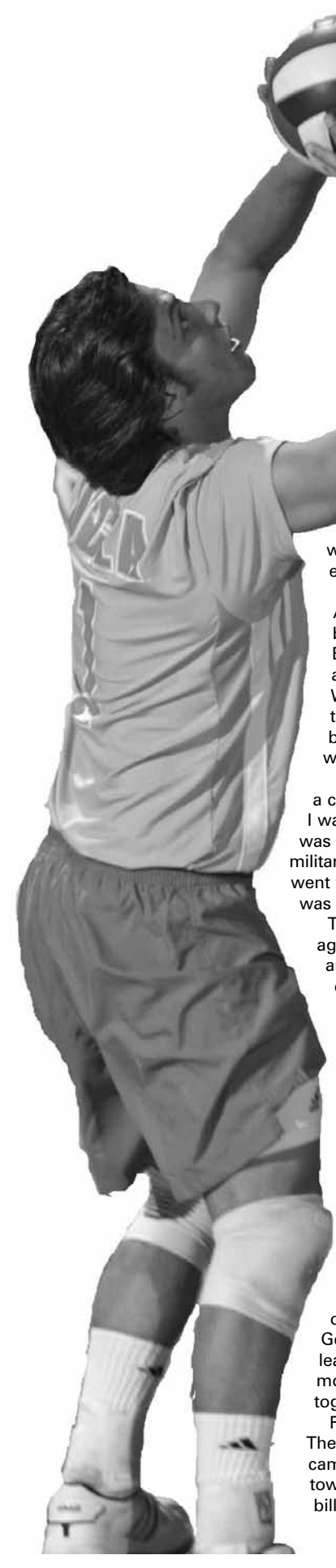
MEN'S VOLLEYBALL

SOPHOMORE LIBERO TONY KER

Sophomore Libero Tony Ker is one of two "veteran" returning starters on the 2006 UCLA men's volleyball team. Last season he earned First-Team All-MPSF honors and Second-Team ASICS All-America honors. Over the summer he played for the U.S. Jr. National Team in the FIVB U-21 World Volleyball Championships, and traveled with the Bruins on their quadrennial trip to Italy.

Bruin Blue: You began your summer in Lake Placid New York.
Tony Ker: Lake Placid is a great facility. It's the second time I've been there. I actually like it better than the Colorado facility just because everything is in one building. You live in the dorms. When you want to eat, you walk down the hall. When you practice, it's 100 yards away. There's a weight room in there. I like being able to get back to my room after long practices or double days and take a nap. It's cool because you get to meet the other athletes that are training there — usually it's bobsledders or skiers.

We went out in town a few times. There's not a whole lot to do in Lake Placid because it's not a very big town. We went out to dinner a few times and saw a couple of movies. We watched the Ironman (triathlon). We made the best of it. It was fun to hang out. We all knew each other from club volleyball or previous junior national teams.



BB: Talk about the trip to India.
Ker: We drove from New York up to Montreal. Then we flew from Montreal to Paris on Air France. The flight there was pretty good. Once we got to (Paris) we connected to Indian Airlines and flew to Bombay, which is the biggest city in India and has the main airport. We stayed a night in Bombay. The next morning, our flight was delayed because the city was flooding — it got 37 inches of rain over a period of a few days. We got word our next flight had been delayed but that (information) ended up being incorrect, so we missed our flight. They put us on another flight to another city, so we got on that one because they said it had a connecting flight to (the tournament site). When we got to our first connecting city, it ended up that there was no connecting flight at all. We ended up staying there for three days and the city was (horribly impoverished). It was the worst city I've ever been in. There was poverty everywhere with poor roads and transportation; nothing to do.

We finally ended up finding a flight to the tournament site. After we landed and walked out of the airport, there was a large bus with air-conditioning—it was the best thing in the world. Before we got on the bus, a huge crowd greeted us, waving and cheering. They gave us gifts and (anointed) our foreheads. We felt like celebrities. Every time we drove around — the tournament was really well-advertised — people knew it was us because we had these buses and a military escort everywhere we went. We waved to everyone from the bus.

When we got to the hotel, they greeted us with more gifts and a coconut milk drink; there were paparazzi everywhere. I felt like I was a rock star. The people were so happy for us to be there. It was amazing. We weren't allowed to leave the hotel at all without a military escort. We got to go out a few times during the trip—we went to a mall. And then we went to the beach. My dad came so it was good to see him.

The volleyball was a good experience because we got to play against some really good competition. Life-wise, going to another country and seeing people live like that was eye-opening. People's houses—up against a wall they angled a towel or a bed sheet and they were living under that. It was interesting to see. It makes you appreciate everything you have a little bit more.

BB: Describe the competition.
Ker: We played Brazil in our second match and they ended up getting second in the tournament. Officially, they were the best team we played. But when we played them they weren't as good as when they played in the finals. I think the best team we played was The Netherlands. They were huge. They had a couple of players who were seven feet tall and (well) built. Their two middles were very big. They were real powerful and consistent.

That was one of our problems — we weren't very consistent. We made a lot of (unforced) errors. We asked a lot of teams how long they had been playing together, and the German team had been playing together for three years. The least amount of time a team had played together was four or five months. And we practiced for nine days. It's tough to try to throw together a team in nine days. It's a tough thing to do.

For every game we had a full house of about 4-5,000 people. The Brazil match was standing room only. Afterwards, the kids came up and asked for our autographs. It was the only show in town and it was free. It was well-advertised: there were posters, billboards and it was on TV.

BB: You came back from India and practiced with UCLA.
Ker: I got back and two weeks later I had to come (to campus) to train with UCLA. I was really happy to come back. (India) was a tough trip. So it was great to come home again and play with all my buddies and to be coached by the same coaches I had last year. I had more fun training here for 10 days (for Italy) than I've had in a long time, just because I appreciated it more.

BB: Talk about the trip to Italy.
Ker: Once we got there, I knew what to expect, so I got to enjoy Italy more The other cool thing was that my whole family came: my mom and dad, both my brothers and my two grandparents. They all came on the bus with us through Italy.

We played really well. I was surprised at how experienced we were together because we lost four seniors last year. I didn't know what to expect.

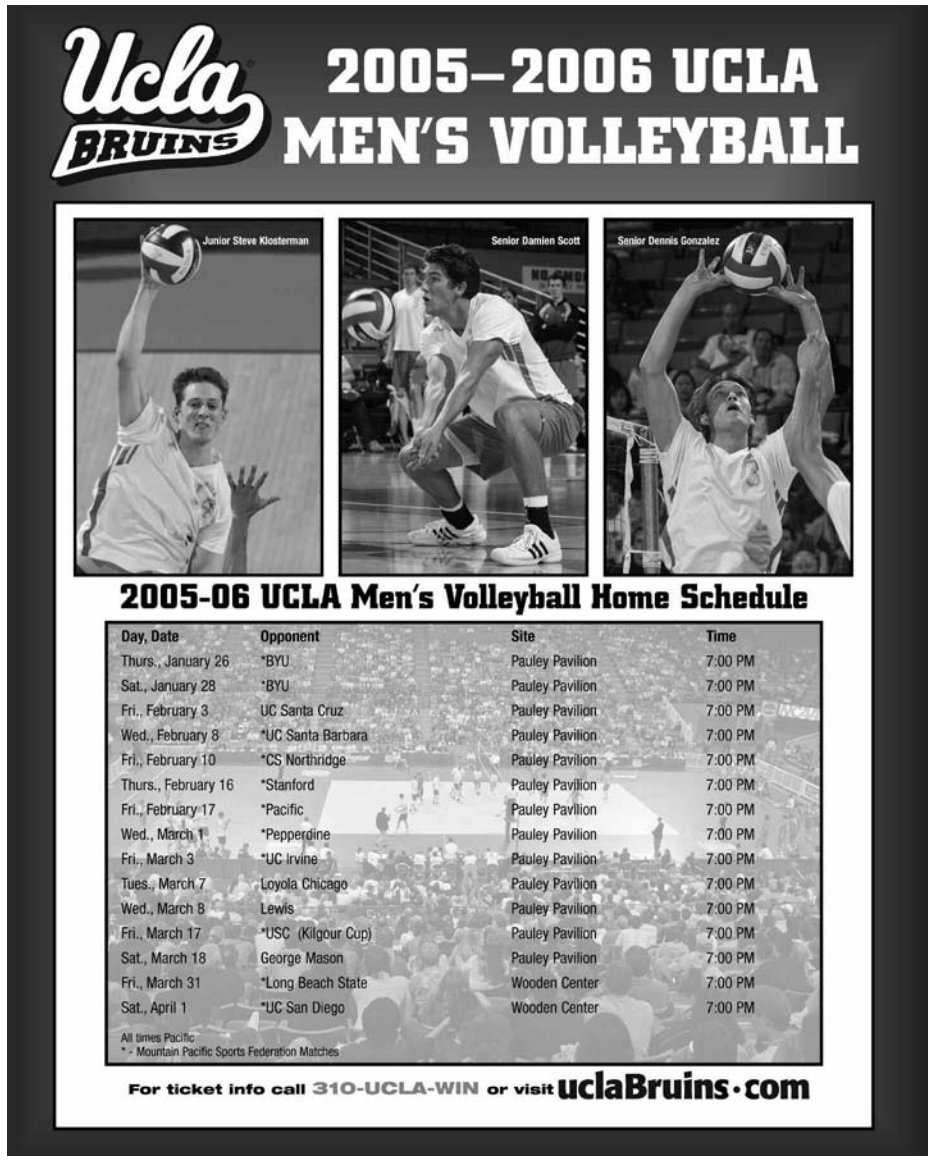
Some of the teams we played were decent but not outstanding in comparison to what we normally see. We won six out of our 10 matches. A lot of them were really good matches. One team we played had two players on the national team. We opened their new gym. They were a veteran team — very cagey.

The sightseeing was great. I've always wanted to go to Venice. We went to St. Mark's Square. There were millions of pigeons in the square. Rome was incredible. I actually liked going to some of the smaller cities because I saw a different side of Italy—it's not the tourist (trap), it's low-key, Italian life. They take siesta in the middle of the day—the whole town shuts down and relaxes for a couple of hours. My dad was (looking forward to visiting) the Sistine Chapel. We waited four or five hours to see it. It was worth the wait.

BB: What are the differences between this year's team and last year's?
Ker: This team is a lot more close-knit as a group and as friends than last year's team. Last year, outside of volleyball, we didn't really hang out that much. The team chemistry on this team is the best chemistry I ever experienced. We spent so much time (together) in Italy we became a second family to each other. You can really see it on the court. Everybody moves together better. We know what we're all going to do. The great thing is that the freshmen, when they came in this year, they saw this great team chemistry and they jumped right on board. As a team we hang out almost every night. It (positively) affects our play and how we get along on the court.

I think team chemistry wins half the matches. We understand that we're out there to help each other; that we're going to be there for each other. The communication on the court has really helped a lot.

I'm really excited about (freshman) Sean O'Malley. He's been doing a great job. Coming here as a freshman is tough — I know what he's going through. He's really stepped it up. He's become one of our more dominant players. He's still learning the game. The freshmen don't really need that much help. Since the team chemistry was good, they haven't felt out of place at all. They fit right in with the team. Everybody gets along great. Everybody's got a great attitude. Everybody's out there to win.



SENIOR KATE RICHARDSON

BY LIZA DAVID, UCLA ASSISTANT SPORTS INFORMATION DIRECTOR

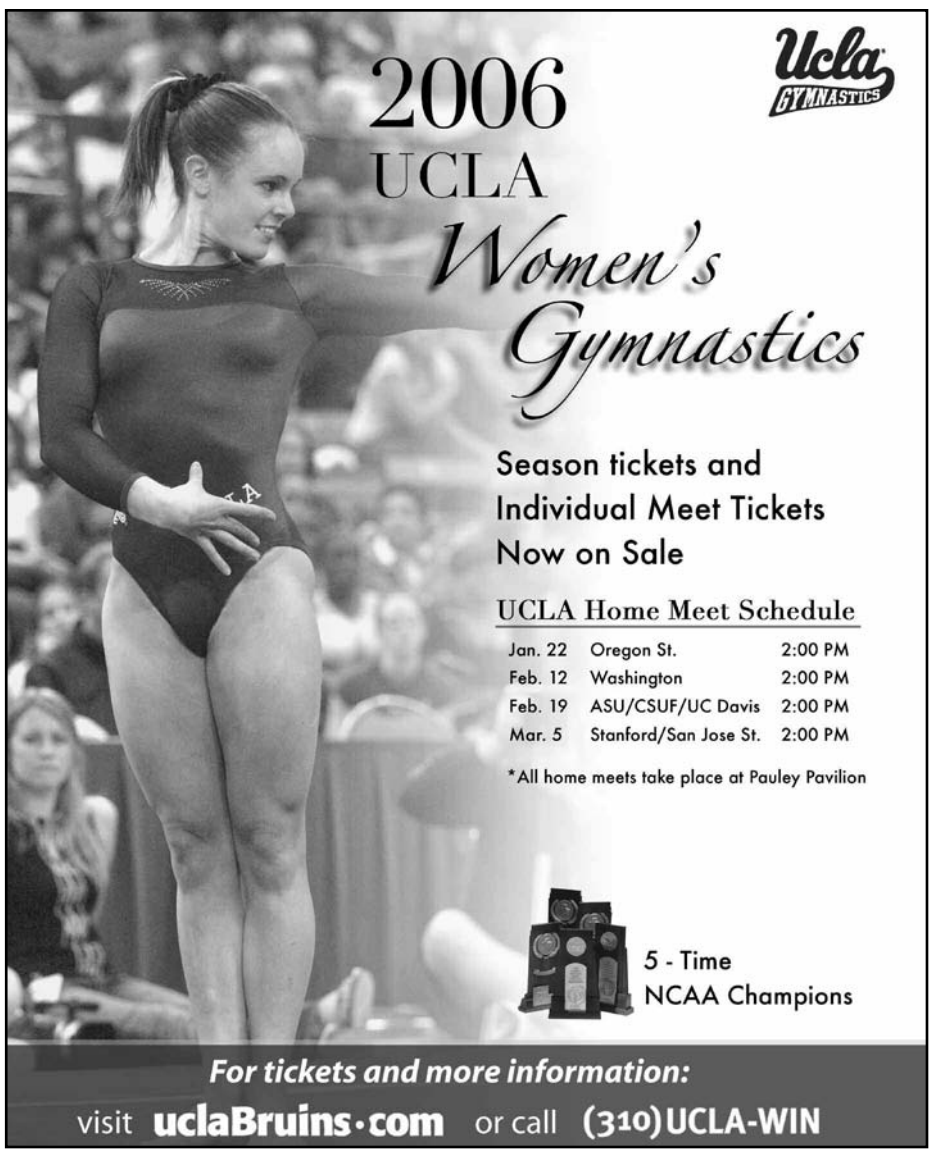
UCLA GYMNASTICS

Two-time Canadian Olympian Kate Richardson is the only senior on a gymnastics team dominated by freshmen and sophomores. The Coquitlam, BC native has won two NCAA team titles (2003 and 2004) and two NCAA individual titles (bars and beam as a freshman in 2003) during her career at UCLA. She made history by becoming the first UCLA female gymnast to compete in the Olympics as a collegiate athlete, making the Olympic team after her sophomore season in 2004. High achievement follows UCLA's team co-captain in everything she does; she has already collected 10 All-America honors and two Academic All-America honors in her career.

Bruin Blue: A little over a year ago, you were competing in your second Olympic Games. You and former UCLA gymnast Mohini Bhardwaj really set a great example for "older" gymnasts to continue their elite careers beyond the teenage years. You are one of just two female gymnasts ever to compete in the Olympics as a collegiate athlete. Do you think that you've help set a trend towards gymnasts doing both elite and college?
Richardson: I think it's a combination of a lot of things. The sport is getting so much harder that it's gearing more towards older girls. You don't see too many 14-15 year olds anymore because it's so hard, and it takes a lot of years to put in the numbers in order to get the skills that are now required. College gymnastics is getting so much harder now too. It has evolved a lot in the last couple of years. It's made it possible for girls to keep training at an elite level while in college because the coaching became so good. I haven't really thought of it as setting a trend, but that's kind of cool! Hopefully, if that keeps going, I think it will be great for college gymnastics for sure. We could get some amazing girls if they can still compete at the elite level. I've heard that a lot more girls say that they want to do that now that it's possible. It could be interesting.

BB: The NCAA imposes a 20-hour per week training limit on student-athletes. How much more difficult was that for you to train for the Olympics as opposed to the first time you went in 2000?
Richardson: It's different for me anyway because I'm older. I couldn't put in the 35-38 hours a week that I was able to put in when I was in club because my body would not have been able to handle it. This time around, I trained a lot smarter, and it helped me in my preparation because I learned how to train efficiently and get my stuff done without exhausting or hurting myself. I also did a lot of conditioning on my own time, which helped a lot. I geared my training more towards getting into good shape and doing conditioning on my own. And I was healthy enough and fit enough to do the skills.

BB: How did the coaches at UCLA help you to maintain all of your elite skills and drive you to continue to train for and compete elite during the college season?
Richardson: My coaches were absolutely amazing. They were 100% behind me and supportive of it the entire time. I mean, I was putting UCLA Gymnastics at risk (during the season) because I could have gotten hurt. But it was what I wanted to do, and they said they would support me the whole way. Just having that was huge. Chris (Waller) is an unbelievable coach and has the experience and knows what it takes to train for the Olympics. So having him coach me the entire time was awesome. He prepared me really well. Val (Kondos Field) gave me the mental strength to help me maintain my elite skills through a long college season, and she kept me motivated. I could not have done it without them.



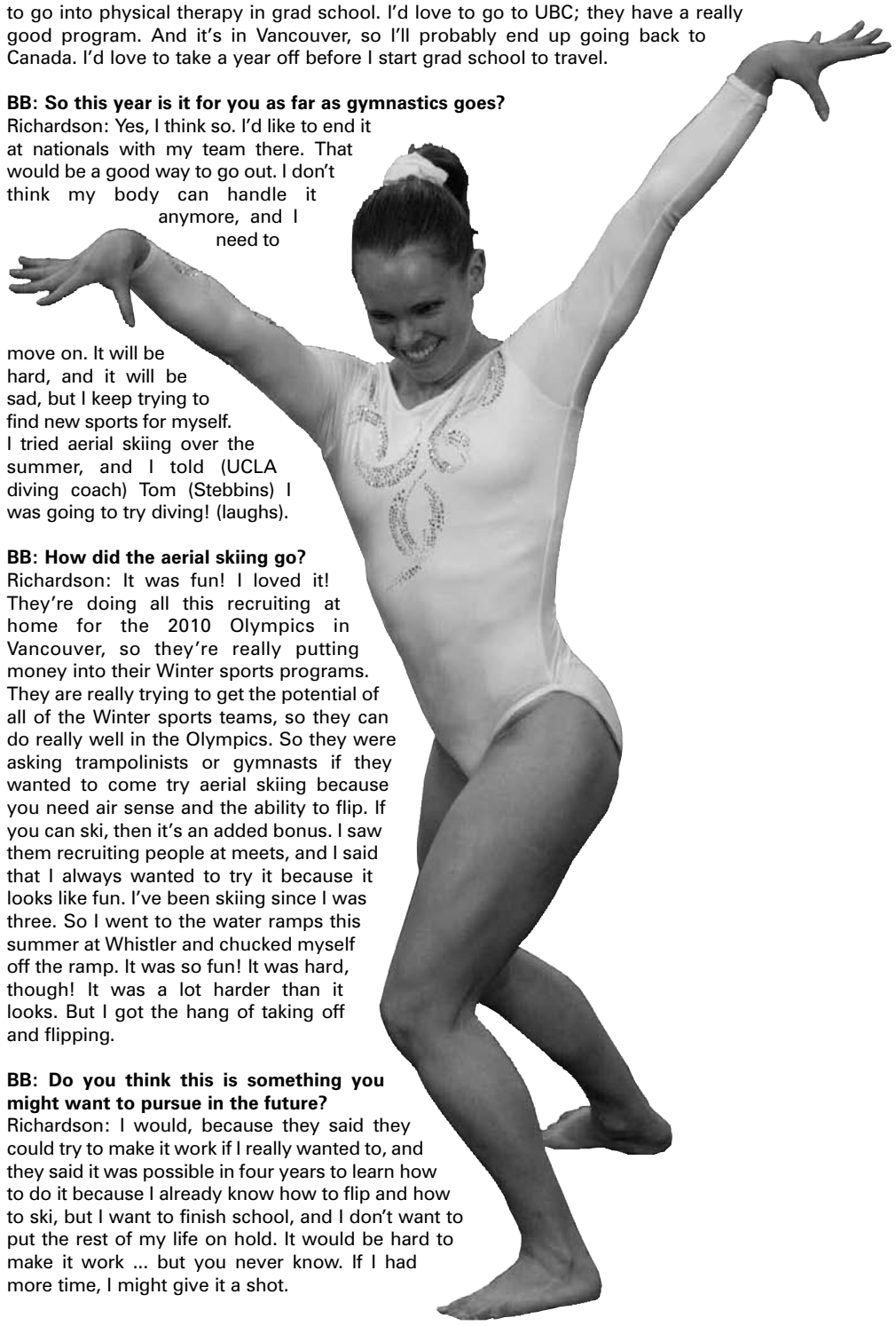
BB: You fractured your tibia back in October. How is your injury coming along now?:
Richardson: Really good, actually. It's been about 12 weeks now, and I've just started tumbling and vaulting a little bit. I'm doing impact, so basically I have no restrictions except for pain. I'm just taking it slow so I don't reinjure it. I'm feeling really good, and I'm raring to go now. I think I'll be ready by the beginning of the season. It's just a question of floor, I think, and whether I have enough time to get my endurance up and get the numbers before the season starts. But it's definitely feeling a lot better, and I'm making progress.

BB: How are things shaping up for the 2006 season?
Richardson: The team is looking good. I think we're on track. We're still on our way up so that we can peak when the season starts. With seven freshmen, we're really young, obviously, but our freshman class is great. They are a lot of fun, and they bring energy and excitement into the gym, which is good for the team. It's always interesting getting used to new dynamics, and this year's team is completely different. It's been fun adjusting to that. We have a lot of really cool people on the team, and we have a lot of talent as well. I think if we can pull together and get healthy and stay healthy and be totally prepared, I think we can do it all.

BB: Getting through injuries really has never been a problem for you. You came back quickly from back surgery in 2002 to win the Commonwealth Games, and your thumb injury last year didn't really slow you down too much. Do you have some sort of secret formula to getting healthy quickly?
Richardson: I'm lucky that my body heals nicely. I've been blessed with that for some reason. I view getting injured as a new challenge. It helps me in my motivation when something is in my way. I see it as just another obstacle, and it makes me love the sport even more when I don't get to do it, and it makes me work even harder. Whenever I get hurt, I always work really hard to get back as fast as I can. I'm just lucky that my body lets me do that. It will help me be stronger than I think I would have been. I don't want anything to ruin my last year.

BB: What are your plans after graduation?
Richardson: My plan right now is to finish up school. I still have another year after this one. I want to go into physical therapy in grad school. I'd love to go to UBC; they have a really good program. And it's in Vancouver, so I'll probably end up going back to Canada. I'd love to take a year off before I start grad school to travel.

BB: So this year is it for you as far as gymnastics goes?
Richardson: Yes, I think so. I'd like to end it at nationals with my team there. That would be a good way to go out. I don't think my body can handle it anymore, and I need to move on. It will be hard, and it will be sad, but I keep trying to find new sports for myself. I tried aerial skiing over the summer, and I told (UCLA diving coach) Tom (Stebbins) I was going to try diving! (laughs).



BB: How did the aerial skiing go?
Richardson: It was fun! I loved it! They're doing all this recruiting at home for the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, so they're really putting money into their Winter sports programs. They are really trying to get the potential of all of the Winter sports teams, so they can do really well in the Olympics. So they were asking trampolinists or gymnasts if they wanted to come try aerial skiing because you need air sense and the ability to flip. If you can ski, then it's an added bonus. I saw them recruiting people at meets, and I said that I always wanted to try it because it looks like fun. I've been skiing since I was three. So I went to the water ramps this summer at Whistler and chucked myself off the ramp. It was so fun! It was hard, though! It was a lot harder than it looks. But I got the hang of taking off and flipping.

BB: Do you think this is something you might want to pursue in the future?
Richardson: I would, because they said they could try to make it work if I really wanted to, and they said it was possible in four years to learn how to do it because I already know how to flip and how to ski, but I want to finish school, and I don't want to put the rest of my life on hold. It would be hard to make it work ... but you never know. If I had more time, I might give it a shot.

BRUIN BASEBALL

SENIOR INFIELDER BRETT McMILLAN

BY JULIAN TEMBLADOR, UCLA SPORTS INFORMATION ASSISTANT

Bruin Blue caught up with senior infielder Brett McMillan for some infield dirt on the upcoming 2006 UCLA baseball season. Last year, McMillan was the only Bruin to start and play in all 56 games during the season. The 2005 UCLA team MVP hit .257 with a team-high 54 hits, seven home runs and 33 RBI.

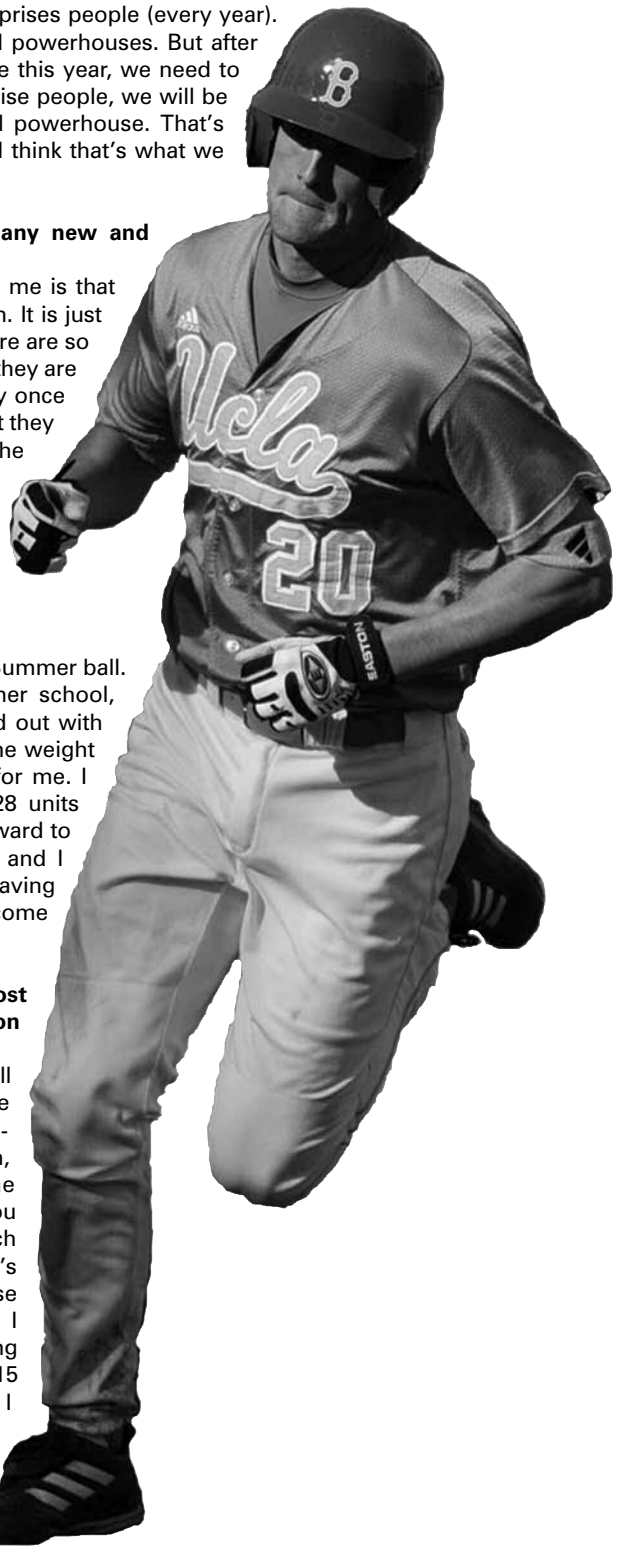
Bruin Blue: What are your goals going into the 2006 season?
Brett McMillan: Personally, I would like to build on what I've done here at UCLA my first three years. That can mean a number of things, but having a better season as a team is the key for us this season. We have a lot of high hopes coming into this year. We have a lot of recruits coming in, a lot of transfers, and judging from Fall ball I think we are going to be extremely improved. I am really excited about the upcoming season.

BB: What are your expectations for this season?
McMillan: I expect us to compete with everybody we play. Coach (John) Savage talks about our schedule being one of the best in the country, and I think it is. I've seen some of the other schedules, and I think we rank right up there with some of the more difficult schedules in the nation. As far as expectations go, I think we expect to compete against the top teams we are going to face. We are going to go out there and battle as hard as we can for nine innings and do whatever it takes to win. I expect us to be good.

We're definitely looking forward to having those top teams play us and come into our house. They're coming into Jackie Robinson Stadium, and we'd like to give them a nice little wakeup call and let them know that UCLA is back on the map. My sophomore year, we went to a Regional, and we were a very good team, but I felt that some people might have crossed us off after last year. But we'll have to prove that last year was just an aberration, and we are going to get after it this season.

BB: What is your role as a senior leader?
McMillan: I think I am mostly a lead by example player. I don't say a whole lot in terms of letting the team know what they need to be doing. I think that by leading by example, it shows the other players what they need to do to be successful. With that being said, if something does need to be said, I'm more than willing to say it and I know that my teammates will listen to me. I like being in that role, I like being a leader for this team.

BB: What do you want to accomplish before your career at UCLA is done?
McMillan: Ultimately, I want to go to Omaha and play in the College World Series. You want to see how far that can take you. My sophomore year, we had our best chance when we went to Regionals. That was a lot of fun, but it still didn't give me that taste of what Omaha is like. This is my last year, so hopefully things will work out in that regard. But this team is going to work its tail off to try to get as far as it can. I think if you look at the teams that go to Omaha each year, there are always those teams that come up and surprise people. We don't want to be the school that surprises people (every year). We want to be one of the perennial powerhouses. But after last year, that is what we need to be this year, we need to surprise people. And once we surprise people, we will be able to make ourselves a perennial powerhouse. That's what we are working towards, and I think that's what we have a chance to do this year.



BB: How is it playing with so many new and younger players?
McMillan: It's fun. The best part for me is that they bring a new energy to the team. It is just a whole new dimension because there are so many of them. They are young, and they are going to make rookie mistakes every once in awhile, but that's ok. We know that they are really talented players and the advantages of having them play far outweigh the disadvantages. It is a lot more fun playing with them and it brings a lot more life to the clubhouse.

BB: How did your off-season go?
McMillan: For me, I didn't play any Summer ball. I stayed around UCLA, took summer school, worked out at the field, and worked out with our strength coach Karl Jordan in the weight room, which was very productive for me. I put on some weight, and added 28 units toward my degree. I am looking forward to graduating at the end of the year, and I think this Summer really helped in saving me some time so I don't have to come back for a fifth year academically.

BB: What did you work on the most during the off-season to improve on for the upcoming year?
McMillan: I worked on my overall strength. I put on some extra muscle and weight. With our season, the 56-games during the regular season, you play even more in the postseason, and it wears on you. You can't get in the weight room as much during the season, and I think it's even more important for me because I have trouble holding weight. I always lose five or 10 pounds during the season. So, if I add 10 or 15 pounds and I am losing that weight, I will still be at a weight I was at last year, instead of at a weight I was at in high school. I just think that will really help my endurance and it will be good for the long haul.

BB: What are you looking forward to the most this season?
McMillan: Right now, I'm looking forward to the first game of the season. Opening day is always the best. You play so long during the Fall, and then we have over a month more to play in January, and players start to get antsy. About that second week in January, we want to see an opponent in that visitor's dugout instead of players from our own team. Other than opening day, I think our team is looking forward to playing some high-caliber teams. Going to N.C. State should be fun. The Pac-10 schedule is always fun. Especially this year, our preseason schedule is awesome.

BB: What is something you do, or think about during games that most people don't know about?
McMillan: I know when my parents are at the games I always like to see them in the stands before each game just to know that they are there. I think just being able to focus on the field by knowing that they are there watching me is very comforting.

BB: What do you enjoy most about playing baseball at UCLA?
McMillan: I can't really characterize playing at UCLA into one thing. I think it is more than just playing baseball; it's being a part of UCLA Athletics. It is something that you take with you and you are proud to say that you are a part of UCLA. Playing baseball here has been a great experience for me. I know that I will always remember it. It's hard to believe that I am a senior already. I remember coming in as a freshman and being blown away by being here. It has just been a blast playing baseball for UCLA. Playing in the Pac-10 has been a great experience. I have played against great players, and played with some great players. Hopefully this team this year can add its name to that list of great UCLA teams.



SENIOR INFIELDER CAITLIN BENYI

BY AMY HUGHES, UCLA ASSISTANT SPORTS INFORMATION DIRECTOR

Senior Caitlin Benyi plays second base for the UCLA softball team and has ended each of her three seasons in the championship game at the Women's College Softball World Series. She has been instrumental in UCLA's last two NCAA championships, producing a clutch hit in 2003 to keep the Bruins alive in their title run. Surprisingly, the former Horizon HS star from Scottsdale, AZ was not heavily recruited until UCLA came to watch. The rest is history.

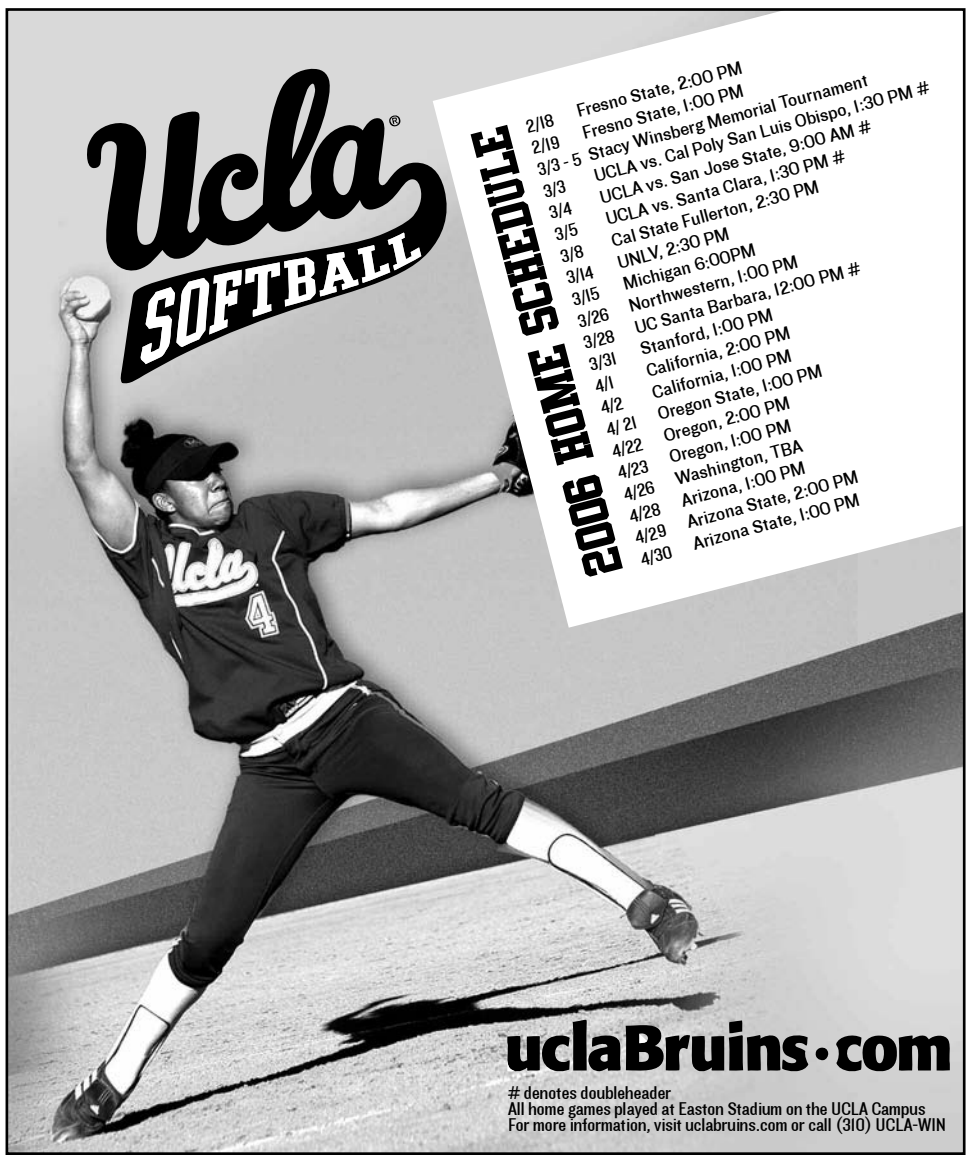
Bruin Blue: How does it feel to be starting your final season of UCLA softball?
Caitlin Benyi: It's weird. This is my last year here, so it's kind of sad and yet it's exciting all in the same breath. My time here has been awesome.

BB: How did you become a Bruin?
Benyi: Both Emily (Zaplatosch) and I were brought in kind of in the 11th hour. We both played on a summer ball team that was good, but it wasn't the marquee team that all the high-profile colleges came to watch. We were at a tournament in Las Vegas and Kelly (UCLA assistant coach Kelly Inouye-Perez) was there and saw Emily pick a girl off of second base. The next inning, I came up and roped a double and that's where it started. We were being recruited before then, but not by schools like UCLA.

BB: You started your UCLA career playing right field when you were really an infielder. Had you played outfield before coming to UCLA, and how did that happen?
Benyi: I played outfield before because our summer ball team was athletic enough that we were playing everywhere. When I got here, I was playing the role of "put me anywhere." As long as I was on the field, I really didn't care, especially with Puppy (UCLA assistant coach Gina Vecchione) helping us learn the position. She was awesome and worked with us a lot.

BB: You probably had the most dramatic of all possible endings to your freshman season, coming up with the game-winning RBI in an elimination game against Texas to put UCLA in the 2003 NCAA Championship game. The next year, you became the NCAA's top home run hitter in Division I. What are some of your favorite softball memories from your first three years at UCLA?
Benyi: I feel like that's the coolest part, that I basically came from nowhere to be the home run leader. The hit against Texas led to the first championship. It will go down as my most favorite moment.

BB: What are some of the other favorite moments of your Bruin softball career?
Benyi: Sophomore year, we played a nine-inning game against Alabama in the second game of Regionals, and (then-freshman shortstop) Jodie (Legaspi) hit a three-run walk-off home run. That still gives me goosebumps, and we still watch that highlight all the time. Another favorite memory is from that same year, a Mother's Day game at Stanford in 2004 after Puppy's mother lost her battle with cancer. [Editor's note: Benyi went 3-for-4 with two home runs, a double and four RBIs in a 7-1 UCLA victory]. Obviously, the championship games are special memories as well, especially freshman year when Keira (Goerl) threw a nine-inning no-hitter in the title game after beating Texas late the previous night. But the Alabama game and that Mother's Day at Stanford are probably my favorite memories. Those will go down as the most emotional and personal moments of my career.

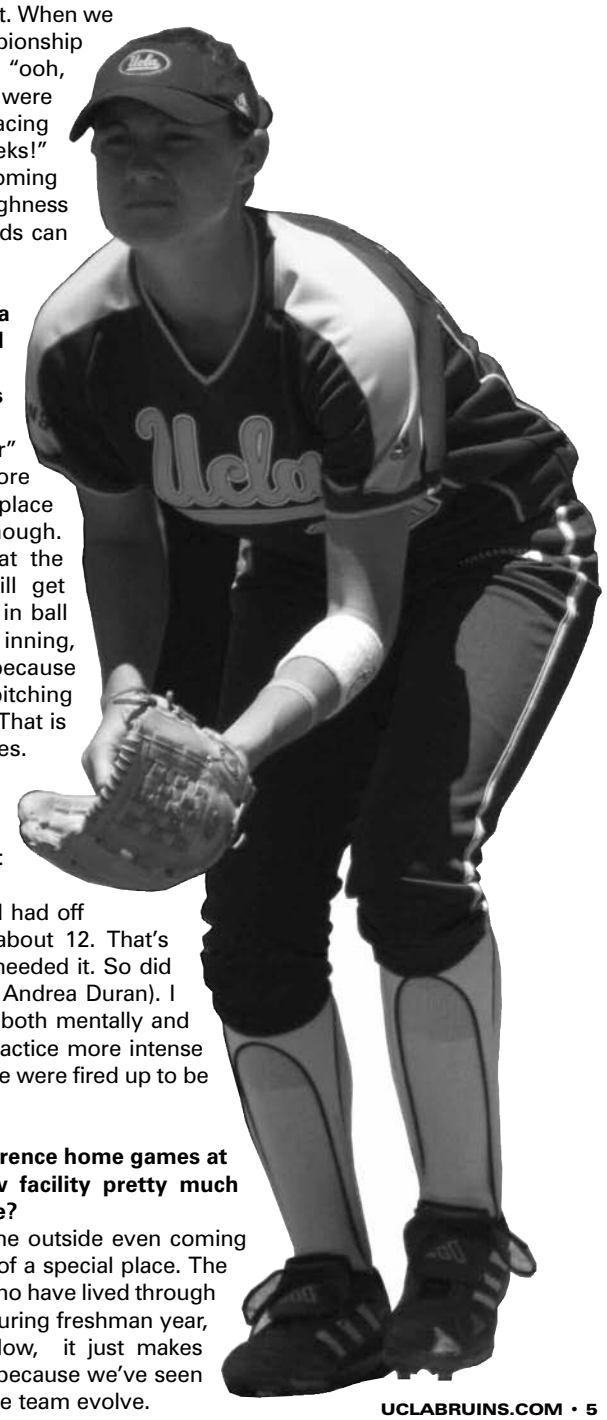


BB: What are you looking for coming into your senior season?
Benyi: Of course we want to win a championship, but I think especially from a senior's standpoint the atmosphere on the team is amazing right now. I think that if we can keep that going through the whole season, it will make the next six months even more special. Obviously, if we win it will make things so much better but right now where the team is … this is like my family. That's what's going to be tough. It's not leaving softball, it's leaving this team.

BB: Do you think this season will be the end of your softball career?
Benyi: No. I'm pretty sure I'm going to play in the pro league. Hopefully that will take off like they want it to. I'm still going to be around next year since I'll have school to finish, so I won't be totally out, but from a (college) softball standpoint, this is it.

BB: UCLA will field basically the same team this year as it did last year. How was Fall ball with a group of players who had already played a season together?
Benyi: Going into this Fall, this team knew that it didn't need to practice, it needed to play. We played a lot more games than usual this Fall, and I think that was key for us in order to shore up the little things — cutoffs pick-offs, signs — all the things that we fell short on last season, we were able to improve upon with our maturity and leadership. The team dynamic is awesome right now. We are really clicking well. We'll go head-to-head with teams physically, but I think that the fact that we can really connect on and off the field is what's going to put us in front of other teams this season.

BB: The team did the "Drama Queen" routine during postseason last year, having to win five elimination games to make it to the Women's College World Series before advancing to the Championship Series. What do you think the team will take from that experience into the 2006 season?
Benyi: Of course, we learned from that, but we also have learned that if for some reason we are in that position again, we can handle it. When we got to the final game of the Championship Series last year, people were saying "ooh, you're facing elimination" and we were thinking "Big deal! We've been facing elimination for the last three weeks!" Especially with the same team coming back, we have that same mental toughness that we had last season. The new kids can just learn from us and follow us.



BB: Last year UCLA's hitting was a little scarce at times, but it looked like it was back in form during the Fall scrimmages. Was that a focus during Fall ball?
Benyi: Offense is the "moneymaker" so to speak, but we really worked more on the little things. We're all in a place where we know that we're good enough. If we don't really have hot bats at the beginning, we know that they will get going. The little things will keep us in ball games, so even if it's the seventh inning, we're going to get that clutch hit because we have the talent, we have the pitching and we have the little things down. That is what's going to keep us in ball games.

BB: A lot of the team, including you, took this past summer off. How do you think that will impact the upcoming season?
Benyi: That was the first summer I'd had off from sports probably since I was about 12. That's almost 10 years, and my body just needed it. So did Emily's and so did Dre's (senior 3B Andrea Duran). I think that it let us come back fresh, both mentally and physically. I think it made our Fall practice more intense and a lot better all around because we were fired up to be playing softball.

BB: There will be a lot of non-conference home games at Easton this season. With the new facility pretty much finished, will that make a difference?
Benyi: With that field finished and the outside even coming together, it just makes Easton more of a special place. The seniors are probably the only ones who have lived through it from the bottom up. I remember during freshman year, the bleachers were falling apart. Now, it just makes everything that much more special because we've seen the evolution of the field and seen the team evolve.



BRW

BRUINS IN THE REAL WORLD: Mark Caso '85

More than 20 years ago, former UCLA gymnast Mark Caso helped the Bruins win their first NCAA team title in men's gymnastics. The championship culminated a courageous comeback for Caso, who four years earlier had suffered a serious neck injury that endangered his athletic career. Although Caso did not qualify for the 1984 U.S. Olympic gymnastics team that won the gold medal in Pauley Pavilion, he ended his collegiate career on a high note by earning All-America honors and by inspiring his teammates. Bruin Blue caught up with Caso, an East Coast native, who has called Southern California home for the last 25 years.

Bruin Blue: Discuss your career after UCLA.
Mark Caso: After I got out of UCLA I went into doing stunts in Hollywood. I did a lot of films and television and had a pretty good stunt career. I worked on all kinds of films: the Teenage Ninja Turtles was one of them. I did a lot of that work and got to travel all over the world.

I got married in 1997, and when my first daughter was born I decided to quit stunts. After she was born, (my wife and I) both wanted to stay at home more. (My wife) was selling eyeglasses. I was constantly going away on location; I'd be gone for three months at a time. It was just not good. We decided we would try to do something together. Shortly afterwards, my wife and I opened the toy company. This company, Bruder Toys, has been manufacturing toys since the 1920s. We opened up the U.S. office for it and started the distribution in 2000. We put our efforts together and it's been absolutely awesome.

BB: How did you and your wife decide on Bruder Toys?
Caso: One night in 1998 my wife thought we could probably sell toys on the internet. We could sell the Bruder brand on the internet and bring it into this country. Her parents are the Bruders. We could work together that way. It started off in a little condo I had in Santa Monica. We outgrew that in two months and had to get a warehouse in Culver City. We realized that the brand was becoming popular and we got the current warehouse in Gardena. Then it just snowballed like crazy. Now we've got a warehouse in Gardena, another one in New Jersey and another warehouse in Canada. We're shipping products out of three different locations.

Because of the family connections we were able to really do a lot with the idea. I'm the head of the U.S. sales and my wife (Beate) is the president.

BB: What are some of the signature toys in the Bruder line?
Caso: Believe it or not … garbage trucks. We're famous for our garbage trucks. It's absolutely unbelievable. They're about same size as the Tonka Trucks. But if you put a Tonka Truck next to (a Bruder truck) you won't even think about a Tonka Truck ever again. Bruder trucks are highly-detailed, high-functioning toys. You can play with the levers, open the doors, open the hood, turn the wheels — everything does what it's supposed to do in the real world. Our products' functionality just blows every (other product) away. These trucks are so realistic; that's the attraction. Yet they're durable enough for kids to use in the sandbox.

Since we've opened our offices we've secured several licenses. We have a Jeep license, we have the Caterpillar license, we've got a John Deere license for Europe and we've also got a license for Fiat tractors. Caterpillar is the biggest name worldwide for construction. There's a Caterpillar display at Disney's California Adventure, and we're in that park in a very big way. Disney sells our trucks there. Our garbage trucks are Mercedes-Benz garbage trucks. We have that license, too. All of our products are manufactured and assembled in Germany.

BB: What kind of a transition was it for you going from a stuntman to managing a sales staff and running a business?
Caso: It was a great transition. Here I was … I got a college degree using my brain and I went straight into stunts where I was using my body like in gymnastics. Then, to finally say, "Now I get to use my brain again" ... was a great relief. When I went to work (in stunts), I'd come home all beat up and hurting sometimes. To not have to wake up with a bruised body is kind of nice. It's still really important for me to work out and do some other things to get rid of the stress (of this job). My other job was so physical that I'd come home (physically) exhausted.

BB: As a business owner, what advice do you have for Bruins going into business for themselves?
Caso: Have a good business plan. Do your homework. Research the market. Follow your instincts. A lot of times, people will tell you things, and if it doesn't ring true, your instincts need to be trusted. That's what we've found—that the moves that we made weren't necessarily going with the direction of everyone else. We were following our instincts and they've proven to be correct. We also

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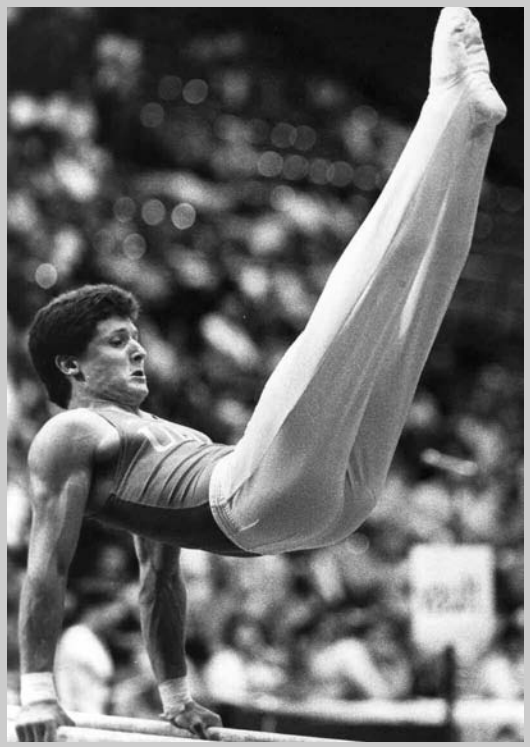
found out that since we've made these moves, other companies started copying us. We're the ones who weren't even in the toy business, and they're copying our moves. You don't necessarily have to follow the trend exactly, but follow your instincts, along with knowing the market and doing your homework.

We (also) piggy-back on these licenses. We (licensed) with Caterpillar and the next thing we know, Caterpillar is marketing all our products in their dealerships; it's on their website. They're pushing our brand and Bruder is pushing their brand. It's the partnerships that really work for us.

BB: What's a typical day in the office like for you?

Caso: Actually, I'm working at (toy) shows about four or five times a year. I go to these different shows to market our product. On normal days I come in and push orders out the door and service accounts. We have a sales force across the country of about 60 reps. I keep my thumb on them and make sure everything's going smoothly out there in the field.

We have another division where we sell direct to in-consumers through the original website and it's called Active Toys. We've got the in-consumer (promotion) going, and the U.S. distribution for the core lines. We're in FAO Schwartz, Toys-R-Us; we're in the Imaginarium, we're in the big catalogues. Twice a year we'll put products in TJ Maxx. We have some discontinued products there.



BB: What do you do in your spare time?

Caso: We like to travel, get out of Dodge. This year we're going to Italy. It's nice to get away and see family. We also like to go the UCLA Women's Gymnastics meets. Val's (Kondos Field) just doing a great job. My daughters are mainly involved in dance and ballet. They don't like trucks. They like Barbies and dolls.

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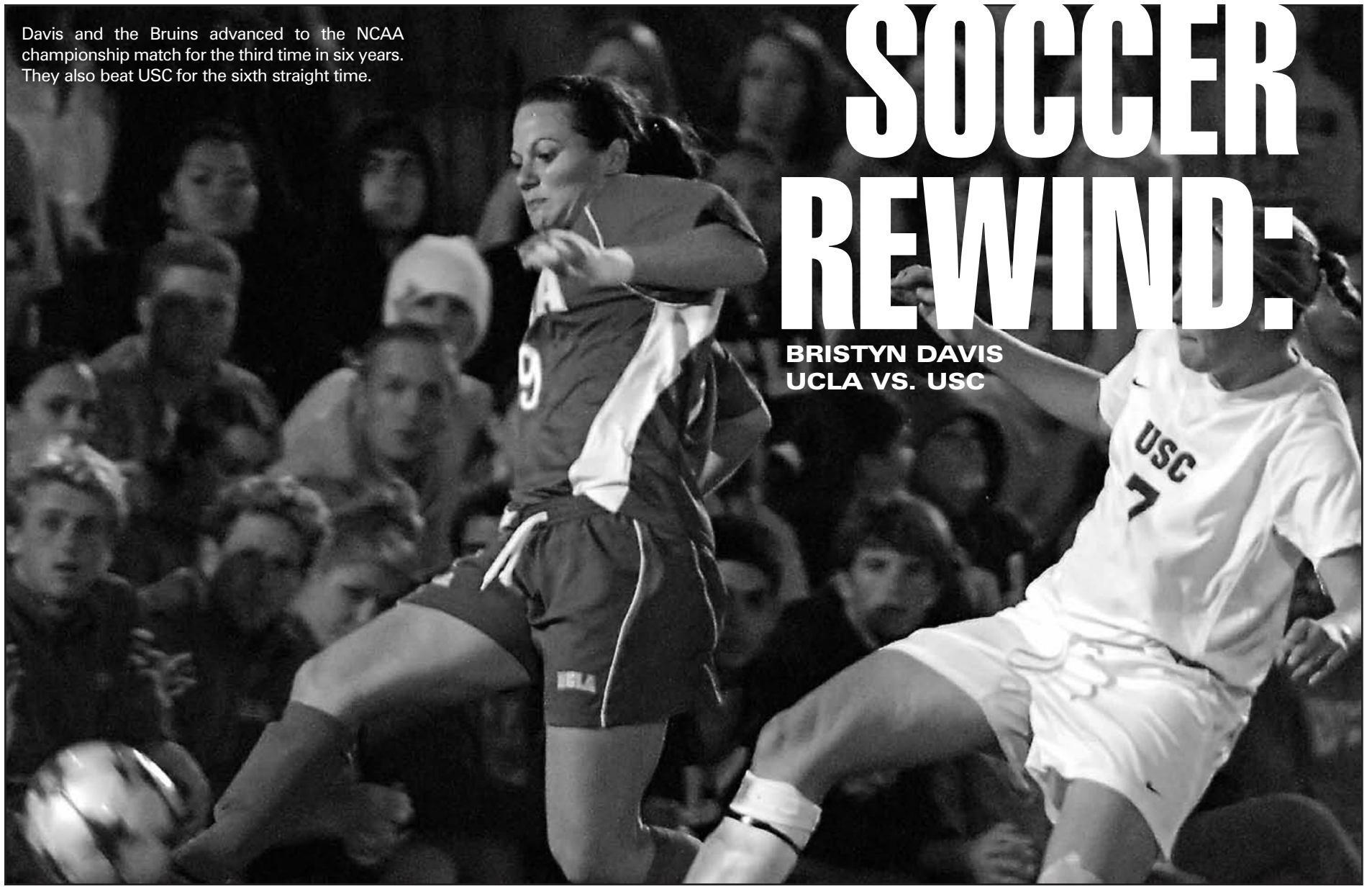
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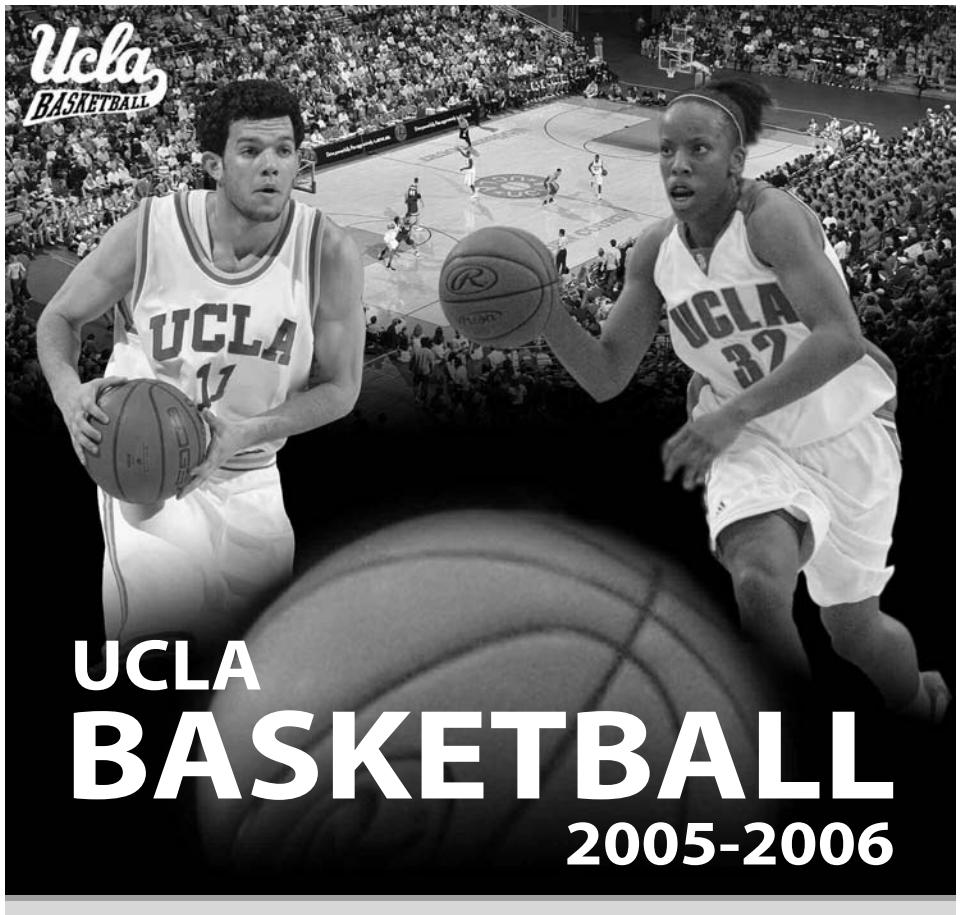
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Bruin BACKTALK

STRAIGHT ANSWERS FROM BRITTANY RINGEL

Senior forward Brittany Ringel is just a small-town girl from Texas who likes TiVo, hates bowl-cut bangs and won't ever sing the National Anthem at one of her basketball games. Why, then, is she not embarrassed to act the fool?

You'll never catch me … singing the National Anthem at an event.

I'm a snob about … my jeans.



My first concert was … Counting Crows/Dave Matthews.

My last big purchase was … Coldplay concert tickets.

Seriously underrated … TiVo—it's changed my life.



Worst haircut … Bowl-cut bangs as a child. I'm still mad at my Mom for that one.

Hidden talents … I'm a makeup artist.

Title of your life story … "Just a Small Town Girl" (as in Journey's "Don't Stop Believing")

Actress who will play me … Angelina Jolie.



If I couldn't play basketball at UCLA I would play … tennis. They have cute shorts and play outside.

Favorite type of pet … baby squirrel. I had one in my second year here.





My athletic dream … is to play one-on-one with Michael Jordan.

I'm not embarrassed … to act the fool.

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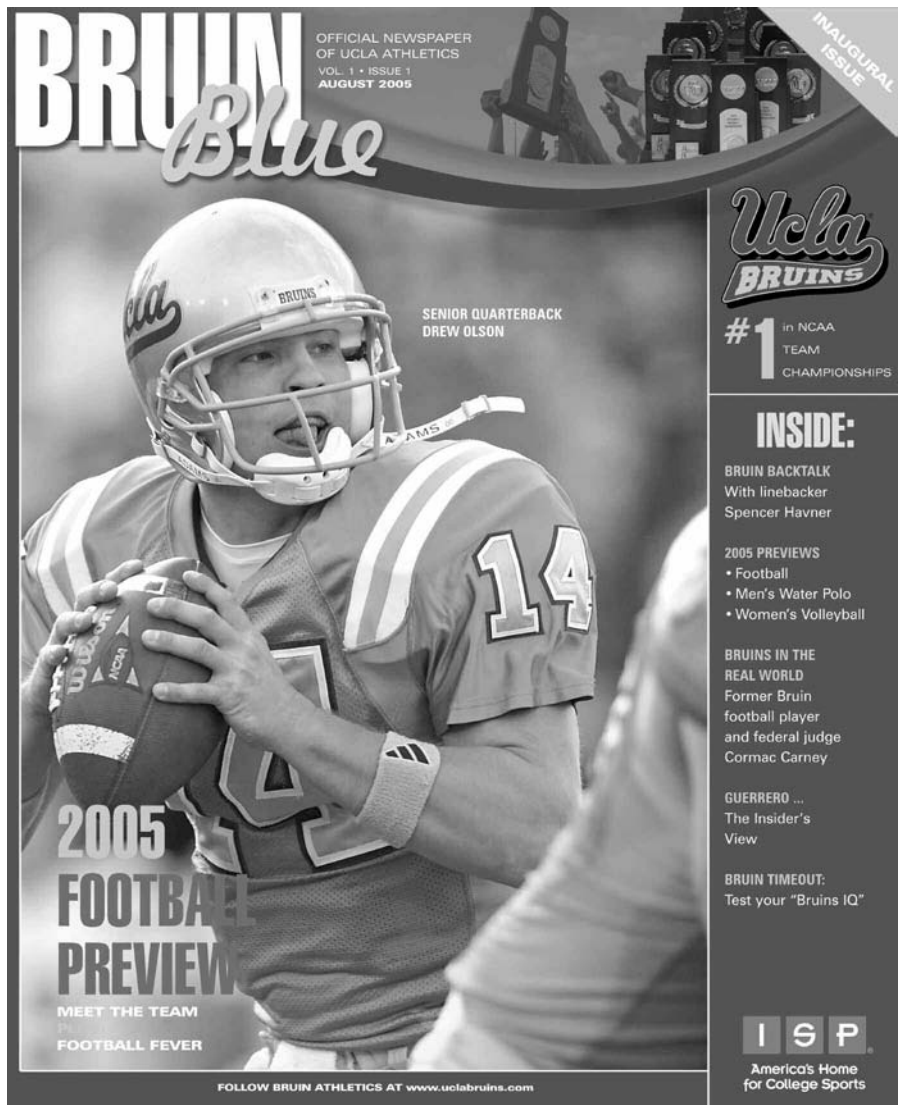
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