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WINTER 2021-22



Charisma Osborne

Jaime Jaquez Jr.

2021-22 BASKETBALL PREVIEW

The **UCLA MEN'S & WOMEN'S TEAMS** *are at different stages, but the goal remains the same*

PLUS:

RECIPE *for* **SUCCESS**

Defensive Lineman **OTITO OGBONNIA** *is as comfortable in the kitchen as he is on the gridiron*

ROAD TRIP

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A YEAR TO REMEMBER

Former UCLA standout **PATRICK CANTLAY** *was named the 2021 PGA TOUR Player of the Year on Sept. 14 as voted by the TOUR's membership for the 2020-21 season. Cantlay won four times on the season including back-to-back victories in the FedExCup Playoffs. With wins at the ZOZO CHAMPIONSHIP, the Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide, BMW Championship and TOUR Championship, Cantlay was the only player with more than two victories during the 2020-21 season. (Photos Courtesy of USA Today)*

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TOP-RANKED TAKEDOWN

Teammates rush junior winger **CONSTANTINOS MICHAELIDES** *after his first goal of the season put the Bruins ahead 1-0 in a Pac-12 showdown against top-ranked Oregon State on Nov. 10 at Wallis Annenberg Stadium. Michaelides, who hails from Limassol, Cyprus, would go on to score once more in an eventual 3-2 Bruin victory over the Beavers. (Photo: Eric Hurd)*

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11.15 • 8:00PM
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11.17 • 7:30PM
NORTH FLORIDA

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12.15 • 8:00PM
ALABAMA STATE

12.22 • 7:00PM
CAL POLY

12.30 • 6:00PM
ARIZONA

1.1 • 12:00PM
ARIZONA STATE

1.13 • 6:30PM
OREGON

1.15 • 7:30PM
OREGON STATE

1.27 • 6:00PM
CALIFORNIA

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2.19 • 7:00PM
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DOWN GO THE TROJANS

UCLA WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL PLAYERS *react following a four-set victory (25-21, 25-20, 21-25, 25-14) over crosstown rival USC on Sept. 22 before 6,623 fans at Pauley Pavilion Presented by Wescom. (Photo: Don Liebig/ASUCLA)*

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12.16 • 7:00PM
TEXAS SOUTHERN

12.19 • 5:00PM
OHIO STATE

12.21 • 1:00PM
CSU BAKERSFIELD

12.28 • 6:00PM
USC

12.31 • 6:00PM
ARIZONA STATE

1.2 • 2:00PM
ARIZONA

1.14 • 7:00PM
WASHINGTON

1.16 • 12:00PM
WASHINGTON STATE

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STANFORD

2.6 • 12:00PM
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RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Defensive lineman Otito Ogbonnia is as comfortable in the kitchen as he is on the gridiron.

by **JON GOLD**

There are always certain football players who get more love from their teammates.

The star quarterback who sets the tone. The workhorse running back who earns respect. The gregarious wide receiver who brings down the house.

And, of course, the guy who cooks.

So is it any surprise Otito Ogbonnia is one of the most popular Bruins on the block?

Just take one look at his Thanksgiving spread, and you'd understand why. His teammates might try to get him elected mayor. Forget sous chefs: Who else do you know with a special set of defensive-line cooks?

"They for sure embrace it, because it means free food for them," said UCLA offensive lineman Jon Gaines, Ogbonnia's teammate, former roommate and perhaps his best culinary cohort. "Everyone loves teammates who can cook. And everybody knows what Tito can do."

◊◊◊

At UCLA, student-athletes are encouraged to be more than just the sport that brought them to Westwood.

But you don't often find a 6-foot-4, 320-pound defensive lineman who is as comfortable in the kitchen as an opposing backfield. Forget hunting quarterbacks, Ogbonnia is chasing down Michelin stars.

His culinary love affair began as a child in Houston, where he was raised by Dr. SKC and Nneka Ogbonnia, both of Nigerian descent.

He started cooking at 7 or 8 with my mom, even if his hulking frame proved a nuisance. Mom wanted him out of the kitchen because he was too big; dad wanted help in the yard or fixing things. Otito was jealous of his sisters who got to cook.

"I found my way back into the kitchen somehow," he said with a laugh.

It was the smell. Traditional Nigerian recipes like fufu bread and stew, Americanized dishes like lasagna and hamburgers. Whatever it was, Ogbonnia caught on. Pretty soon, he began cooking full meals for his family.



"They for sure embrace it, because it means free food for them. Everyone loves teammates who can cook. And everybody knows what Tito can do."
–Jon Gaines, Offensive Lineman

A few years ago, far from home for Thanksgiving, he and Gaines decided to cook for their teammates. Ogbonnia made 10 dishes, including a turkey, a ham and smoked ribs, plus several desserts.

"My strawberry cheesecake gets rave reviews," said Ogbonnia, who plans to forgo a career in the culinary arts and instead hopes to attend law school once his football playing days are over.

That might be far into the future.

Ogbonnia has been a stalwart on the defensive line for Chip Kelly, starting more than a dozen games entering his senior year. Through Week 8 of the 2021 campaign, he had three games with four or more tackles and another with three. In a 34-16 win at Arizona on Oct. 9, Ogbonnia had a huge game with five tackles and a strip-sack.

"Otito had a big sack and a fumbled caused, and we finally got to their quarterback a little bit," Kelly said after the game.

A 6-4, 320-pound defensive lineman, **OTITO OGBONNIA** *might have to put his culinary ambitions on hold if the NFL comes calling following the 2021 season. (Photo: Scott Chandler)*


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RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

DL OTITO OGBONNIA IS AS COMFORTABLE IN THE KITCHEN AS HE IS ON THE GRIDIRON



In addition to football, **OTITO OGBONNIA** *was a member of the UCLA track & field team in 2019, competing in both the shot put and discus. (Photo: Don Liebig/ASUCLA)*

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Off the field and outside of the kitchen, there is yet more to Ogbonnia.

Last year, with the Coronavirus raging, the then-UCLA junior was one of 11 Pac-12 players to sign a letter urging then-commissioner Larry Scott for better communication during the pandemic, including daily meetings between the conference and the Player Representative team.

"I just decided to kind of stick my neck out, I used the pandemic as an opportunity. This was a once in a lifetime situation, and this is our chance to change the conversation."
–Otito Ogbonnia

"I just decided to kind of stick my neck out," Ogbonnia said. "I used the pandemic as an opportunity. This was a once in a lifetime situation, and this is our chance to change the conversation. These are things that people talk about. It wasn't perfect, but with teammates, I've heard a lot about this. I kind of just had to take a stand. If it wasn't now, it would be never."

Ogbonnia is hoping to continue the conversation forward. He points to the recent change allowing student-athletes to profit off their name, image and likeness. The college sports ecosystem has not crumbled, as some critics of the NIL policy change warned.

"I can put it like this: At one point I was hearing the NIL would destroy all of college sports," he said. "Nothing has happened. The NCAA says, 'This is the way we do things.' Everyone kind of knows that should not be the case."

For Ogbonnia's teammates, they can think of no better a representative.

"He was doing it for all of us," Gaines said. "He's a great representative for our team. We just want people to understand that student-athletes aren't always valued the way human beings should be."

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Settled well into his senior year, Ogbonnia is hoping to be a role model for some of his football-focused teammates.

From the kitchen to the courtroom, there is more to being a Bruin football player than just the practice field. A former two-sport athlete at UCLA — a former track and field star in the throwing events, Ogbonnia gave up the sport to commit to football — he has had to become intentional with his time.

"I struggled with that when I first got here," he said. "Track, football, my major – it was hard to take everything in all at once. I knew I didn't want to succumb to the typical athlete lifestyle, pick an easy major, just do football all day. You want to put all you have into one thing, but I quickly realized, it's not productive for your mental health. There is such thing called too much football. It'll eat you up."

That meant pursuing his outside interests as well.

"Doing a number of things off the field, as long as they're not impeding what you came here to do — that's fine. You just have to find that balance. There's a difference between partying and practice and cooking and practice. It's not like it's something I can't resist."

No, it's his teammates who can't resist. Once they've tasted his cheesecake.

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MEN'S HEAD COACH

MICK CRONIN

WOMEN'S HEAD COACH

CORI CLOSE



by **JON GOLD**

2021-22
BASKETBALL PREVIEW

The UCLA men's and women's teams are at different stages, but the goal remains the same.

If building a championship basketball team is like putting together a puzzle, the UCLA men's and women's basketball teams couldn't be at more different parts of the process.

For the men's team, ranked No. 2 in the country entering the season, all the pieces are laid out on the table for The Michael Price Family UCLA Men's Head Basketball Coach Mick Cronin. Simply put, with five returning starters and a bevy of backups, the Bruins know what they're working with. They may even have the corners together.

On the other hand, The Michael Price Family UCLA Women's Head Basketball Coach Cori Close is breaking in eight new players this season, a record for her. Forget the cornerstones – by early November, Close barely had the box open, pieces strewn all over.

But if there is one thing Cronin and Close know, it is this: A championship team isn't built in November.

◊◊◊

Cronin learned that lesson the hard way last year.

UCLA opened last season with a 15-point defeat at San Diego State, a loss that dropped the Bruins from a preseason No. 22 ranking. It would take almost two full months for UCLA to get ranked again, when the then-11-2 Bruins opened Pac-12 play at 8-0. The ranking was short-lived, though, after a span of three losses in four games in late-January and early February.

And just when Cronin thought he'd screwed the wheels back on with four-straight wins following the skid, UCLA lost three straight to close the regular season, then fell to Oregon State in the quarterfinals of the Pac-12 Tournament.

The Bruins were just about left for dead, seeded No. 11 in the NCAA Tournament and given an unenviable berth in the First Four.

Then ... well, you know what happened.

Down went Michigan State and BYU, Abilene Christian and Alabama. Then UCLA toppled No. 1 seed and fourth-ranked Michigan in a thrilling Elite Eight matchup.

If not for a desperate half-court heave by Gonzaga's Jalen Suggs in a Final Four overtime slugfest, UCLA may have advanced to its first championship game since 2006.

So if anyone knows that a team is not a finished product in November, it's Cronin.

◊◊◊

Close, tasked with melding together what she considers to be the best collection of talent she's had at UCLA, preached that message throughout the preseason.

"The challenge is I've never had eight new players in the same year, and the question is, how can we go from a great pickup team to a cohesive team where we're a collective unit?" Close said. "That only

Far left: Men's head coach **MICK CRONIN** *and the Bruins head into the 2021-22 season with high expectations following a run to the Final Four in Indianapolis last year. (Photo: Scott Chandler)*

Left: Women's head coach **CORI CLOSE** *will be tasked with getting her talented, yet young, Bruin squad ready to peak come March. (Photo: Don Liebig)*

2021-22 BASKETBALL PREVIEW

THE UCLA MEN'S AND WOMEN'S TEAMS ARE AT DIFFERENT STAGES, BUT THE GOAL REMAINS THE SAME.



Junior **JAIME JAQUEZ JR.**, *who averaged 12.3 points and 6.1 rebounds last year, thinks that UCLA's experience could be the key to more postseason success in 2021-22. (Photo: John McGillen)*

comes from reps together, experiences together. I'm not sure we're a Final Four team right now. But I think we could be, come February."

Close searched far and wide for key contributors to a team that lost star Michaele Onyenwere, Lauryn Miller and Lindsey Corsaro from the starting lineup. UCLA ended up landing Wake Forest grad transfer Gina Conti, a second-team All-ACC selection; Iimar'i Thomas, a finalist for WBCA All-America Regional and Becky Hammon Mid-Major Player of the Year honors, as well as the AAC Player of the Year at Cincinnati; former Indiana starter Jaelynn Penn; and former Oregon Duck, Angela Dugalic, who played for the Serbian National Team in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

"Right now, there are a series of individual players, and if I'm honest, we're not a championship team yet," Close said. "If you lined up our new players and had a series of 1-on-1 games, we'd be pretty good. That doesn't get you to a Final Four. And what would normally take us maybe 30 to 60 days, I think will take 60 to 90. What I thought would be covered in one practice might be solved in two or three."

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Meanwhile on the men's side, there is more familiarity than a 20-year reunion.

Johnny Juzang, the darling of the 2021 NCAA Tournament, shocked many by returning for his junior season. All-conference selections Jaime Jaquez Jr. and Tyger Campbell are back, as are Cody Riley and Jules Bernard. Key reserves David Singleton, Jake Kyman, Mac Etienne and Jaylen Clark — all return, too.

Lest you think the Bruins are a finished product, the team also added an impact transfer in former Rutgers center Myles Johnson, plus much heralded five-star recruit Peyton Watson.

"The advantages of having a veteran team, your starting point is a little further down the line," Cronin said at Pac-12 Media Day. "Hopefully your end point is further down the line as well. You can become a better team because you're not starting from so far back. Which is the challenge of having a bunch of young guys, which we don't have."

With the level of acquaintance among the team, what is normally a sustained introductory period has been condensed.

It's not that the Bruins know where their teammates are going to be before they get there. It just might appear that way.

"We're not a brand-new team," said Jaquez, who averaged 12.3 points and 6.1 rebounds last year. "We've been playing together, most of us, for three years now. This experience we have, there's nothing you can substitute that for."

A sustained March Madness run gave the Bruins some bona fides — so much so that many too-soon rankings, released immediately after Baylor's upset win over the Bulldogs in the title game, had UCLA in the top three — but Juzang's return only further solidified the team's place in the rankings.

Not that it elicited much fanfare in the Pauley Pavilion locker room.

"We're happy to see our teammates explore their goals, but when they get back, it's back to business," said Singleton, UCLA's best returning outside threat. "Expectations don't stop just because they're back. Goals don't stop. So there's no celebration. We want to hold them accountable to reach those goals."

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Accountability is a big thing around Close's squad this year, but she's hoping it doesn't have to come from the coaching staff.

Tasked with rallying the troops is Charisma Osborne, who averaged 17 points per game and scored in double figures in 20 of 23 games last year as a sophomore. In her debut campaign in 2019-20, Osborne set a freshman record with 59 3-pointers. She knows how to dial it up.

Now in her junior season as the team's unquestioned returning leader, she won't be expected to dial it down.

"Charisma becomes that much more important," Close said. "You can be a coach-led team and be good. But to be elite, you have to be a player-led team. If I say this isn't the standard, I get a response. But if Charisma says it, it changes really fast."

With the puzzle still a work in progress, Close doesn't dare talk about expectations and Final Fours. The Bruins talk about championship reps, and she's seen her fair share during the preseason. Not enough, by her standards.

"That's been so important," Osborne said. "There are people who've been here for a while and we know the way. We can set the standard and hold the standards up. Demand is probably the right word. It's easy when a coach is yelling all the time to tune them out. But when you have players playing hard, you listen to them. Whether it's me or someone else holding the standard."

For now, it's a work in progress, and the Bruins will be challenged early with non-conference matchups with No. 2-ranked UConn and No. 17 Ohio State.

Osborne knows there will be some bumps along the way, with some of the eight newcomers "trying to unlearn things they've gone through."

"The key is us focusing on what each person is supposed to do and understand what our team goals are," she said. "We know it's going to be a process. Those frustrations are going to come. But we're preparing for March. The veterans, the returners, we're just trying to put what we have together."

One piece at a time.



Guard **JOHNNY JUZANG** *tested the NBA waters following UCLA's Final Four run a year ago but ultimately decided to return to the Bruins for another crack at an NCAA title. (Photo: John McGillen)*



Wake Forest grad transfer **GINA CONTI**, *a second-team All-ACC selection in 2021, will be one of the key newcomers for head coach Cori Close and the Bruins this season. (Photo: Mark Konezny, USA Today)*



Guard **CHARISMA OSBORNE** *averaged 17 points per game and scored in double figures in 20 of 23 games last year as a sophomore. (Photo: Don Liebig)*

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THEIR OWN PATH

Women's volleyball players Mac May, Anna Dodson & Zoe Fleck

by **JON GOLD**

When a team undergoes the kind of progress that the UCLA women's volleyball team has displayed this season, it falls to the coach to prescribe the big changes.

For Michael Sealy, the word is evolution.

That's how he explains the one-year transformation of his Bruins, who, through 20 games, were 17-3 and a Pac-12-leading 10-2 in conference play.

But, strangely enough, Sealy doesn't see the team having evolved, so much as the players themselves. Not the whole, but the sum of its parts.

"Every kid who has gone through the program and who had a huge gain, it always kind of happens on their own," Sealy said.

For some, the gains happened on the physical side. For others, the mental game. And for yet a few more, their biggest gains came in dealing with their emotions.

Evolution comes in many forms, it seems.

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Ten games into her fifth season of college volleyball, UCLA outside hitter Mac May had to go back to the drawing board.

The Stanford Cardinal proved a tough challenge on that late-September day, but not a tougher challenge than May's mind. As competitive as she is talented, the three-time All-American just couldn't shake her mistakes. She felt like she was letting the team down, even as they eked out a 3-2 victory.

It's a feeling Sealy knows all too well.

A UCLA volleyball star himself and one of the best setters in conference history, Sealy remembers what it was like to not be able to shake off disappointment.

"I lived my life with an inability to handle that failure, especially when I realized the chips I earned at the college level didn't have currency in the pros," Sealy said. "I played a lot of my career with a fear of failure."

He saw it creeping into May, and the two settled her mind down. It's been smooth sailing ever since.

"A lot of it was the mental work that was done," May said. "Sealy is very good at failure response. How quickly can you let the play go? It's OK to make mistakes, and that's a big part of learning. You have to know sometimes you're going to fail, and it's not going to feel good. The most important thing is trying again."

The two UCLA leaders, one a head coach and the other a coach-in-training – May is pursuing a Master's in John Wooden's Transformative Coaching and Leadership program – Sealy and his protégé have spent a significant amount of time talking about identity.

He has challenged May to find herself outside of the gym, to seek a life with more balance, more perspective. That is sometimes a challenge for players who come to UCLA as among the best in the nation.

"Sometimes this sport can feel like a job, like a chore, something I was obligated to do. I was getting really frustrated with myself. Things weren't going how they were supposed to go. Once I let go of those expectations, it changed. Every year, you have to earn back what you want. You start from scratch. Things are not linear at all. They're a roller coaster. But that's the beauty of it. Taking life as it is. You can't have the good moments without the bad moments making them that much better."
–Mac May

"When players come to play at UCLA, this is usually their first experience with failure," Sealy said. "If they go to family reunions, what are they asked about? Volleyball. If they search their name online, the first thing is volleyball. They learn they're popular and worthy because of what they can



Graduate **MAC MAY**, *who is pursuing a Master's in John Wooden's Transformative Coaching and Leadership program, found a new appreciation for volleyball after she was forced to sit out for seven months during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Photo: Han Q Duong)*

THEIR OWN PATH

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL PLAYERS MAC MAY, ANNA DODSON & ZOE FLECK



Despite several injuries, redshirt sophomore **ANNA DODSON** *has emerged as one of the top middle blockers in the Pac-12. (Photo: Han Q Duong)*

do in their sport. When they fail, it's a traumatic experience. That's what that pain feels like. It's about being willing to go through it."

May entered the abbreviated spring volleyball campaign with a renewed vigor, having not played the game for seven months during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. She returned to Westwood looking to rekindle her love for the sport, and she says, "I remembered how much I was grateful for just experiencing the game and playing the game, even having the touch on the ball. I went into our modified season being really grateful for every opportunity."

She returned this year feeling a little odd, sensing a disconnection with some of her much-younger teammates. She found herself pressing. Worse, she found herself stressing. The Stanford match was just the crescendo.

"Sometimes this sport can feel like a job," she said, "like a chore, something I was obligated to do. I was getting really frustrated with myself. Things weren't going how they were supposed to go. Once I let go of those expectations, it changed. Every year, you have to earn back what you want. You start from scratch. Things are not linear at all. They're a roller coaster. But that's the beauty of it. Taking life as it is. You can't have the good moments without the bad moments making them that much better."

Sealy has watched with great pride as May dug herself from out of her emotional pit.

"I use her as an example," Sealy said. "She was a top-10 recruit when she came here and her first couple years, it was really hard for her to fail. That was going to limit who and what she'd become. The work she's done from the neck up is more important than anything. It's a skill set. People understand it intellectually, but going through the trenches of failure and staying there, that's not for everybody. For many of these girls with volleyball, it's, 'Here's my identity, here's who I am.

"And when it gets challenged, it's like, 'Who am I?'"

◊◊◊

Anna Dodson heard the warning.

But after volleyball was taken from her three times – twice because of torn ACLs, once because of a global shutdown – the UCLA redshirt sophomore middle blocker wasn't about to go any more time without the game.

And if that meant tussling with male collegiate volleyball players, some of whom had commanding advantages in size and strength – well, so be it.

Even if she had to break Sealy's rule in the process.

"Anna Dodson is the one who found the most opportunities," Sealy said. "She played with a lot of men's players, playing with more physical people, and it forced her to get tough. Of course, my one rule was don't go play with men's players. She got lucky she escaped with a banged up finger."

"Right now, as a college athlete, we're always trying to be the best," she said. And that opportunity allowed me to play so freely, and to play with people who are better than me." –Anna Dodson

For Dodson, it was worth it. The proof? Through 20 games, she was tied for six in the Pac-12 in blocks per game.

"I took advantage of open gyms this year, and I played on a guy's net all summer," Dodson said. "Coach specifically said do not play with guys, but I needed to find games. I said, 'Welp, I'm going to play with guys.'"

She'd spent too many afternoons without the sport she loved. A concussion suffered during her sophomore year kept her on the sidelines, and she knew she needed gym time. So she headed down to Orangewood Academy in Garden Grove to play with the OC Resilient Volleyball Program, sometimes bringing teammates with her, even if it was against Sealy's protocol.

"Right now, as a college athlete, we're always trying to be the best," she said. And that opportunity allowed me to play so freely, and to play with people who are better than me."

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At times during the offseason, UCLA defensive specialist and libero Zoe Fleck found herself with Mac May, practicing with the collegiate national team. Other days, Fleck headed out with Dodson to tangle with the big boys down in Orange County.

And when there was no volleyball, Fleck turned to a similar sport, albeit one that requires a racket.

"I picked up tennis actually," she said. "I found a lot of similarities in footwork, mindset and mindfulness. Without being able to get in the gym, I was still working."

Just when Fleck was realizing her dream coming true, transferring to UCLA after two highly successful seasons at UC Santa Barbara, the Coronavirus shut things down. Fleck's first quarter as a Bruin was fully online.

"Even that made me more stoked about playing volleyball for UCLA," she said. "That year really separated those who really loved the sport. And it reminded me why I loved the sport."

Her enthusiasm showed: In the abbreviated spring schedule, Fleck was named Pac-12 Libero of the Year.

"Coming here, that confidence of having that experience of playing with anybody really gave her a window into what her potential is,"
–Mike Sealy (on Zoe Fleck)

"Coming here, that confidence of having that experience of playing with anybody really gave her a window into what her potential is," Sealy said. "She's a professional. She wants to play in the Olympics and play overseas. Once that becomes the focus, any adversity in college is a stepping stone for the next level."

Adversity is the key word here, adapting to it and overcoming it.

That took focus and dedication, both important steps in UCLA's evolution.

"Individually they were doing things in their own time," Sealy said. "They were very professional and raised the tide for everybody."



After starting her career at UC Santa Barbara, defensive specialist/libero **ZOE FLECK** *earned Pac-12 Libero of the Year honors in last spring. (Photo: Han Q Duong)*

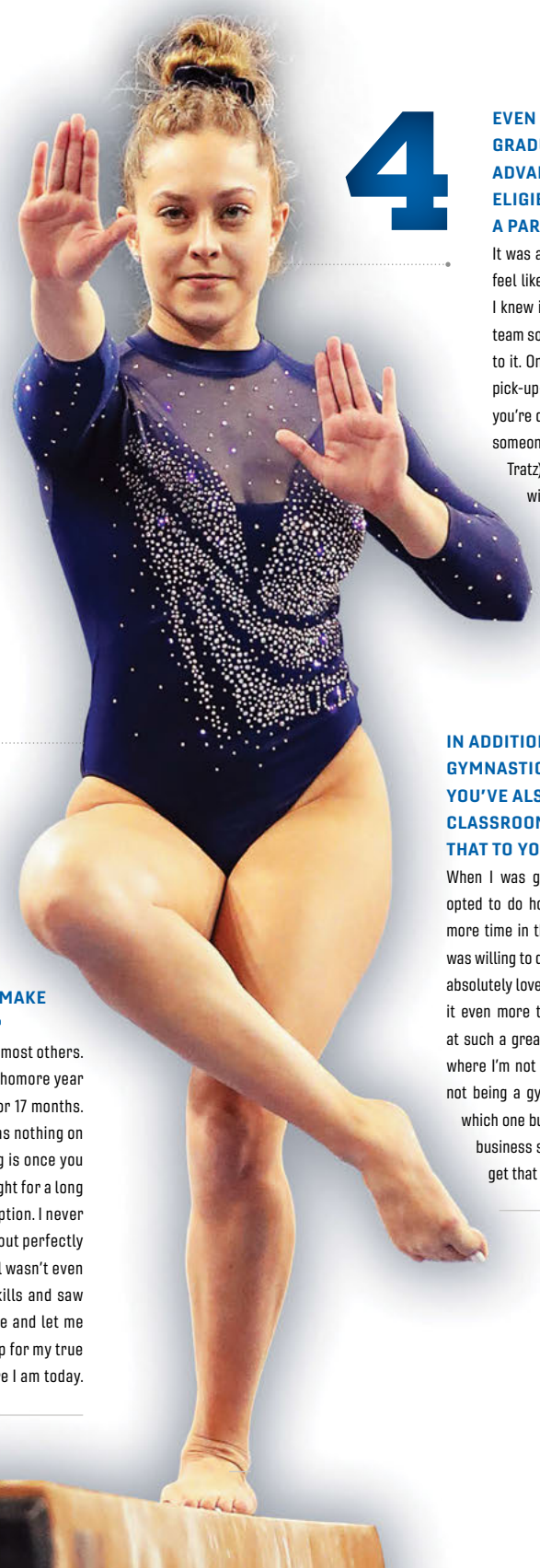


Left: UCLA head coach **MIKE SEALY**, *who is in his 12th season as head coach of the Bruins, realizes that all his players are on their own timeline for growth. (Photo: Don Liebig)*

FIVE QUESTIONS

with Gymnast

KENDAL POSTON



1 HOW WERE YOU INTRODUCED TO THE SPORT?

I actually started gymnastics when I was about two years old in a mommy-and-me class. Being able to run around to music and walking on the beam, I just loved it so much. But the first time I really decided that I loved the sport was watching Carly Patterson complete at the Olympics in Athens. I was six years old. I watched her on beam and I knew right then, this was the sport that I wanted to do.

2 UCLA GYMNASTICS HAS SUCH A HUGE FOLLOWING, ESPECIALLY WITH KIDS. DO YOU EMBRACE BEING A ROLE MODEL TO SO MANY WHO FOLLOW THE SPORT?

I think it's the coolest thing ever. I grew up in Southern California and would come to the meets as a kid too. Before I even realized what college was I told my dad, "I want to come here and do what they are doing." I was THAT little girl so now being in the position I'm in, it's pretty insane. It makes me feel like I've made it in this sport. I've exceeded anything I've wanted to do in this sport because I get to inspire that next generation of gymnasts.

3 BEING A UCLA FAN AS A KID, HOW DID YOU MAKE YOUR DREAM OF COMING HERE A REALITY?

My recruiting process was really unique compared to most others. I actually thought I had a career-ending injury my sophomore year of high school. I shattered my left tibia and was out for 17 months. I was looking at schools but after that injury, there was nothing on the table. Unfortunately, the atmosphere in recruiting is once you get hurt, they aren't looking at you anymore. So I thought for a long time that college gymnastics was not going to be an option. I never thought that I would end up at UCLA. It kind of worked out perfectly where someone mentioned my name to Miss Val. I still wasn't even doing full gymnastics but she liked my leadership skills and saw my drive to get back to it so she took a chance on me and let me walk on. I went from a walk on to earning a scholarship for my true senior year. So definitely a unique path to get to where I am today.

4 EVEN THOUGH YOU HAVE ALREADY GRADUATED YOU DECIDED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AN EXTRA YEAR OF ELIGIBILITY DUE COVID-19. WHAT PLAYED A PART IN THAT DECISION?

It was actually a really hard decision. Last year just didn't feel like the end for me. Honestly, looking back on it now, I knew it wasn't time to close the book yet. I just love this team so much and I just felt like I had so much more to give to it. Once I shut that door it's not like I can just go play a pick-up-game of gymnastics. Once you are done with gym, you're done. When I first came back onto campus this year someone mentioned to me, and our other fifth year (Pauline Tratz), that we came in with a natty and we could leave with a natty. For me it's not so much about that. It's more about leaving it all out on the table and walking away with no regrets. But a natty would be icing on the cake and I know that this team has all that it takes to do it.

5 IN ADDITION TO YOUR GYMNASTICS ACCOMPLISHMENTS, YOU'VE ALSO EXCELLED IN THE CLASSROOM. HOW IMPORTANT IS THAT TO YOU?

When I was growing up a lot of gymnasts opted to do home school so they could get more time in the gym and I can tell you, that wasn't something I was willing to do. I was lucky to be born just loving the classroom. I absolutely love school. My first couple of years here I think I loved it even more than gymnastics. I was just so excited to be here at such a great university. I'll be really sad when the day comes where I'm not a student anymore. I'll probably be just as sad as not being a gymnast anymore. It will be a close parallel to see which one bums me out more. Fortunately, I want to go to either business school or law school on the East Coast. So I'll likely get that chance to be in the classroom again someday.

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FIVE UPCOMING EVENTS TO ATTEND

MEN'S WATER POLO NCAAS

DEC. 2-5



The defending NCAA Champion UCLA men's water polo team is hosting the 2021 NCAA Tournament from Dec. 2-5 at the Spieker Aquatics Center. The Bruins, who have been ranked No. 1 for much of the 2021 season, defeated crosstown rival USC, 7-6 in last year's NCAA Championship match at the Trojans' Uytengsu Aquatics Center. UCLA and USC are once again expected to be two of the top teams vying for this year's title.

TIME: TBA

TICKET INFO: 310-UCLA-WIN OR UCLABRUINS.COM/TICKETS

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL VS. OHIO STATE

DEC. 19

A pair of preseason top-20 teams will do battle at Pauley Pavilion Presented by Wescom on Sunday, Dec. 19, as No. 17 Ohio State visits No. 20 UCLA for an early-season non-conference showdown. The Bruins will be paced in 2021-22 by junior guard Charisma Osborne, who put up career-highs in points per game (17.0) and assists per game (3.8) last season. Ohio State's roster features 10 returners, including last year's leading scorer in junior guard Jacy Sheldon (16.7 ppg).

TIME: 5:00 P.M.

TICKET INFO: 310-UCLA-WIN OR UCLABRUINS.COM/TICKETS.



MEN'S BASKETBALL VS. ARIZONA

DEC. 30

Fans can expect a blockbuster any time Pac-12 Conference rivals UCLA and Arizona hit the hardwood and this season should be no different. The preseason No. 2 Bruins return every player from a team that advanced to the Final Four last March in Indianapolis. UCLA's top two returning players, Jaime Jaquez Jr. and Johnny Juzang were both named to the watch list for the 2022 Naismith Trophy, given annually to the top player in college basketball. Arizona enters the season with new head coach Tommy Lloyd, who spent the last 20 seasons as an assistant under Mark Few at Gonzaga.

TIME: 6:00 P.M.

TICKET INFO: 310-UCLA-WIN OR UCLABRUINS.COM/TICKETS.



SWIMMING & DIVING VS. STANFORD/CAL

JAN. 28-29

Two off the most dominant Pac-12 swimming & diving programs of all time descend on UCLA's Spieker Aquatics Center in late January, with Bay Area powerhouses Stanford and Cal scheduled to face the Bruins in separate dual meets. Action gets underway on Friday, Jan. 28 with Stanford at 2:00 p.m., followed by Cal the next day at Noon. UCLA senior Claire Grover, a 2020 CSCAA All-American in the 50 free, figures to pace the Bruins once again in 2021-22.

TIMES: 2:00 P.M./NOON

TICKET INFO: FREE



GYMNASTICS VS. UTAH

FEB. 4



February kicks off with a nationally-televised Friday night meet in Pauley Pavilion against conference rival Utah on Feb. 4. The marquee matchup will feature two teams who have won the last seven Pac-12 Championships, and each team features three 2020 Olympians. UCLA boasts U.S. silver medalist Jordan Chiles, Canadian all-around finalist Brooklyn Moors and U.S. alternate Emma Malabuyo, while Utah has U.S. silver medalist Grace McCallum, Great Britain's bronze medalist Amelie Morgan and U.S. alternate Kara Eaker.

TIME: 7:00 P.M.

TICKET INFO: 310-UCLA-WIN OR UCLABRUINS.COM/TICKETS.



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ROAD TRIP

UCLA'S WILSON PLAZA *served as the backdrop to* **ESPN'S ICONIC MORNING SHOW** *on Oct. 23*

ESPN's College GameDay aired live from the UCLA campus for the first time ever ahead of the Bruins' homecoming showdown against No. 10 Oregon at the Rose Bowl on Oct. 23.

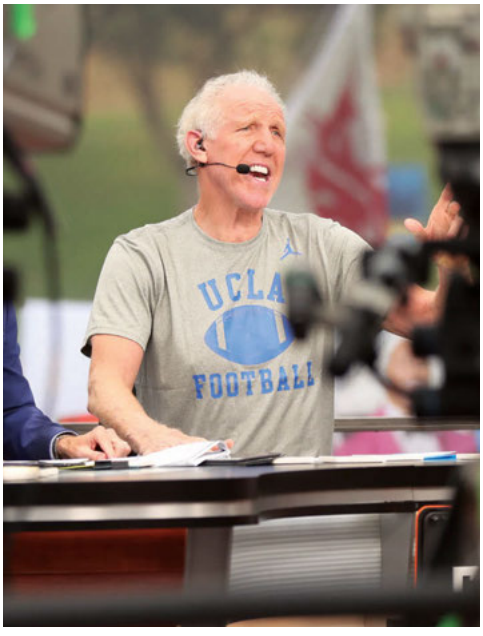
Show hosts Rece Davis, Desmond Howard, Kirk Herbstreit, David Pollack and Lee Corso played host to a raucous crowd that turned up as early as 4:30 a.m. – despite dark and rainy conditions no less – to represent the Bruins on national TV.

It marked College GameDay's first trip to Southern California for a UCLA home game in 23 years, with the previous visit coming on Oct. 17, 1998 at the Rose Bowl.





"This is Bears and Ducks. This is fur. This is feathers. This is bills. This is claws. You need my pick? I'm going with UCLA!"
–Celebrity picker & legendary Bruin **BILL WALTON**





"If you're a competitor you get excited about playing in games like this. Mario's team is going to be prepared. The UCLA Bruins are going to be prepared. I think it's going to be a really good football game."
–UCLA head coach **CHIP KELLY**
ahead of Oregon's down-to-the-wire 34-31 victory over the Bruins

"It's awesome to be in a good position going into the season. We have such an amazing group of guys. But every game starts 0-0 so the hunter or the hunted it doesn't really matter. We are coming out focused."
–UCLA men's basketball player
JOHNNY JUZANG *on the No. 2 Bruins being the one of the NCAA favorties in 2021-22*



ROAD TRIP

UCLA'S WILSON PLAZA *served as the backdrop to* **ESPN'S ICONIC MORNING SHOW** *on Oct. 23*

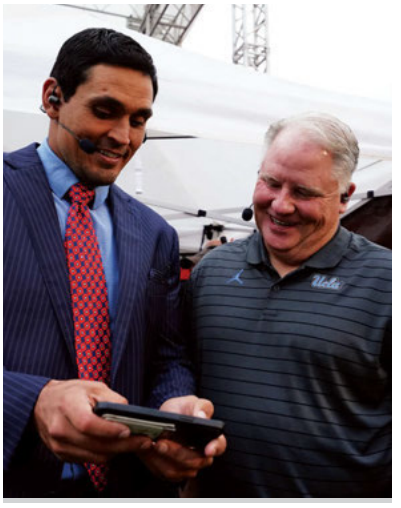


"I'll tell you what, I don't know if any of us expected this at 5:00 a.m., in the dark and in the mist this kind of showing. We really are blown away."
–ESPN's **KIRK HERBSTREIT** *(far right)*











"We have a pretty strong sign game here at UCLA this morning."
–ESPN's **RECE DAVIS**













"They said it was too early.
They said you wouldn't show up.
Bruin Nation stood up!"
–UCLA Athletic Director
MARTIN JARMOND
addressing the Bruin fathful



"It's no secret that the Oregon Duck is my favorite.
I love the Duck. But this is strictly business."
–ESPN's **LEE CORSO** *before picking the Bruins*
by putting on the Bruin Bear head



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