

# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS

## CAL'S POWE CREDITS SUCCESS TO HIS MENTOR

By Jonathan Okanes, *Contra Costa Times*  
March 1, 2006

BERKELEY - Cross paths with Leon Powe and there's a good chance Bernard Ward is somewhere nearby.

Powe is playing in a basketball game at Cal? There's Ward sitting behind the basket. Powe is recovering from reconstructive knee surgery? There's Ward helping him out of bed. Powe needs to do some laundry? There's Powe at Ward's home in San Pablo.

Much has been made of Powe's unlikely journey from impoverished Oakland kid to All-America candidate at Cal. The single most important force has been the continuing presence of Ward in his life.

"Some people ask me if that's my agent," Powe said. "I'm like, 'No, that's my brother.'"

Powe affectionately refers to Ward as his big brother, but Ward also is his unofficial guardian, father figure and confidant. Ward, also an Oakland product whose own promising basketball future deteriorated into a life of drugs and crime, grabbed on to Powe when it looked as though his life was headed down the same path. He hasn't let go.

Because of Ward, Powe is only 29 units short of obtaining his degree in social welfare at Cal, he speaks to inner city kids at schools and is perhaps getting ready to strike it rich in the NBA.

"Forget the basketball. He's the reason I'm in school, period," Powe said. "If it wasn't for him, I don't know what I'd be doing, but I wouldn't be here. Even if I didn't have basketball, I'm a good person now because of him."

Powe's journey has been well documented. His father left him when he was 2. He spent much of his childhood bouncing around homeless shelters, cheap apartments and hotels, and foster homes. His mother, Connie Landry, worked long hours in an attempt to raise Powe and his siblings but got involved with drugs and did jail time.

With no father figure in his life, Powe lacked direction. He spent a lot of time with Ward's younger stepbrother, Shamare Freeman, who wound up in prison.

Ward, who spent close to three months in prison in 1992 because of drug charges, had turned his life around and was working as a probation counselor for Alameda County — the job he still holds — when he got involved with Powe. He knew Powe because of Powe's friendship with Freeman, and vowed not to let him end up like his stepbrother.

"I just didn't want him to end up like my little brother," Ward said. "It wasn't about basketball. It was about taking a kid and showing him about life."

Powe was in middle school when Ward started taking an interest. He didn't know about Powe's interest in basketball. Powe, on the other hand, knew of Ward's history as a star at Oakland Tech High School and as a junior college All-American at Contra Costa College.

Said Powe, "He was like, 'Young fella, you have to get your life together. You can't go down that road that (Freeman) and all the other fools took.' I didn't know what he was talking about, but we just connected from there. He became like a big brother to me."

One of the first things Ward did was drive Powe around Oakland, showing him areas where drug dealing was rampant and trouble was waiting. "I told him not to surround himself around that," Ward said. "It's just so easy in Oakland to get caught up. I was a good kid, but I would go outside and I would see this every day, and I got caught up. I didn't want to see anybody go through what I did, with all the stuff I was around."

For Ward, part of getting his life in order was earning a college degree from Sacramento State. He's now close to completing his master's in psychology at John F. Kennedy University. Ward passed on the importance of an education to Powe.

By the time Powe was a junior at Oakland Tech, he and Ward had become joined at the hip. Powe moved in with Ward and his wife, Alice, and their two younger children.

"That raised the grocery bill," Alice Ward said with a laugh. "Bernard has pretty much taken Leon as his own. I just believe his passion in life is to help people. We had the room, and Leon is a great kid. It was all just a blessing."

While Ward provided guidance and helped Powe with his game, he needed assistance making sure Powe took care of business in the classroom. So he solicited the aide of Oakland Tech English teacher Jonas Zuckerman, who had taught Ward's stepdaughter in elementary school. Zuckerman became Powe's personal tutor.

"Bernard Ward is a hero," Zuckerman said. "He's a role model for what kind of adult we should be. If we all looked out for one kid or one family of kids the way Bernard Ward has, I'd like to live in that society."

Even though Powe's life now is in order and his future is bright, Ward still is as involved as ever. When Powe wants to practice shooting free throws at 5 a.m., Ward meets him at Haas Pavilion before heading off to work. When Powe underwent surgery on his left knee in Vail, Colo., during the summer of 2004, Ward was at his bedside while he recovered. And when Powe weighs the possibility of entering the NBA draft after this season, it will be Ward who will serve as his No. 1 advisor.

"He's done so much for Leon. I have a lot of respect for the sacrifices Bernard has made, just to help Leon," Cal coach Ben Braun said. "I wish we had more people like him doing that."

Powe still spends a lot of time at the Ward household, and has become close with Alice Ward, too. Powe had a deep affection for his mother — even when he and his siblings were taken away from her by child services, he still remained close to her and tried to help get her life in order — but now refers to Alice Ward as his "Godmom." Landry died of heart trouble while Powe was a junior at Oakland Tech.

The Wards have helped other members of Powe's family, too — Powe's younger brother, Tim, also lived with them for a short while and now is a student at Cal State East Bay.

"He's a lifesaver," Powe said of Ward. "He and his wife, they took me in with open arms, and I can't do anything but thank them for it. He had his own life. For him to take the time to help me like that, that was huge for me."

Powe now spends some of his free time speaking to kids about making the right decisions in life, decisions he's not sure he would have made if it weren't for Ward.

"You hang around with people that are doing bad stuff, you're going to do it, too. (Ward) helped me realize that you're going to end up

# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

somewhere you don't want to end up, or you're going to end up dead," Powe said. "I just can't even explain it. The person I am now, I was not nearly that person back then. I've changed dramatically, and he has a whole lot to do with that, more than anybody."

## CAL'S POWE REBOUNDS FROM SETBACKS

*By Malcolm Moran, USA Today*  
*December 29, 2005*

BERKELEY, Calif. — Leon Powe recognized the symbolism. The braces for his once-troublesome left knee had allowed him to function two years ago during a painful, if successful, freshman basketball season at California. They helped guide his return this summer after two surgeries and an empty season spent off the court.

California's Leon Powe, a McDonald's and first-team Parade All-American, was a preseason favorite for the 2005-06 Wooden All-America team.

By Jack Gruber, USA TODAY

But earlier this year, once Powe proved he could run, jump and shoot, once a punishing regimen restored his confidence, the braces were gone. First one, then the two backups.

"They're in the Dumpster," he says. "They're in garbage heaven, where they need to stay."

Their disappearance represented a celebration of Powe's ability to scale yet another obstacle in a series that has characterized his adolescence.

For the 6-8, 240-pound forward, the lack of dependence became a major step away from the sleepless nights, the sense of helplessness and all that time to wonder. "Is it worth it to try to keep playing and keep fighting, or just give up?" Powe remembers thinking more than once.

"When he reverts back to who he is and what's at the core of his personality, he didn't stay in that doubting mode very long," California coach Ben Braun says.

"He did what he does best. He put his head down, and he moved forward."

Relentless perseverance became a signature long before the start of his sophomore season with the Golden Bears. "First you've got to find yourself," Braun says. "Now that he's finding himself, it's becoming even easier for him to be a leader."

The truth of Powe's adolescence is that his recovery and rehabilitation after the two-part process — a bone graft April 21, 2004, and reconstructive surgery of the left knee the following Sept. 8 — does not begin to approach his most difficult challenges.

Not after the death of his mother, Connie Landry, of heart problems at 41. Not after her struggle with drug addiction, the loss of their home to fire, a series of moves in the Bay Area and the eventual placement in foster care.

When the pain of his knee rehabilitation became too great, her guidance became his refuge. "My momma never quit," he says. "She could have quit. So I'm going to stick it out until my wheels fall off, until I can't go anymore."

Powe's sophomore season started with another issue, a stress fracture in his right foot that kept him out of the first four games. His averages of 20.8 points and 9.4 rebounds lead the Bears (6-3), who have their Pacific-10 opener tonight at Southern California.

"He has chosen a hard road," Braun says. "There were a lot of choices he could have made before he came to Cal that might have been a little easier. Leon's goal is not just to get in the NBA. Leon's goal is to be a player that plays there for many years and excels and to be an all-star. That's a big difference."

"He has really grown as a person. It's amazing. The maturity level. His perspective on life. The ability to communicate and perceive a situation. His assessment skills. His ability to read people and read situations. He has a good handle on what he sees, and he communicates it well."

Powe's evolving game, the imposing post play of his freshman season merging with a more effective presence on the perimeter, has inspired high expectations from the beginning of his career. His average of 9.5 rebounds in the 2003-04 season made Powe the first freshman to lead the Pac-10 in rebounding. He led the Golden Bears with 15.1 points a game, was named the league's freshman of the year and made the all-conference team, all with an unstable knee held in place by that brace. "I got it done," Powe says of that season, "but it wasn't how I wanted to get it done."

When he struggled to walk during his rehabilitation, he found a way to practice his shooting form, on crutches or in a wheelchair. He called his shot his "Sam Perkins jumper" in a playful tribute to the North Carolina star and longtime NBA player known for a jump shot that almost looked like a set shot. "I ain't jumping," he remembers and laughs. "It's just all net. It worked for him. That's what I had to work with. Whatever I had to work with, that's what I'd work with."

Powe's combination of size, strength and grace makes it difficult to imagine a period of helplessness. When Powe remembers that time, he jabs the tip of his right index finger into a table for emphasis. "The people that walk on crutches, the people out there in a wheelchair league, the people that have some kind of disability ... my blessing goes out to everybody that's trying to do something," he says.

"I know it's hard. I prayed to God that I'd just be able to walk. I didn't even talk about basketball. I couldn't go normal places quickly, like go to the movies, go get something to eat, then go back home. I had to take one step at a time."

He turns 22 on Jan. 22. "I've seen a lot," he says. "Stuff I went through, I don't know if any normal kid can handle that and still be all right in the future."

His drive has been shaped by the needs of five siblings. "I didn't want my family to be living like we were living before," he says. "I've got a chance to do something, so I'm going to go ahead and go do it. Any kind of help for my family, that was good for me. If it's showing them getting good grades in school, that would make my momma happy, so that made me happy and that made me keep pushing."

Powe, a social welfare major, is expected to be within a year of graduation by spring. He received an award in May 2003 from the Alameda County (Calif.) Board of Supervisors in recognition of his accomplishments. He has spoken with groups of young people about the choices he has made and the ones they face.

"I don't define heart by doing something crazy," he says. "I define heart as like stepping up, being who you are and representing yourself."

## 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

Don't try to act like another person that you see on TV or in the movies. That's what our problem is today."

Powe has grown to understand the example he has set. "I didn't realize until after my freshman year," he says. "I realized how many kids look up to me. Whatever I tell them, that's what they're going to do. That's something I didn't have in my community when I was coming up. I had to turn to myself, make my own decisions."

Says Braun, talking of businesses outside of basketball, "There are people that would fight to hire Leon in their organizations. They'd go into bidding wars over Leon. They're sold on Leon as a person, and his perseverance.

"He can be a mentor. Outside of being a good basketball player, he has so much to offer young kids in the community who are going through similar experiences. He knows that. He takes that as a responsibility. ... He'll give back. He realizes how important that is."

A year ago, the period of inactivity created a season that was empty but not lost. "The year off is probably a blessing for him in terms of maturity, perspective and opportunity," Braun said. "It's great to see him smiling again."

### POWE A TOWER OF POWER

*By Phil Taylor, Sports Illustrated*  
*February 27, 2006*

Leon Powe was not one of those little boys who grew up actively dreaming of an NBA career. His fantasies were deferred while he concerned himself with more practical matters, like finding a permanent home, keeping his family together and having enough food for his mother and siblings. Besides, every time he watched an NBA game on television, it seemed as though the players made every shot. "I thought guys in the pros never missed," says Powe, 22. "They seemed like they were perfect, and I knew I wasn't perfect. There wasn't anything about my life that you would have called perfect."

Loftier dreams are a possibility now that Powe, California's bruising sophomore forward, is the Pac-10's leading scorer (20.1 points per game) and rebounder (10.5 per game) and has a realistic chance for an NBA future. Powe sat out last season after reconstructive surgery on his left knee, and the Bears struggled to a 13-16 record without him. But with Powe back in the lineup, Cal was 10-4 in the Pac-10 (16-7 overall) and tied with UCLA for first place at week's end. The 6'8", 245-pound Powe is so dominant in the low post that he routinely faces double and even triple teams. "He's probably the strongest guy in the league right now," says Washington senior guard Brandon Roy. "He's got that grown-man game."

Powe has always been mature beyond his years. A childhood filled with poverty and heartache forced him to grow up quickly. As the oldest child of a single mother, Connie Landry, young Leon quickly took on parental duties, caring for his younger brother, Tim, while their mother supported them by selling used goods at flea markets near their Oakland home. That lasted until he was seven, when he came home from school one day to find the family home ablaze, accidentally set on fire by five-year-old Tim.

No one was hurt, but the house was destroyed, beginning a long odyssey for the family. They lived with relatives at times, but more often they stayed in cheap motels or shelters — wherever Landry could find a roof, however temporary. "There were probably 25 or 30 places that we called home at one time or another," Powe says, "and that's not counting some of the places where we would just stay for a night before moving on. Money was more than tight, and we just did what we had to do to survive."

While they were on the move, the family grew. Landry eventually had five more children, and Leon played Mr. Mom while she worked at various jobs during the day. He missed virtually all of fifth grade when he spent the year looking after his siblings. "You had to make sacrifices," Powe says. "Some nights I would let my little brother or my mom have my dinner. I figured I could eat the next day." In 1994, when Leon was 10, Landry was arrested for stealing food from a grocery store; later that year and again in '96 she was charged with welfare fraud. By the time he was 14, Powe and his siblings had been placed in foster homes.

His life finally took a turn for the better when Bernard Ward, an Oakland playground legend, took Powe under his wing. Powe developed his game and eventually became a star at Oakland Tech, which he led to the state final as a junior. The game is a memory filled with grief; his mother died of heart failure at age 41, four days earlier. He now wears a medallion with Landry's likeness and also listens to Tupac Shakur's *Dear Mama* before each game. "I know the way we lived wasn't the best, but she tried the best she could," he says. "She found a way when it looked like there was no way."

That might help explain Powe's resilience. He tore his left ACL after his junior season in high school, but he recovered well enough to be named state player of the year as a senior and lead Tech back to the state final. The next season he was Pac-10 rookie of the year at Cal. After redshirting to have the knee operated on again in 2004, he has come back strong on and off the court: He's on track to get his degree in social welfare in spring '07.

Powe also worked hard on his jump shot and his ball handling during his year off, skills he needed to improve to better his pro prospects. The NBA dreams he couldn't entertain as a boy are now in the back of his mind, where he plans to keep them until the season is over. "I don't want anything to take away my concentration on what we're trying to do," he says. "After the season I'll sit down and think about my options, but right now I feel at home here." That's a feeling Powe will never take for granted.



## 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

### ANOTHER INJURY TESTS POWE'S PATIENCE AS CAL SEASON OPENS

*By Jeff Faraudo, Oakland Tribune*

*November 17, 2005*

BERKELEY — For Leon Powe, the next chapter begins, frustratingly similar to the last.

But the Cal sophomore, upon whose powerful shoulders the hopes of Cal basketball fans reside, has developed patience to match his rebounding prowess, and he knows his time is coming.

Powe was told by doctors Wednesday that he has a minor stress fracture in his right midfoot, and must wear a walking boot for two weeks before having the situation reassessed.

If all goes well, the 6-foot-8 forward from Oakland Tech High could be back on the floor when the Golden Bears play Kansas on Dec. 10. It would be his first time in a Cal uniform on game day since March 11, 2004 — a span of 21 months.

"While this is obviously a temporary setback for Leon, he has handled it well, and we are confident he will return to action relatively soon," Cal coach Ben Braun said in a statement. "The good news is he has had no pain symptoms, and Leon knows he has a lot of basketball ahead of him this season."

Powe is a young man without guile, so when he was asked recently about the season he expects to have, his response was direct.

"The people around here who know me, they're not going to be surprised," he said. "But the casual fans ... they know I'm good, but they don't know how good."

Those Cal fans saw him win Pac-10 Freshman of the Year honors two seasons ago, while playing all year on a torn left anterior cruciate ligament, his second major knee injury in three years.

Powe doesn't wonder about basketball. "I know how good I am," he said. "I know how good I can be."

It's everything else that keeps Powe grounded, prevents him from taking for granted even one day.

"Actually, my whole life has been astonishing to me," he said. "The knee injury don't compare to the stuff that happened to me in my real life. I look back on some of that stuff ... man, sometimes I think I shouldn't even be here."

"Leon's amazing. He's defied a lot of the odds," Braun said. "He's got a solid core. I've never heard Leon make excuses. When he's had a bad break in his life, he's turned it into a positive."

There have been plenty of opportunities for Powe to take a different path in his life.

His father left home for good when Leon was 2 years old, and younger brother Tim was a newborn. Powe's mother, Connie Landry, worked hard to support the family but couldn't outrun poverty and its insidious sidekicks.

Powe missed classes in grade school because he had to stay home and take care of Tim — now a freshman at Cal State East Bay. Leon's best friend became involved with drugs and did jail time. Powe's own grades at the outset of high school were poor enough he was ineligible for a portion of his freshman basketball season.

Powe estimates he lived in 20 places — apartments, shelters, residential hotels — during his childhood, following his mother as she did her best to keep the family afloat.

She didn't always make the right choice: A couple scrapes with the law in the name of trying to help her family, and a succession of five more babies, Powe's half-siblings.

In 2002, four days before Powe and Tech played for the California state title, Landry died at the age of 40 of complications from chronic heart disease. Still, Leon says she didn't leave him empty-handed.

"She had that will to survive," he said. "I think that's what I have in me."

That trait was put to the test during rehab the past year.

"There were times I wanted to give up," Powe said. "What kept me motivated was God and my mother. My mother didn't create no quitters. If something's planned in the future for me — something big — I might as well stick it out and just wait and see."

Now, Powe can see the light at the end of the tunnel. With a 2.6 grade-point average at Cal, he's on pace to graduate. And he looks forward to a career in the NBA, although his latest ailment is another reminder of how fragile dreams can be.

Powe knows he's had help along the way. Bernard Ward, who had conquered his own troubled past to earn a college degree, became Powe's surrogate father and helped him envision a path to the future. Jonas Zuckerman, a teacher, was invaluable as a tutor and academic motivator.

"Sometimes things aren't meant for you to go through it by yourself," Powe said. "At first I was thinking, 'You handle it on your own. Be a man.' No, you need help. I got support from everybody. It's a good feeling."

"Toughness is when you can ask for that."

Washington coach Lorenzo Romar, familiar with Powe's story, said the Cal star's ability to overcome makes him a natural leader on his team.

"He's as good a player as there is in the country," Romar said. "He's not only a good player, he's an inspirational player. He's one of those players his teammates feed off."

Nearly four years later, Powe still feeds off the memory of his mother. He better understands now the pressures she faced, and he retains the goodness in her.

"Every day I wake up in the morning, and think about my momma and where I came from," he said. "Just to be here at Cal is a blessing."

When he's back on the court, Powe said there will be no hesitation in his approach.

"I can only play the game one way — rough and ruthless. That's my pace," he said. "I can't fear anything."



# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

## MIDGLEY REMINISCES ABOUT HIS CAL CAREER

*By Ron Agostini, Modesto Bee*

*March 5, 2006*

BERKELEY — Richard Midgley always has valued deeds over words.

Interviews never are easy for the young man who left England for Modesto — all for basketball — at age 16. He's never unpleasant but always reserved.

"Like taking blood out of a stone," said Gill Midgley, his mother.

There were sufficient signs, however, that Saturday — Senior Night — was difficult for Midgley, who made his 96th start and final appearance for Cal at Haas Pavilion. He heard and acknowledged two standing ovations, one before the game and the other as he walked off the court for the last time with 30 seconds left in the Golden Bears' 71-60 win over USC. He was a crowd favorite for four years, a long-armed warrior on defense and the second-best 3-point shooter in school history.

And then it was done — an ordinary five points on, for him, an extraordinary night.

"It's tough to leave. It's gone by real quick," Midgley finally admitted. "I'm not sad, but it's disappointing to leave Cal. I'm ready to move on, but it's been great times here. The people in Modesto, as you know, are so great, they made it a lot easier than it could have been."

He walked onto the court before the game with his parents, who OK'd his overseas dream. Also there were Randy and Sue Anderson, who cared for him during his years as a star at Modesto Christian High. And Ben Braun, who has called Midgley the hardest-working player he's ever coached, offered a sincere hug.

There were no tears from Midgley — that would have been out of character — but he clearly was touched by the emotion swirling around him. He didn't need to be told that chapters of his life are beginning and closing at the same time.

Sometimes words aren't required. His appreciative grin, and the thank-you from the crowd, said it all.

"How many kids would have made that decision and leave everything they were comfortable with at that stage in their life?" asked Kevin Midgley, his father.

Not many, dad.

See, Midgley is the ultimate gym rat. His parents said you could count his trips to San Francisco on one hand. But when it came to losing 30 pounds between his junior and senior year, or running the stadium steps until he doubled-over in exhaustion, or shooting hundreds of shots a day, Midgley was all basketball.

"You can't believe what Richard has. It's something you have or you don't," Kevin Midgley said. "Richard is so totally focused on his sport."

Homesickness has dogged Midgley his entire time at both Modesto and Cal. Frustrated over a rough patch in his career as a sophomore, he nearly walked off the team, according to his father. But homesickness and disappointment, mind you, would have interfered with hoops.

Nothing separates Midgley from basketball.

"We found it very hard when he left," Gill said, "but it was always what he wanted to do."

Looking back, his decisions were sound. At Modesto Christian, he built his basketball reputation and parlayed that into a scholarship and a successful career at Cal. For him, it all paid off — the loneliness, the uncertainty of life as a teenager in a foreign country.

"Coming to Berkeley, it's a lot more European," Kevin Midgley said. "No disrespect to Modesto, but Berkeley is a lot more European."

As long as Berkeley had a roundball and a hoop, it worked for Midgley.

He'll probably end his collegiate career at the NCAA Tournament. His last appearance in the Big Dance was three years ago as a freshman, when his 3-pointer with 3.9 seconds left in overtime carried Cal over North Carolina State in the first round. Since then, injuries and inconsistency have barred the Bears from a return to the game's biggest event. But Saturday night's win was Cal's 18th and its 12th in the Pacific-10 Conference, a formula that has escorted Pac-10 teams into the tournament for the last 17 years.

Midgley dearly wants to return to the tournament that gave him his greatest thrill. At MC, his senior year was revoked after some clumsy handling of his transfer transcripts along with issues regarding his age. This time, he'd like to get it right.

Regardless, he hasn't been cheated during his stay in Northern California. He played in one of the most memorable games in state basketball history, Modesto Christian's crushing loss to Mater Dei in the 2001 state Division I final. At Cal, he's been featured on national TV and praised for his work ethic, though his team's chance for its first conference title in 46 years was doused Thursday night by UCLA.

Today, he's left with only unfinished business — one final postseason ride, a degree in social welfare to be received in May and, hopefully for him, professional basketball in Europe.

Said Midgley, "That's my goal."

## A MORE DYNAMIC MIDGLEY

*By Jonathan Okanes, Contra Costa Times*

*November 7, 2005*

BERKELEY - Rod Benson could hear the rustling. It was a lot earlier than he'd prefer to hear rustling, quite frankly. But he knew it was for a good cause.

For all of the spring and most of the summer, Benson would hear his roommate and Cal basketball teammate Richard Midgley wake up at around 6 or 7 a.m. every day. By the time Benson got up a couple hours later, Midgley already had returned home after running the track at Edwards Stadium and going through a shooting workout at Haas Pavilion.

And that was before Midgley's regular conditioning workout with his teammates later in the day.

Midgley has spent the offseason working out with a chip on his shoulder. Unhappy with how he and the Bears have performed in each of the

# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

past two seasons, Midgley set out to do something about it for his senior year. He has shed about 20 pounds from last season's playing weight of 215 and has morphed into a quicker, more dynamic player. In the process, he has set an example for his teammates.

"Richard has worked harder this summer than he ever has, but I can say that every summer about Rich," said Benson, a fellow senior. "Every single summer it seems like he puts in that much more effort."

Cal coach Ben Braun always has had a special affection for Midgley because of his work ethic, but what Midgley did this offseason was nothing like he had ever done before. Pac-10 opponents might not recognize his new physique. And reports from Cal players are that Midgley is putting on dunking shows in practice.

"He's doing dunks now and we didn't know he could dunk the whole time," Benson said. "Just yesterday I saw him doing reverses and 360s. It's really exciting to see the progress he's made with his athleticism."

Said Midgley: "I used to barely dunk. Now I can get up pretty good."

Midgley took his performance hard last season. With Leon Powe out because of knee surgery, the Bears looked to Midgley to assume more of the scoring load. But Midgley tried to do too much at times, taking himself out of his comfort zone. He also missed three games with a sprained right shoulder and played through several other games with the injury.

Midgley scored 12.9 points per game but shot just 39 percent from the field. His outside shooting, the component of his game the Bears count on most, also wasn't up to par.

As Midgley struggled, so did the team. Cal lost seven of its last eight games — six of the defeats by coming by at least 15 points — and the Bears finished 13-16, their second consecutive losing season.

"I was just really disappointed with the way our team played the past two years," Midgley said. "The way my season ended last year, I was real upset with myself. Team attitude, my performance, a lot of stuff I just didn't want to go through again."

With Powe back this season, along with Kansas transfer Omar Wilkes, Midgley likely won't have as much pressure to score. The Bears say they are committed to utilizing their athleticism to play more up-tempo basketball this season, and Midgley and his new body should fit in well.

"He might not make the rugby team now, but he'll make us a better basketball team," Braun said. "He realized he needed to be quicker. He's playing as well as he's played since he's been at Cal."

Midgley said he didn't put himself through the grueling offseason conditioning program only to help himself, but to send a message to his teammates that he means business this season.

"Every guy on the team knows how much effort I've put in," Midgley said. "I win every sprint. I work harder than everyone else in every drill. My goal is to be the best conditioned athlete in the Pac-10."

Said Benson: "You can't run a sprint and put your hands on your knees without hearing Richard yell 'Get up off your knees. This is my season. This is my senior year.'"

## CAL NOW FOCUSES ON BID TO NCAAS

*By Jeff Faraudo, Oakland Tribune*

*March 4, 2006*

BERKELEY — Kevin Midgley, who traveled with his wife from Burgess Hill, England, to watch their son play his final regular-season basketball games for Cal this weekend, expects tonight to be an emotional one.

It's Senior Night at Haas Pavilion, and senior guard Richard Midgley, a crowd favorite, is sure to get a nice reception before the Bears' Pac-10 Conference finale against USC.

Mom and Dad might be a misty-eyed, but Kevin Midgley makes one thing clear: "This isn't about us. It's about him."

Yes, when all the pregame hugs are complete tonight, Midgley and his teammates must attend to serious business.

The Golden Bears (17-9, 11-6) entered Thursday's game against No. 15 UCLA hoping to secure at least a piece of their first conference title in 46 years. Didn't happen. UCLA won in overtime, and the landscape shifts for the Bears.

"We have to bounce back," Richard Midgley said. "We've already talked about that we're not going to give up. This was a huge game for us, which we didn't get. (Today) is just as huge."

A loss would send Cal into the Pac-10 tournament next week seeded No. 4 or 5 against Stanford or Arizona. A loss in the Pac-10 opener would create this unimpressive entry on the Bears' NCAA Tournament résumé: Five defeats in their final six games and an RPI computer ranking hovering near 70.

In other words, if Cal loses today, its road to the NCAAs becomes not impossible but extraordinarily hazardous.

By winning today, however, the Bears could finish as high as a tie for second place in the final Pac-10 standings. They would be a No. 3 seed in the conference tournament in any event if they win today, because they would lose a second-place tiebreaker with Washington.

A win also pushes the Bears to 18 victories, 12 in the conference, a total that has translated to an NCAA bid for every Pac-10 team over the past 17 seasons.

Midgley, who will start for the 96th time in his Cal career, is certain to be ready. He is the gritty leader of this team, a reluctant spokesman who always has been willing to let his rough-and-tumble play speak for him.

"He's a fighter and a battler, a tough competitor," coach Ben Braun said. "I'll remember all the battle scars — the ones he's received and the ones he's inflicted."

Asked how well he's fared on balance, Midgley said, "I think I've given out more than I've taken."

The edge probably stems from his athletic background in England. "He was a very good (soccer) goalkeeper as a 10-year-old. Very good," Kevin Midgley said. "He made the choice to play basketball because he was able to dominate."

As a young teenager, he twice scored 91 points in a game in Britain. At Cal, Midgley has scored 1,152 career points but has been most

# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

valuable for his versatility.

"There are aspects of his game that are totally underrated," his father said.

Everyone noticed when Midgley sank the game-winning 3-point shot in overtime as a freshman against North Carolina State in the 2003 NCAA Tournament. The Bears lost to Oklahoma two days later and haven't returned to the NCAAAs since.

"It's been real hard," Midgley said. "Obviously, coming in, it seemed like Cal was going to the NCAA Tournament every year. You realize it's not an easy thing. You really have to earn it."

Midgley and the Bears get another shot at doing that today. There aren't many chances left.

## UBAKA EMERGING AS CAL'S FLOOR LEADER

*Janie McCauley, Associated Press*

*February 1, 2006*

BERKELEY, Calif. - Ayinde Ubaka can improvise.

Last summer, when Ubaka's California teammates were too beat up to take part in open gym, Ubaka quickly found another way to hone his game. He drove a half-hour each way several days a week to Saint Mary's College, where he played pickup games with the Gaels and his good friend John Winston.

"I just wanted to play somewhere and get better," Ubaka said. "It's one thing working on your game, but you still need to implement it in a game. I had to get somewhere to play."

Then, he would return to Cal for individual workouts.

All that gym time is paying off for Ubaka, who has demonstrated a knack for hitting clutch shots in crunch time and has shown he is more confident being the floor leader for the Golden Bears in his junior season.

Ubaka scored a career-high 29 points in a win over Oregon on Jan. 5 that gave Cal a 3-0 start in conference play. He scored seven of his nine points in the final 4:53 of a 62-58 win at Southern California on Dec. 29 and had another big basket in the final minute of a 68-61 upset at then-No. 11 UCLA two days later - the Bears' first win against a team that highly ranked since they defeated No. 7 Arizona on Feb. 25, 1999.

He helped the Bears sweep then-No. 10 Washington and Washington State last week to move into a three-way tie for second place as Cal heads to Oregon State and Oregon.

Ubaka believes being around players other than his own teammates all summer probably helped him - and the Gaels were probably hopeful he'd have a change of heart, transfer and join them for good.

The 6-foot-4 guard is Cal's second-leading scorer at 15 points per game and also averages 3.2 rebounds and a team-best 3.9 assists. His ballhandling is a big reason the Bears are averaging a conference-low 12.6 turnovers and are 9-1 at home.

For Ubaka, it means a lot to be carrying a significant load this season considering there were plenty of people who weren't sure he could make a big impact at the college level.

"I always had the physical ability," he said. "It's just mentally believing in myself and being confident, not letting anybody take my confidence away no matter who it is. You can tell me I can't do this, I can't do that - I'm just not listening and tell myself to play and do what got me here. ... It's the same people who said bad things who are saying good things now."

Reaching the point where he no longer worried about what others thought of his game took some time. He's willing to listen to anybody's ideas for ways to get better, but he also knows when there's too much information running through his mind that it might lead to confusion.

"The real thing you should do is listen to the people in the program, the coaches," he said.

Ubaka came to Cal three years ago as part of a talented recruiting class that also featured star power forward Leon Powe. They both grew up in nearby Oakland, and while Powe is the bigger name, Ubaka was the most highly touted guard to join the program since Jason Kidd in 1992.

No longer can opponents focus only on Powe and expect to get away with it.

Ubaka's strong play has certainly helped take some pressure off Powe, the Pac-10 freshman of the year two seasons ago who returned after missing all of the 2004-05 season following knee surgery.

"You need good big men, but guards really carry teams far," Ubaka said.

Ubaka knows even he has been guilty of looking past a few of California's opponents this season, leading to losses in games the Bears probably should have won. A couple years ago, he might not have said anything to his teammates about the problem. Now, he's speaking up.

For Ubaka, being healthy has made a big difference in his strides, too. He broke a bone in his left foot early last season, immediately had surgery and missed 11 games, keeping him from having the kind of season he'd hoped for as a sophomore.

"He's really gaining confidence," Cal coach Ben Braun said. "His health, for one, has contributed to his confidence and number two, having some success knocking down shots. That goes a long way. He's been challenged and he's answered those challenges. To take a step, you've either got to challenge yourself or answer the challenges that have been thrown at you, and he's done that."

## CAL'S UBAKA HAS MATURED AS A PLAYER, TEAM LEADER

*Jake Curtis, San Francisco Chronicle*

*January 12, 2006*

The past two seasons, boxing promoters would have called the point-guard duel in Stanford-Cal games a mismatch.

Stanford's Chris Hernandez is a two-time all-conference player who led his team to NCAA Tournament berths both years. Cal's Ayinde Ubaka had won no honors and the Bears had losing records both seasons. Stanford has won all four games in which they met, and Hernandez's numbers in last season's two meetings (16 points per game, a combined 8-for-11 on 3-pointers, 4 assists per game) dwarfed those of Ubaka (4

# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

points, 1-for-7 on 3-pointers, 2 assists).

An odd thing happened in the offseason, though. Ubaka got good.

Although he is the same height and just a pound or two heavier than last season, Ubaka looks bigger because his on-court persona has grown exponentially. So have his numbers.

He seems ready for the Hernandez confrontation, and Ubaka admits he gets a little more pumped up when he's facing a top point guard like Hernandez.

"He's probably one of the better point guards around," Ubaka said, "and he plays super hard. So I do look forward to it."

He was cranked up for Cal's game two weeks ago against UCLA's Jordan Farmar.

"Yeah," Leon Powe said, "he had that marked on his calendar."

Ubaka more than held his own against Farmar, outscoring him 18-6 and getting the critical points down the stretch in Cal's road win.

Ubaka would like similar results in Friday's game at Stanford, which has not lost to Cal at Maples Pavilion since 1993.

The Hernandez-Ubaka matchup may not be quite the same now that Hernandez is playing a lot at shooting guard with freshman point guard Mitch Johnson in the starting lineup, a move that has improved Hernandez's scoring. However, it is still Hernandez who directs the Stanford ship, just as Ubaka has learned to do at Cal.

The epiphany for Ubaka came off the court in the offseason, when he got to know Ben Braun. That may sound odd, considering he had played for Braun for two seasons, but all Ubaka knew about his coach was that he was the guy in Ubaka's face when he made a mistake.

Rumors were flying last spring that Ubaka wanted to leave Cal. That's when Braun and Ubaka got together, meeting not player-to-coach, but man-to-man.

"It was just me and him sitting down," Ubaka said. "I had never really sat down with him like that, and I found out I didn't know him at all."

Ubaka got a personal view of why Braun handled Ubaka as he did, and found the coach to be much more laid-back and calm than his sideline demeanor suggested.

Ubaka grew more comfortable with Braun and started visiting Braun's house, playing pool and hanging out, something he never would have considered doing before. Suddenly, communicating with his coach was easy.

"When I talked to him, it became more like a man-to-man conversation, instead of a player coming to his coach sounding like I'm complaining," Ubaka said.

Their biggest offseason goal was for Ubaka to stop looking over at Braun for guidance during games. Braun wanted Ubaka to be in charge on the court, and act like it. During the summer and in preseason, Braun would get on Ubaka or make him run sprints every time he looked over at Braun.

Ubaka almost never glances at the bench now, and the effect is apparent.

He's more than doubled his career scoring average, and his shooting percentage has shot up. More obvious is his control of game.

"I'm not scared anymore, not hesitant," Ubaka said.

Cal needs Ubaka on the court almost all the time. He played all 40 minutes in two of the past three games, and probably would have played all 40 in the other if Braun had not taken him out for four minutes when Ubaka sprained his ankle. Even in that game, Braun felt compelled to put a gimpy Ubaka back in, because Oregon was making a run, and the Bears needed Ubaka's leadership to hold off the Ducks.

Ubaka is a different player from the one who became an immediate starter as a freshman after being a highly touted recruit at Oakland High School. It's hard to describe exactly how he's different, but it's obvious.

One example of the change is that Ubaka knows his performance against Stanford will be judged on whether Cal wins or loses, not on whether he outscores Hernandez.

## CAL FINDS A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH IN ROBERTSON

*By Jonathan Okanes, Contra Costa Times*

*February 4, 2006*

EUGENE, Ore. - It's typical of a coach to express confidence in his players. So when De La Salle High School boys basketball coach Frank Allocco said Cal was "getting a steal" last spring when it secured a commitment from Theo Robertson, it was taken with the obligatory grain of salt.

As it's turned out, it was more than just routine coaching loyalty. Robertson has made a surprising impact, helping the Bears manage a handful of injuries and providing a steadying force usually unique for a freshman.

"He's not surprising anyone on Winton Drive (where De La Salle is located), I can tell you that," Allocco said. "Athletically he's one of the top two guys we've ever had here. He really knows how to play the game and isn't blown away by any situation."

Robertson has modest numbers of 5.5 points and 2.9 rebounds per game. But he's averaging 20 minutes, playing both inside and outside, and even as a freshman is one of Cal's most fundamentally sound players. He's only 6-foot-5, but Robertson actually has played more post than wing this season, primarily because of injuries to Rod Benson and Leon Powe.

"Theo has been an all-purpose guy," Cal coach Ben Braun said. "When we've needed him to step up in different areas, he's done that. He's helped us at the post, he's helped us at the guard. He accentuates the guys around him. He makes plays."

Robertson was recruited by only a handful of mid-major schools before Cal had a scholarship become available last spring. Robertson had skipped the early-signing period and was considering St. Mary's, Santa Clara and USF before the Bears called in March.

"I watched him two years ago at the Martin Luther King Classic at St. Mary's. I hadn't seen him before," Washington coach Lorenzo Romar said. "I asked, 'Who is that?' I thought he was going to be a player. So it doesn't surprise me. I thought he was going to be pretty good."

With Benson and Powe out at the beginning of the season, Robertson started the Bears' first four games and scored in double figures in the first three. His playing time decreased as Cal got healthy, but when Benson went down again with a knee injury three weeks ago, Robertson's



## 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

importance once again became magnified.

“Unfortunately we had some guys go down so I just had to do my best to step up and help the team win,” Robertson said. “I definitely didn’t expect to be in this situation, but at the same time I’m embracing it.”

Robertson has played well against good teams, too. He had 11 points in 20 minutes in a loss at Arizona and had nine points and four assists in a win over Washington.

“He’s never had any fear,” Allocco said. “I think it helps in high school to play a national schedule like we did. He always seemed to play big in those big games.”

Allocco said Robertson wasn’t recruited as heavily probably because he’s more workmanlike than flashy. But that’s not to say that all Robertson can do is set screens and make free throws. Robertson is athletic and strong and is one of the Bears’ most versatile players.

“Going into the season, if we were at 100 percent health, he might not be playing as much,” Braun said. “But you never count him out. He’s the kind of player that just competes and finds a way to help your team. I think he still might have earned his way onto the floor and helped us.”

### NEW BEAR ROBERTSON NEVER DOUBTED HIS ABILITY

*By Jeff Faraudo, Oakland Tribune*

*November 25, 2005*

BERKELEY — Maybe it’s not an accurate way to describe how Theo Robertson came to the Cal basketball program, but it seemed he was an after-thought.

Signed last spring out of De La Salle High, Robertson had been pursued by the Bay Area’s three West Coast Conference schools — Saint Mary’s, USF and Santa Clara — but made relatively little fuss on the recruiting radar nationwide.

“I definitely felt like I had a chip on my shoulder. I wanted to come in and prove something,” Robertson said. “There was a sense maybe not that I couldn’t play here, but I didn’t have as great of expectations as some others.

“But I knew I could play basketball.”

Through the Golden Bears’ first two games, the 6-foot-5 Robertson has been about as dependable and versatile as anyone on the roster. With injuries springing up everywhere, coach Ben Braun started Robertson at power forward in both games. He was rewarded not only with 13.0 points, 5.0 rebounds and 60-percent shooting, but also with heady, controlled play.

Robertson came across as a player who understands the game.

“He’s given us a lot of stability,” said Braun, aware that is not a contribution freshmen routinely make. “The guys recognize his abilities and the way he blends in. He’s just played.”

With the Bears’ injury list finally beginning to shrink, it’s possible Robertson may no longer be in the starting lineup for this weekend’s 13th annual Golden Bear Classic. Cal opens tonight against Northern Colorado.

Either way, Robertson has demonstrated he belongs in the mix. It’s no surprise to Frank Allocco, his coach at De La Salle.

“I thought Cal really got a steal,” Allocco said. “We felt all along Theo was one of the best players we’ve ever had. I thought he would be a serious impact player.”

Just imagine what might happen when the Bears’ frontline becomes healthy enough that Robertson is able to play at his natural position on the wing.

“It’s kind of funny, we really saw him as a two guard at the next level,” Allocco said. “But in our system, he played everywhere. His outside shot and his ballhandling were good, but he has always been a great post player, a very good post defender.”

Braun concedes that Robertson had something of a reputation as a “tweener” in high school, a player perhaps without a position.

“He’s a basketball player — that’s what counts,” Braun said.

Although Robertson might have difficulty defending a 6-9 post player, he more than held his own in Cal’s first two games. And he was De La Salle’s all-time 3-point percentage leader.

“I think he has the physical ability he could be a pro someday,” Allocco said. “He can jump, and he’s strong as an ox. He’s got it all.”

### CAL’S OMAR WILKES ALREADY A TEAM PLAYER

*By Jonathan Okanes, Contra Costa Times*

*October 26, 2005*

BERKELEY - It’s difficult to determine what Cal will value more about Omar Wilkes — his ability to pick apart another team’s defense or to keep his own team together.

Wilkes, a 6-foot-4 sophomore guard from Los Angeles, joins the Bears this season after transferring from Kansas. While he should inject Cal with some much-needed scoring ability and athleticism, his most indispensable asset might be his personality.

Wilkes, the son of former Warriors and Los Angeles Lakers star Jamaal Wilkes, is a natural leader with an infectious personality. That should be a welcome addition for the Bears, who experienced problems with team chemistry at the end of last season.

“We saw that quality about him coming out of high school,” said Cal coach Ben Braun, who recruited Wilkes when he was at Loyola High School. “He has a lot of friends on the team, and a lot of friends off the team, I’m sure. It’s just the way he is. Omar is a personable guy. He’s somebody that I think is well-respected by his teammates.”

The Bears are coming off back-to-back losing seasons for the first time in Braun’s nine years in Berkeley, and they endured a miserable end to last season. Cal lost seven of its final eight games, six by at least 15 points.

## 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

The makeup of this team's roster is substantially different from last year. Forwards Dominic McGuire and Kevin Langford transferred, center David Paris became academically ineligible, and forward Marquise Kately withdrew from school.

Cal's players say team chemistry now is stronger than ever, and the addition of Wilkes no doubt has something to do with that.

"He's always upbeat, always positive," Cal senior guard Richard Midgley said. "He's a team player. Whatever the team needs, he's able to do it."

Wilkes figures to move into the Bears' starting lineup immediately, as Cal likely will play a three-guard lineup featuring Wilkes, Midgley and point guard Ayinde Ubaka. With Wilkes, Midgley and the return of forward Leon Powe from knee surgery, the Bears should have a wealth of leadership, something that was sorely lacking last season.

"It never hurts to have another vocal person that can try to keep the energy up," Wilkes said. "I think that will be an important part of my role this year, off the court as well as on the court."

Wilkes was rated as the No. 94 recruit in the country by ESPN.com coming out of high school. After Wilkes committed to Kansas, coach Roy Williams left for North Carolina. The Jayhawks hired Bill Self as their new coach, and Wilkes played just 3.5 minutes per game as a freshman.

Wilkes decided to transfer, citing homesickness and "comfort level with the coaching staff" among his reasons.

"We welcomed the opportunity to have Omar come back," Braun said. "He's a team guy. I don't think he has a huge ego, and it shows when he plays."

Teammates have been impressed with Wilkes' play in practice — one player said, "I can't believe he didn't play more at Kansas." Wilkes figured to see heavy minutes already, but his role takes on even more significance now that Kately is gone. Wilkes has a chance to be one of the most high-impact transfers in the country this season.

"Last year was a great experience but kind of tortuous, not being able to get on the court and help the team win," Wilkes said. "I'm just really excited and anxious to get going. I always thought I would contribute a lot. Maybe it will be a different role this year (without Kately), but I always thought I could bring something to the table."

The Bears hope to provide matchup problems for opponents by putting Ubaka, Midgley and Wilkes on the floor at the same time. And they are not worried about the matchup problems it could cause them. Wilkes essentially will be an undersized small forward.

"The way we look at it, it's a concern for them, too," Wilkes said. "It goes both ways."

### CAL'S SKINNY FRESHMAN TO SHOULDER HEAVY LOAD

*By Jonathan Okanes, Contra Costa Times  
January 19, 2006*

BERKELEY - Just in case you had forgotten about that 6-foot-11 beanstalk of a freshman who scored 11 points in Cal's season opener at Eastern Michigan, you're about to get re-acquainted.

Jordan Wilkes suddenly has become an important part of the Bears' rotation after the results of an MRI on Wednesday confirmed senior Rod Benson has a torn meniscus in his right knee and will be sidelined four to five weeks. Benson suffered the injury Monday in practice.

That means Wilkes, along with fellow freshman Theo Robertson, will be counted on to assume a more important role.

Benson, the Bears' leading scorer and rebounder last season, spent most of this season trying to come back from a stress fracture in his left heel and was averaging just 16 minutes per game. If he's able to return in four weeks, it would make him available for the Bears' home games against the Arizona schools in mid-February.

In the meantime, Cal needs Wilkes to pick up some of Benson's productivity. Wilkes exhibited excellent potential on the offensive end early in the season before suffering a sprained right ankle and missing four games. He's played only on a limited basis since.

"It's exciting to me because I feel like I'm ready and prepared," said Wilkes, whose older brother Omar is one of Cal's starting guards. "If that's what they need me to do, I feel I'm up to the task. I'm looking forward to seeing what I can contribute."

Wilkes went 5-for-6 from the field against Eastern Michigan and flashed other signs of his potential over the next few games. His challenge will be on the defensive end, where he and his lean body will have to work not to get pushed around.

It was clear when Wilkes arrived at Cal that adding weight to his 225-pound frame would be his top priority. And coach Ben Braun says he's already doing that.

"He's a guy who's getting stronger," Braun said. "That doesn't happen often during the year that your guys get stronger. Usually it's very difficult to put on any kind of weight during the season and just get stronger, because the season wears on you. Jordan has become more durable. He's withstanding the rigors of practice better."

Cal will try to snap a two-game losing streak tonight at Arizona State, which features a big man similar in stature to Wilkes in freshman Jeff Pendergraph, who is 6-10, 210 pounds. Arizona, the Bears' opponent Saturday, doesn't feature much of an inside threat.

"Coming in here, I knew I was behind physically," Wilkes said. "I'm not saying I'm fully caught up or anything like that, but I'm definitely making strides."

Braun said it will depend on matchups whether he uses Wilkes or Robertson more. When both Benson and Leon Powe were injured at the beginning of the season, Robertson started and Wilkes came off the bench.

Robertson started the season with three straight double-digit scoring games, but his production and playing time have steadily diminished. He didn't play in Friday's loss at Stanford.

"I have faith in Jordan," Braun said. "I think Jordan can do some things for us. He and Theo are going to have to step up like they did at the beginning of the season and give us some minutes."

# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

## HARDIN MAKING HIS PRESENCE FELT

*By Gary Peterson, Contra Costa Times*

*January 6, 2006*

BERKELEY - First impression upon seeing Cal's basketball team in person for the first time this season: How cool to see Leon Powe on the court again, posting up, taking a charge, asserting himself on the low block.

Second impression: Who's the enormous guy down there with him?

Ever hear of DeVon Hardin? He's the guy. At 6-foot-11, he is (with Rod Benson) the tallest player on the team. At 235 pounds, he is (behind Powe) the second heaviest.

But he looks bigger than Powe. Stronger, too. Which is a revelation — kind of like discovering the University of Texas has a backup quarterback who's even faster and more elusive than Vince Young.

Now, Powe, despite missing last season after knee surgery, is still the man. Guard Ayinde Ubaka is the point man. They combined for 56 of Cal's 77 points in Thursday night's 77-66 victory over Oregon.

Hardin, a sophomore from Newark Memorial High School, was the guy you couldn't stop watching. In the first few minutes, he had two tape-measure blocked shots, real statements. Beyond that, he was statistically subtle — two points, six rebounds, two assists, two blocks, one steal. Visually, he was everywhere.

"I feel I can be a very strong force," he said. "I only had two points, but for me it wasn't about scoring. It was about playing defense, making those guys not want to come down the lane."

Here's the incredible thing — Hardin was on the team last season, too.

Join the club if you don't recall any of the 468 minutes he played as a freshman. According to the Cal media bible, Hardin averaged 4.3 points and 4.5 rebounds per game. He was there — and remember, Powe was not — but Cal coach Ben Braun put his trust in Benson and the departed David Paris. Since Braun has won approximately 500 more college basketball games than anyone else in this discussion, we'll give him the benefit of the doubt. Maybe Hardin was a 16-minute-per-game kind of guy.

He's not that kind of guy anymore.

"I put in a lot of extra work this summer," he said. "It's been a bumpy road. I'm not anywhere near where I want to be."

His sophomore season got a jump-start because Cal needed him early. Powe developed a stress fracture in his foot. Benson was in and out with a stress fracture in his heel. For the first four games, Hardin was Cal's entire inside presence. In those games, he averaged 15.8 points and 9.8 rebounds.

"I think that helped build my confidence," he said.

This isn't to say that Hardin is a finished product. Powe, as a freshman, was ahead of where Hardin is now in terms of savvy and polish. The thing about Hardin is, you look at his size, his energy, you add the experience he'll get over the next two-plus seasons and multiply by his natural growth and you get something Cal has never had.

A beast.

Oh, Cal's had tall. Benson, Solomon Hughes, Michael Stewart and Francisco Elson come to mind. They were on the willowy side. Hardin is from the oak family.

Cal has had beefy. Paris, for example.

Cal has had great shooting big men (Lamond Murray), the unnaturally long-armed (Brian Hendrick), football players in shorts (Tony Gonzalez), superlative power forwards (Shareef Abdur-Rahim).

But tall, thick, agile and coordinated? That discussion might begin and end with Mark McNamara. After Hardin is finished at Cal, even McNamara may not be in the discussion.

That's all speculation, of course. But it's tough to keep your mind from wandering when you see what the crowd at Haas Pavilion saw midway through the second half Thursday night.

Overplaying a passing lane between the circles, Hardin stole the ball and roared upcourt on a one-on-none. He flew to the hoop on testosterone wings, cut loose with an implosive dunk, then swung once around the rim in the aerial ballet equivalent of a victory lap.

He was called for a technical foul, acted as if he couldn't believe what he was hearing, then raised his arms in scowling triumph and chest-bumped guard Omar Wilkes with such force that Wilkes almost wound up on Telegraph Avenue.

Thursday's victory, on the heels of last weekend's sweep in Los Angeles, left the Bears 3-0 in Pac-10 play and in sole possession of first place. Which is about as good as you can be after three games. On the other hand, they are safely this side of scary good, and there are questions about their depth.

Thus, you can point to Hardin as a key to whatever Cal hopes to accomplish. Powe looks a lot like we remember him. Ubaka looks like we were promised he would look when he was recruited three years ago. Benson's better, and Wilkes seems to know what he's doing.

Hardin is the guy you want to keep an eye on, if first impressions are to be believed. And they haven't failed us yet this season.

## KNEZEVIC HAS COME A LONG WAY TO JOIN CAL

*By Jeff Faraudo, Oakland Tribune*

*January 7, 2006*

BERKELEY — One of the oldest cities in Europe, Belgrade also is among the most repeatedly overrun by outsiders. Invaders over the centuries have included the Romans, Huns and Eastern Goths in ancient times, and the Germans and Soviets in the past 60 years.

But Serbia remains resilient and, among other things, recently has shown off its basketball prowess. The home of Peja Stojakovic and Vlade Divacs, who gained fame in the NBA, the former Yugoslavia shocked the world by winning the 2002 World Championships in Indianapolis.

# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

Belgrade's latest export made his first appearance at Haas Pavilion on Thursday night, and 19-year-old point guard Nikola Knezevic had the crowd of more than 8,000 Cal fans buzzing with curiosity.

Knezevic (pronounced NEE-koh-lah k-NEH-zhuh-vich) didn't expect to wind up in Berkeley. A member of his country's age-group national team since 13, Knezevic was one of five young Europeans chosen from an adidas camp in Berlin two summers ago to play against the top American prospects in Atlanta last August.

Even then, Knezevic had other ideas about his basketball future.

"Before Atlanta, my mom and dad asked me, 'What do you think if you get some offers to play college?' I said, no. I didn't know college basketball was really so good, and I wanted to be a pro."

Atlanta went well, and Knezevic received scholarship offers from Kansas, Utah, Mississippi State and one other school.

"I was really confused because I had offers to play pro (in Serbia)," he said.

Then he told his mother, Tatjana, that Cal also was interested.

"Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me?" she said. "Do you know what Berkeley is? Berkeley is like Oxford and Cambridge."

"He saw there are other Serbian students here, and that it's a good environment for international students," Cal coach Ben Braun said.

When Braun and associate head coach Louis Reynaud made a home visit to Belgrade in September, Knezevic told them how excited he was that Serbian Olympic swimmer Milorad Cavic is a Cal student. "He's a god," Knezevic told them.

Braun and Reynaud also were struck by life in Belgrade.

"He comes from a pretty modest background, and we were pretty tear-jerked when his mom gave us gifts when we got there," Reynaud said. "It's better, but they're still rebuilding."

Rebuilding from the spring of 1999 when for 78 days NATO forces bombed the country as the world groped with how to address brutal dictator Slobodan Milosevic.

"I don't want to remember that time," said Knezevic, who was 13 that spring. I was with my brother and my mom — we were with my grandparents in Germany."

Laws required his father to stay behind, and when the bombing stopped, the family returned to find their father and home OK.

"It was a mess but not so much," Knezevic said. "Now they are building, so it will be OK. There is something special with Serbian people — everybody is strong."

"With communism we didn't have much opportunity to go to the future. Now with democracy, we have a great future, I think."

Knezevic played 17 minutes Thursday against Oregon barely two weeks after he arrived on campus.

He showed defensive energy and a talkative nature on the floor, contributing four points, an assist and a steal. "We love his attitude," Braun said. "That's why we were so enamored with him."

Senior Richard Midgley, a native of England, said Knezevic is fitting in nicely with the team.

"He's cool. He works real hard, and the team has responded to him well," Midgley said. "I think he's pretty good. And I think he's real happy to be here."

Knezevic, who lists the Spurs' Manu Ginobili as his favorite player, said he believes he can one day be a leader for the Bears. For now he's adjusting on the fly.

"My parents say this is a new life for me," Knezevic said. "I came here to learn from coaches, to work hard. I like my team. They are really great. We are really together."

"We are, as coach says, on the same page."

## BEARS SECURE NO.3 SEED IN PAC-10 TOURNAMENT

*By Jeff Faraudo, Oakland Tribune*

*March 5, 2006*

BERKELEY — Cal's reward for beating USC 71-60 in the regular-season finale of the Pac-10 Conference season Saturday is the chance to play the Trojans again on Thursday.

And while the Bears are taking a low-key approach to the rematch in the opening round of the Pac-10 Tournament, USC coach Tim Floyd said he's not excited about his team's draw at the Staples Center.

"They've already beaten us twice — those guys have our number," Floyd said.

If Cal (18-9, 12-6) can pull off a third win this season over the Trojans (17-12, 8-10), they may find their way into the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2003.

Or maybe the Bears, who finished alone in third place, are in the postseason mix already.

For 17 consecutive years, every Pac-10 team that has won at least 12 conference games — all 50 of them — have been rewarded with an NCAA bid. Of course, few of those teams entered the regular-season finale having lost three of four games, as the Bears had. "It's a real tough science," senior Rod Benson said of trying to decipher the NCAA picture. "It's hard to predict who's in, who's out. I, like everyone else, watches the bracketology shows."

"It's really up to the (NCAA selection) committee. All we can do is play the games."

Cal played this one well enough in the second half to extend a 24-23 lead at the intermission to 16 points with 11 minutes left. It didn't hurt that USC missed 22 of its first 25 3-point shots and finished the game at 29.5-percent from the field overall.

On Senior Day, sophomore Leon Powe had 22 points and 11 rebounds for his 13th double-double of the season, then tried not to pay attention as the Cal student section chanted, "One more year."

This was a critical game for the Bears, wounded emotionally by Thursday's 67-58 overtime loss to UCLA, a setback that cost them a chance for their first conference title in 46 years.



# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

Cal coach Ben Braun, whose mantra is to take games one at a time without considering potential distractions such as the NCAA Tournament, actually addressed the subject in his pregame talk.

"Here's what I said ... I told the guys we can't go back and get the Pac-10 championship," Braun said. "But we can achieve our goal of playing in the postseason."

The players knew exactly what was on the line. "I'll tell you one thing," Powe said, "if we had lost this, I knew we were out."

Neither team played inspired ball in the first half, the Bears leading by just one point over a team that shot 29 percent. Powe had 14 points by halftime, but Braun encouraged him to get his teammates more involved in the final 20 minutes.

"I said, 'OK, coach, you're right. They're all keying on me. I'll try to do that,'" Powe said. "And they were getting better shots. But give them the credit, they did the rest."

The Bears got some easy fastbreak baskets, and junior guard Ayinde Ubaka, who has struggled the past couple of weeks, came alive. He scored 15 of his 17 points in the second half, including a 3-pointer with 6:16 left after the Trojans had scrapped to within 50-38.

Braun conceded that Ubaka, who ranks second in the Pac-10 in minutes played, may be getting tired. He also suggested, "Ayinde's getting what Leon's getting right now. That's the price you pay when you become a pretty good player. They're not giving him a lot of looks.

"But Ayinde has a knack. He seems to always hit a big shot for our team."

The Trojans hit very few shots until the final 3:10, after which they made five of their eight 3-point baskets. They needed a Haas Pavilion-record 35 attempts to reach that total.

"The shot chart told the story," Floyd said.

The teams have just a few days to prepare for the rematch.

"It's a new game when we get to Staples," USC sophomore Nick Young said.

Powe agreed but said the Bears would like to add to their postseason rsum.

"I want to do some more," he said. "I think we're very close ... if we get a couple more wins, I think that will assure us."

## POWE GETS 30 POINTS IN BEARS BIG WIN

*By Jake Curtis, San Francisco Chronicle*

*February 17, 2006*

Several unusual things took place at Haas Pavilion on Thursday night.

For one thing, Cal beat Arizona, and that doesn't happen every day. The Bears' wire-to-wire 75-66 victory was only Cal's second win against the Wildcats in their past 16 meetings.

Cal (16-6, 10-3) finds itself 2 1/2 games ahead of Arizona (15-10, 8-6), and that has not happened this late in the season since Lute Olson arrived at Arizona in 1983.

For another thing, Leon Powe scored 30 points, and after scoring a career-high 32 against Stanford last Thursday he becomes the first Cal player since Ed Gray in 1997 to score 30 points or more in consecutive games.

"Powe is a man among boys," Olson said. "He's special. I think he's more active than the first time we played him."

Cal has won six games in a row, and now would have to implode to play itself out of NCAA Tournament berth.

However, the most significant news Thursday is that Cal is in first place. Granted, the Bears are only tied for the Pac-10 lead with UCLA, but it is still a historic event because the last time Cal was in first place on this date, Feb. 17, was 1960. You may recall that 1960 was also the last time Cal won a conference title.

"I think they're good enough to win it," Olson said.

Cal has put itself in a position that every victory means the next game is more important than the previous one.

"That's how it is when you're on top," Richard Midgley said.

And, believe it or not, Cal is on top and could be alone in first, at least briefly, if it beats Arizona State on Saturday, because UCLA does not play again until Sunday.

The Bears' chore now is to ignore the standings.

"This wasn't an ordinary game," Powe said, "but I was telling myself it wasn't a big game. We just think of this as a two-game tournament this weekend, and Saturday is the championship game."

Powe has played the past two games like they are championship games. He was an unstoppable force last week in the Bears' critical win over Stanford, and he was much the same Thursday in a game that was at least as big.

For his part, Powe was most proud of his team's rebounding. The Bears got clobbered on the boards in last month's 60-55 loss to the Wildcats, who collected 21 offensive rebounds that day. This time, Cal had six more rebounds than Arizona, and Powe had 10 of them.

Lost among the Powe spectacle was the defensive job Cal did on Hassan Adams. Adams was averaging 18.3 points before Thursday, but he had a season-low seven on 3-for-10 shooting against the Bears, with freshman Theo Robertson being the chief defender on him.

"But Theo will tell you he got help," Cal coach Ben Braun said. "I don't remember playing an Arizona team when they got no fast breaks (which was the case Thursday). Usually Hassan is dunking on somebody's head."

Cal took charge from the start, jumping out to a 9-0 lead. Less than a minute into the game Powe led his own fast break, dribbling behind his back to beat Arizona's Marcus Williams, then continuing on for a layup that he turned into a three-point play after being fouled.

Briefly: Cal forward Rod Benson got his first playing time in more than month, playing nearly two minutes after having knee surgery on Jan. 20.

Cal guard Omar Wilkes, who sat out last week's game with a sprained ankle, also played Thursday, playing 11 minutes, all in the second half, with Ayinde Ubaka and Midgley both getting their fourth fouls with more than 10 minutes left.

Arizona guard Chris Rodgers, who was dismissed from the team four weeks ago and reinstated this week, played 22 minutes.



# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

## CAL ENDS IT EARLY, WINS 13TH

*By Jake Curtis, San Francisco Chronicle*  
*February 3, 2006*

Corvallis, Ore. — Cal took out Oregon State with surprising ease Thursday night, and did it so quickly it left most of the evening to mull over several Cal milestones.

Defensive intensity and an early 21-2 Cal lead were the means to the Bears' 69-52 victory over the Beavers at Gill Coliseum. Afterward, the Bears were left to marvel at the numbers on the stat sheet.

— Cal (13-6, 7-3 Pac-10) has matched its overall win total from last season and surpassed last year's Pac-10 victory total. The Bears already have four conference road wins, one more than they had last season. And after finishing tied for eighth last season, the Bears now share second place with Stanford, a game behind first-place UCLA and a game ahead of USC and preseason favorite Arizona. If the Bears can get past Oregon in Eugene on Saturday, talk of a possible NCAA Tournament bid is inevitable.

— The Bears committed a season-low five turnovers in a display of offensive efficiency.

— Primarily because the Beavers missed their first eight shots while falling behind 14-0, Cal limited Oregon State to 31.9 percent shooting, a low for a Cal opponent this season.

— Leon Powe had 16 rebounds, a career high and the most by a Pac-10 player this season. He was limited to 13 points, but had a career-high four assists as he passed effectively out of the double-team. In the past two games, Powe has more assists (seven) than field goals (five).

"That's OK," Cal coach Ben Braun said. "He sure made things look easy for us. It's good to see him become a basketball player."

— After scoring 15 points last Saturday for his highest offensive output since Dec. 6, Richard Midgley followed up with 16 points on Thursday, hitting all three of his 3-pointers along the way. Moving Midgley to point guard seems to have had the unexpected effect of making him more of a scoring threat.

— Oregon State (10-11, 3-7) has fallen off the map. The Beavers beat Cal and Arizona in consecutive games last month, but have dropped five of their six games since then, including three in a row at home. The slide has coincided with the loss of point guard Lamar Hurd, who's out with a groin injury.

"The glue to this team is not with us," Oregon State coach Jay John said, "and we have come unglued."

John made some desperate moves on Thursday, first replacing his entire starting lineup 3 1/2 minutes into the game, then using Brett Casey at point guard for half the game even though Casey had played a total of seven minutes in the Beavers' previous nine conference games.

Nothing worked for the Beavers, in large part because the Bears took 6-foot-9 Nick DeWitz out of the game. He had scored 28 points while hitting 7-of-9 3-pointers in the Beavers' 82-63 win over Cal last year in Corvallis, and he made all three of his 3s while scoring 18 points in OSU's 82-74 upset of Cal in Berkeley last month.

On Thursday, DeWitz had just two points as the Cal big men prevented him from getting open shots from long range.

"We didn't want DeWitz and (6-10 Sasa) Cuic to get off," Powe said. "If they get a good look they're going to knock it down every time."

Cuic also had burned the Bears from long range last month, and though he finished with 21 points Thursday, he had only five in the first half when Cal swept the Beavers off their own court in the first seven minutes.

"When I looked up and saw it was 14-0, I was shocked," Powe said, "but then again I wasn't shocked, because of the way we were playing defense."

The Beavers never got closer than eight points after that as Cal cruised to its third straight win.

## WILD THINGS HAPPENING IN BERKELEY

*By Jake Curtis, San Francisco Chronicle*  
*January 27, 2006*

Leon Powe and Omar Wilkes pointed out the scratches on their backs delivered by excited students who rushed the court after Cal's 71-69 upset of No. 10 Washington on Thursday.

They weren't complaining.

"It was fun," Powe said.

It was a blast for Cal to get its first win over a top-10 team in seven years, and it was satisfying for the Bears that the revved-up Haas Pavilion crowd of 8,957 became a significant factor in a game for the first time this season.

"The crowd was great," Powe said, "especially if we can get it back like it used to be, when the floor was shaking."

The Bears (11-6, 5-3 Pac-10) needed every boost they could get to hold off the Huskies, who trailed by 13 points with 5:56 left but tied it with 36.7 seconds to go.

Forcing the Huskies (16-3, 5-3) into 18 turnovers and grabbing more offensive rebounds than Washington were Cal's means to its big win. Ultimately, though, it was Cal's success at the free-throw line that made the difference, just as it was Cal's problems at the foul line that doomed the Bears against Stanford.

It is still much too early to start talking about NCAA Tournament scenarios for Cal, although folks will start whispering about them anyway now that Cal has beaten both of the Pac-10's ranked teams, UCLA and Washington, which are wins the tournament selection committee will appreciate.

Playing with intensity for 40 minutes, as Cal did Thursday, is what leads to the postseason.

"That's the effort you have to have against Washington," Cal coach Ben Braun said.

Aside from the turnovers, Washington did not play poorly. It shot 47.3 percent from the floor and made 10 of 16 3-pointers.

"We shot it better than we have all year," Huskies coach Lorenzo Romar said.

## 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

Washington's Brandon Roy had 23 points, nine assists and five rebounds, and Ryan Appleby made all five of his 3-pointers. The Bears prevailed anyway, with the trio of Powe, Wilkes and Ayinde Ubaka supplying most of the offense, with some unexpected help from freshman Theo Robertson.

The Bears were buoyed by their board work, getting two more offensive rebounds than the Huskies, who lead the conference in rebounding margin.

"We turned up the heat in practice," Braun said.

After getting outrebounded badly by Arizona in Saturday's loss, Braun orchestrated physical practices this week that focused only on boxing out and rebounding.

The grunt work did not affect the Bears' touch. They were 15-for-17 from the line, and Ubaka (15 points) and Powe (18 points, 13 rebounds) nailed four straight free throws when Cal had to have them in the final 40 seconds. Ubaka did it with a sprained ankle that left him with a noticeable limp in the closing minutes, although Braun expects him to be ready for Saturday's game against Washington State.

Ubaka gave Cal the lead for good when he hit two free throws with 36.1 seconds left, less than a second after Appleby hit his fifth 3-pointer to tie the game. Joel Smith fouled Ubaka immediately after Ubaka took the ensuing inbounds pass, a foul that drained away much of Washington's momentum.

Ubaka's foul shots gave Cal a 2-point lead, and Powe was fouled with 16.8 seconds left after he rebounded a Roy miss. A 66.7 percent foul shooter, Powe was convinced he'd hit these.

"I've been getting up at 5 in the morning to shoot free throws," Powe said, "so I was thinking about nothing but dropping two."

He dropped two, Cal had a safe, 4-point lead, and 16 seconds later, the students were all over the court, scratching their heroes.

### CAL 'D' ECLIPSES SUN DEVILS

*By Jonathan Okanes, Contra Costa Times*

*January 20, 2006*

TEMPE, Ariz. - Cal guard Ayinde Ubaka said coach Ben Braun wouldn't stand for any — uh — "shenanigans" this week in practice.

But for the first seven minutes of their game at Arizona State on Thursday night, the Bears' play was laughable.

Cal's extra-tough practices still ultimately paid off. The Bears erased early deficits of 11-1 and 16-5 in dramatic fashion and ended by matching their biggest Pac-10 road win ever with an 88-58 triumph in front of an announced crowd of 7,521 at Wells Fargo Arena.

The only other time Cal won a conference road game by 30 points was on Feb. 12, 1998, when it beat USC 73-43. It also was the Bears' eighth-largest overall road win in history.

"Coach is usually real laid-back, more like a teacher," said Ubaka, who led the Bears with 24 points. "But he was on us and we responded to it."

The Bears (10-5, 4-2) were coming off back-to-back losses in which they allowed Oregon State to shoot 54 percent and Stanford 49 percent from the field. Thursday, the Sun Devils (7-9, 1-6) connected on just 36 percent of their floor shots.

Braun acknowledged he was tougher than usual on his players this week.

"I had to be," he said. "I thought it was unacceptable for us to play the kind of defense we played. I felt our team had to hear that message, and the team responded. It was pretty obvious what we needed to do. Going out and doing something about it is the next step."

It was a delayed response. The Bears started the game looking a lot like they did two weeks ago against Oregon State, when the Beavers scored the game's first eight points and never trailed in a 72-64 victory. This time, Arizona State scored the first nine points and didn't allow Cal to score a field goal until Leon Powe's layup at the 13:28 mark of the first half.

"We were up on Stanford last week and that didn't do us much good," Braun said. "I thought we stayed consistent and really concentrated on defense and rebounding. I told the guys the offense would take care of itself if we just trusted it. We didn't trust it in the first two minutes of the game. But I think over the long haul our confidence grew."

Cal began to creep back by getting to the foul line. When Powe scored the first field goal, the Bears already had converted five free throws. They went on to go 31-for-38 from the foul line, their most made free throws in a game since also connecting on 31 at Washington State in 1997.

Cal went 11-for-24 from the foul line in its 75-61 loss at Stanford last Friday, including a 5-for-11 effort from Powe. Thursday, Powe was 12-for-15 and finished with 20 points and 10 rebounds.

The Bears held a 6 a.m. practice Wednesday morning, and Powe arrived at Haas Pavilion at 5:15 to shoot free throws.

"Coach chewed me out a bit about making more free throws," Powe said.

Cal led 36-30 at halftime, then outscored the Sun Devils 12-2 to begin the second half. But after both Powe and DeVon Hardin went to the bench after picking up their third fouls, the Sun Devils cut it to 64-56 with 6:23 remaining.

Not only was that the closest Arizona State would get, the Bears closed the game with a 24-2 run. The stretch was sparked by a strange play by Hardin, who attempted a wild drive to the basket but put back his own miss and was fouled for a three-point play.

"The object is to put the ball in the basket, but we told him never to do that again," Ubaka said.

# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

## BEARS TOP BRUINS FOR SURPRISING SWEEP

*By Jake Curtis, San Francisco Chronicle*  
*January 1, 2006*

Los Angeles — Cal's 68-61 victory over No. 11 UCLA at Pauley Pavilion on Saturday was a head-scratcher. The result did not match what we thought we knew about the Bears and Bruins.

— Leon Powe scored a mere five points against UCLA — and UCLA (11-2, 1-1) ends up being the highest-ranked team Cal has beaten on the road since the 1994-95 season.

— Cal (8-3, 2-0) lost its final two nonconference games in disappointing fashion to unranked teams — and the Bears start conference play with their first road sweep in Los Angeles since 1999-2000.

— The Bears had been winless outside Berkeley entering Pac-10 competition — and for the first time since 1956-57, they open conference play 2-0 when both games were on the road. That wasn't even accomplished by Cal's 1959 national championship team, which played its first two conference games on the road and lost one of them.

— UCLA's Jordan Farmar, considered the best point guard in the Pac-10, played 36 minutes despite earlier suggestions that he'd be sidelined because of a sprained ankle he sustained Thursday — and he was outplayed by Cal point guard Ayinde Ubaka, who limited Farmar to three assists and six points (on 2-for-11 shooting) while scoring 18 points himself and making the critical plays down the stretch for the second straight game.

— UCLA had made 50.1 percent of its shots before facing Cal and had shot better than 50 percent in five of its past six games — and Cal limited the Bruins to a season-low 36.7 percent shooting.

"This was huge," said Cal guard Omar Wilkes, who scored 12 points and is the son of former UCLA All-American Keith (later, Jamaal) Wilkes. "Pops helped build this place, and I felt the basketball gods were on our side."

Some outside force seemed to be working as Cal and Powe suddenly figured out how to prosper despite Powe being double-teamed at the block. Like most Cal opponents, UCLA sent two defenders at Powe when he got the ball, but he passed out of the trap, leading to open shots, which led to Cal shooting 52.2 percent from the field and 60 percent (6-for-10) on 3-pointers.

Powe, whose previous season low was 13, had just one field goal on seven attempts, but he had 12 rebounds and ended the notion that he has to put up big numbers for Cal to win.

"I think this was one of Leon's best games," said Ubaka, perhaps overstating the case a bit. "You've got the best player in the Pac-10 passing the ball out for good shots. This was all Leon. Every single game, it starts with him."

Lately, every single game ends with Ubaka. He was a major force in the final three minutes of Thursday's win over USC, and he had eight points in the final four minutes against UCLA. He made all six of his free throws in that stretch and hit a clutch 6-foot shot with 36 seconds left after regaining a ball that had been stripped away by Arron Afflalo.

"You can see Ayinde's confidence spilling over to his teammates," Cal coach Ben Braun said. "I don't think he tried to show anyone up or make it an individual competition (with Farmar). He just played basketball."

Ubaka was the steady force every time UCLA and its crowd got back into the game, and his two foul shots with 21 seconds left gave Cal a five-point lead.

"I've seen a different Ayinde completely from last year," Cal center DeVon Hardin said after a 10-point, eight-rebound performance. "He's much more of a leader. Last year, there seemed to be more confusion. Now, after a timeout, the players huddle as a team, Ayinde talks, and everybody knows what they're doing."

The Bears certainly knew what they were doing on defense. After limiting USC to 37.3 percent shooting Thursday, the Bears did an even better job against the Bruins, whose starters were a combined 11-for-40 from the field.

### Rare pair

— Cal's road sweep of USC and UCLA is its first since the 1999-2000 season. It's the first time Cal opened Pac-10 play at 2-0 in three years.

— The wins over USC and UCLA mark the first time Cal started league play with two road victories since the Bears beat Washington State 66-58 and 61-51 on Jan. 4 and 5, 1957.

— Cal hadn't beaten a team ranked as high as No. 11 UCLA since beating No. 7 Arizona 89-76 on Feb. 25, 1999. The Bears' last road win over a team ranked 11th or higher was a 74-72 victory over No. 9 Arizona on Feb. 12, 1995.

## POWE'S PRESENCE HELPS BEARS' PERIMETER GAME

*By Jonathan Okanes, Contra Costa Times*  
*December 7, 2005*

BERKELEY - Cal forward Leon Powe connected on his first career 3-pointer Tuesday night. It was only fitting it came in this game, seeing as he was responsible for so many of his teammates' 3-pointers.

The Bears made 10-of-18 shots from beyond the arc, including 8 of their first 11 when it really mattered, and they extended their win streak to six with an 82-64 win over San Diego State in front of 8,679 at Haas Pavilion.

The Bears (6-1) took advantage of an Aztecs defense that consistently double-teamed Powe, leaving their perimeter players with plenty of room to shoot. Guards Richard Midgley and Ayinde Ubaka combined to go 7-for-12 from 3-point range.



## 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

Powe had 22 points and eight rebounds while Midgley went 4-for-5 from beyond the arc and had 17 points and five assists. Ubaka, who was 3-for-7 from 3-point range, had 13 points, five rebounds and five assists.

"We knew they were going to double the post. We worked on it all week," Midgley said. "The posts did a great job when they were doubled off kicking it out. A few of us were open and we knocked them down."

The Bears were 6-for-8 from the 3-point line in the first half, when they used a 26-7 run to open up a 42-27 lead 1:32 before the intermission. Ubaka connected on 3-pointers on back-to-back possessions during the stretch. It was 42-32 at halftime, and the Aztecs (4-3) never cut the deficit to single-digits.

As a freshman in 2003-04, Powe was inconsistent handling double-teams, and the Bears often failed to make their opponents pay. But while sitting out last season after undergoing knee surgery, Powe said he became more of a complete player, including improving his decision-making when facing double-teams.

Powe had only 19 assists during his entire freshman season, an average of 0.7. He has six in three games so far this year, including three on Tuesday.

"They came at me pretty hard early," Powe said. "I couldn't force up too many shots. I had to pass it. We have good shooters on the wings. Why shouldn't I? They knocked them down. That opened the game up."

Cal finished last in the Pac-10 in 3-point shooting in each of the past two seasons. But with Powe and DeVon Hardin attracting a lot of attention from opposing defenses inside, Cal is connecting on 40 percent of its 3-pointers this season.

Midgley, who ranks fourth on Cal's all-time list in made 3-pointers, played through a sprained right shoulder for much of last season and was only a 35 percent shooter from beyond the arc. He's making 49 percent this season. Ubaka entered the program with the reputation as a good perimeter shooter, but was only a 28 percent career shooter from beyond the arc entering this season. He's shooting 39 percent so far this season.

"We're passing the ball way better this year," Ubaka said. "We're more unselfish. Richard and I worked together all summer. It's pick your poison with our team. Kick it out and we'll hit the shot. It's simple offense."

The Aztecs had to defend the paint even more Tuesday because Cal forward Rod Benson returned to action after missing the previous three games with a stress fracture in his heel. He played just 13 minutes but was still a presence, scoring eight points and also opening things up for the Bears' perimeter players.

Midgley became the 34th player in Cal history to amass 1,000 career points when he converted a three-point play early in the second half.

The Aztecs were picked to win the Mountain West Conference in a preseason media poll. With Benson easing his way back into action and an 11-day break coming after Saturday's game against Kansas in Kansas City, Mo., the Bears are feeling good about the way things are coming together.

"It's good to try to get into a rhythm," Cal coach Ben Braun said. "Richard and Ayinde were playing like that last year before both sustained injuries. They're playing well together. That's what they can do to help this team."

## CAL GOES BIG TO MANHANDLE AKRON

*By Jeff Faraudo, Oakland Tribune*

*December 4, 2005*

BERKELEY — Cal's basketball team threw its size around Saturday night, and there wasn't much Akron could do about it.

The Golden Bears' big-man duo of Leon Powe and DeVon Hardin combined for 44 points and 17 rebounds, leading Cal to its fifth straight victory, an 89-75 verdict before 7,820 fans at Haas Pavilion.

Powe and Hardin so overpowered the Zips that their only remedy was to foul, and that didn't work out well, either. The equation sent the two to the foul line 25 times, and put Akron's three best big men in early foul trouble.

Powe had 26 points and 10 rebounds, his second straight double-double. Powe was 12-for-16 from the foul line. Hardin, the reigning Pac-10 Player of the Week, had 18 points and seven rebounds, hitting 8-for-9 from the line.

Asked when he realized the Bears had a huge advantage inside, Powe didn't hesitate.

"The whole night ... before we even played, our plan was to attack their big guys," Powe said. "Just try to get them in foul trouble, but make them play defense. Big guys don't like to play defense if you go right at them. I'm one of those."

"If me and Leon can get to the line, it's going to be a force to be reckoned with," Hardin said.

By the time it was over, the Bears (5-1) paraded to the foul line 33 times, converting 28 of them.

Guards Ayinde Ubaka and Richard Midgley added 15 points apiece, and reserve point guard Martin Smith contributed six assists.

Akron (2-1), hoping to beat a Pac-10 team for the first time since 1951, used 11 3-point baskets to stay close for a while. But guard Nick Dials, who scored 15 first-half points, couldn't even get off a shot in the second half, and there were few interior options given the foul situation.

"We got out-physicaled," Akron coach Keith Dambrot said. "Our best players got in foul trouble, and our best player (Romeo Travis) didn't play, really. It's just frustrating because you want your best players to play. I'm not saying we didn't foul."

Travis, the Zips' leading scorer at 21.0 points per game, played just 14 minutes before fouling out with six points. Backup forward Rob Preston had a career-high 18 points, but also fouled out, and starting center Matt Futch was limited to 14 minutes by four fouls.

Dambrot was impressed by the Bears.

"Obviously, Leon's a pro, and maybe Hardin is, too," he said. "They got in trouble and Midgley made a big shot. Ubaka is playing a lot better than he has before. Leon's got a chip on his shoulder."

Powe was playing just his second game after recovering from a minor stress fracture in his foot last month and a major knee surgery last year. He played 36 minutes, and the Bears seemed to have a better flow in this one.



# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

Cal played again without senior forward Rod Benson (heel) and freshman forward Jordan Wilkes (ankle).

Dambrot is the fourth former Braun assistant to face the Bears this season, but is best known for having coached LeBron James two years in high school.

"We could have used him tonight," Dambrot said.

## RETURN OF THE POWE CAL USED TO KNOW

*By Jake Curtis, San Francisco Chronicle*

*December 1, 2005*

Ten Cal players saw action in the Bears' 70-52 victory over San Jose State on Wednesday night, but only one seemed to matter to the 8,138 folks at Haas Pavilion.

Forward Leon Powe, playing his first game since March 11, 2004, was the focus of everyone's attention, and although it seemed impossible for him to live up to the build-up to his first game in more than 20 months, he somehow managed to exceed expectations.

Powe scored 10 points in the opening 4:20 of the game, and he finished with 27 points, tying a career high, and added 10 rebounds in his 31 minutes of playing time. Cal's overall performance was not a work of art, but having Powe back made up for any aesthetic shortcomings.

"He did exactly what we expected," coach Ben Braun said.

Powe's season debut had been a long time coming. He was the Pac-10 freshman of the year two seasons ago, but missed all of last season following reconstructive knee surgery, and he was held out of the first four games this season because of stress fracture in his foot.

Not surprisingly, Powe was more than a little anxious when the game began.

"When the ball went up, I said, 'Man, I'm here,' " Powe said. "I haven't played in a college game in so long. It's blessing from God just to be out here."

George Nessman also made a return to Haas Pavilion. Nessman was a Cal assistant last season before being named the Spartans' head coach. His team more than held its own for awhile despite playing its second game in two nights, and they did it without top scorer, Demetrius Brown, who remained in San Jose with a bacterial infection.

However, the Spartans had no answer for Powe.

"He hasn't played in a year and half and look what happened," Nessman said. "He makes Cal enormously better."

Powe made up for the Bears' personnel problems in the frontcourt. Cal (4-1) was without two post players, Rod Benson (foot stress fracture) and freshman Jordan Wilkes (ankle sprain). Benson might play in Saturday's game against Akron, although Wilkes is less likely.

Powe provided the remedy. He scored Cal's first 10 points, hitting his first five shots with five different moves. He opened by swishing a 12-foot baseline jumper 18 seconds into the game. He followed that with a driving spin move that produce a layup, then scored from close range off an out-of-bounds play. Then he scored on a follow shot, although he missed the free throw that went with it. Powe finished his flurry with a 5-foot floater in the lane. The game was just 4:20 old, and Powe had 10 points. At one point Powe was 5-for-5 and his teammates were 0-for-5 as the Cal players found themselves watching Powe work.

"It's hard not to," Braun said.

Cal guard Richard Midgley seemed to benefit from Powe's presence, hitting 4-of-7 3-pointers in the first half. But he admitted to being a spectator at the Powe show, too.

"Obviously, the offense will run through Leon," Midgley said, "but it's been a year and half since we've had him so it's an adjustment."

## BEARS' BIG WIN: POWE READY TO GO

*By Jake Curtis, San Francisco Chronicle*

*November 26, 2005*

Cal coach Ben Braun was feeling pretty good about his team Friday night, although the Bears' 83-59 win over Northern Colorado had little to do with it.

Braun was uplifted because his team is almost completely healthy, which was a nice birthday present for Braun, who turned 52 Friday. The only key player who was not available Friday, in the Bears opening game of the Golden Bear Classic at Haas Pavilion, was Leon Powe, and he is scheduled to play for the first time since the 2003-04 season in the Bears' game against San Jose State on Wednesday.

"It would be a great shot in the arm if we could get everybody healthy," Braun said, "It's been a long time."

Backup point guard Martin Smith, who missed the first two games with a stress fracture in his pelvis, got his first game action of the season, playing nine minutes, although the Bears (2-1) could not get out of the evening without some injury issue. Rod Benson re-injured his heel in the first half and that kept him out of the rest of the game. His status for tonight is uncertain, but his injury does not appear to be a long-term problem.

With the 6-foot-8 Powe coming back, Benson getting better and 6-10 sophomore DeVon Hardin having another big game on Friday with a career-high 21 points, Cal may have the parts that gave the Bears such preseason optimism, especially in the frontcourt.

"We have a lot of potential," Cal point guard Ayine Ubaka said after scoring 16 points, "but that's kind of an overused word. I've heard that since freshman year."

The best news for Cal was the status of Powe, who sat out last season following knee surgery and has yet to play this season. He was diagnosed with a small stress fracture in right foot 10 days ago, at which time it was announced that his foot would be in a boot for at least two weeks before it was reassessed. Powe's foot has progressed more quickly than expected, and on Friday afternoon, doctors cleared him for action. To be on the safe side, Cal held Powe out of Friday's game and will keep him on the bench in tonight's championship game against

## 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

Northeastern as well. The plan calls for him to begin practice this weekend and play Wednesday.

"Leon Powe gives them another whole dimension," North Colorado coach Craig Rasmuson said.

Although Powe's absence was a non-factor against overmatched Northern Colorado, the Bears could use him against Northeastern, which beat Cal State Northridge 102-81 in Friday's early game. The Huskies are 4-0 for the first time since 1981-82, when Jim Calhoun was their coach, and they have two players worth watching — 6-9 shot-blocker Shawn James and 5-11 point guard Jose Juan Barea.

Cal went through a glorified practice session against Northern Colorado, which is 0-5 and in its third year of a four-year transition from Division II to Division I. The Bears made their first seven shots while Northern Colorado missed its first six, and less than five minutes into the game, Cal had a 19-0 lead. The rest of the game was essentially 35 minutes of garbage time.

Benson did not start Friday's game, but was expected to get extended playing time. However, he got only four minutes in before feeling a twinge in the heel area, which was the location of the stress fracture that kept him out of Cal's opening loss to Eastern Michigan.

### BRAUN ALL WET AFTER GETTING NO. 500

*By Jeff Faraudo, Oakland Tribune*

*November 22, 2005*

BERKELEY — No Leon Powe. No Richard Midgley. No Martin Smith.

No problem.

Cal welcomed back senior Rod Benson from the injured list, and got an improbable contribution off the bench from former walk-on Alex Pribble on the way to an 88-69 victory Monday night over Long Beach State before an announced crowd of 7,286 at Haas Pavilion.

The victory was the 500th of coach Ben Braun's 29-year career, and one he will remember for unexpected reasons — including having a huge bucket of ice water dumped on his head afterward by Benson and mates.

"It was actually coach (Louis) Reynaud's idea," Benson said, "but he knew the right person to tell, basically. There was no stopping me."

"I'll trade that for a win anytime," Braun said.

The 6-foot-10 Benson, who went through his first contact practice Sunday after nursing a stress fracture in his heel since mid-August, scored 14 points in 15 minutes off the bench. "My heel's fine, my body is kind of tired," Benson said.

Sophomore center DeVon Hardin scored 14 points and grabbed 10 rebounds — both career highs — as the Bears (1-1) dominated inside against Long Beach (0-2), which didn't start anyone taller than 6-6.

Team Attrition had three regulars on the bench again, with star forward Powe (foot) and backup point Smith (pelvis) joined in street clothes by starting guard Midgley, who injured his shoulder last Friday against Eastern Michigan.

"It's pretty ridiculous," Benson said of the injury epidemic, "but at this point you just have to roll with the punches."

When starting point Ayinde Ubaka was relegated to the bench with 5:56 left in the first half and the Bears leading just 30-29, it was Pribble who kept the rudder steady.

A 6-4, 215-pounder from Fairfax, Pribble is built more like a strong safety than a point guard, and he is normally the Bears' No.4 point. But against a scrambling Long Beach squad which pressed relentlessly, Pribble had three points and career highs of seven rebounds and five assists in 23 minutes, and was a key to Cal forging a 46-34 lead by intermission.

Braun said maybe it was fitting that a walk-on played a prominent role in his milestone victory.

"I'd say half of those wins were with those kind of players," Braun said. "We didn't have much option there. Alex is a tough, hard-nosed guy. Alex is one of those guys who grew up with Cal banners in his room, and this was a dream game for him."

Pribble said he was ready.

"I played point guard in practice, so I was ready for it," said Pribble, who played point guard on offense in high school, but was a post player on defense. "If we stay calm, that's how we beat a press. We were prepared for it."

Omar Wilkes led the Bears with 18 points and five assists, freshman forward Theo Robertson hit double figures for the second straight game with 14 points, and Ubaka had 12 points and four assists.

Braun said he expects Midgley to be ready Friday when Cal hosts its Golden Bear Classic. Powe may have his stress fracture checked with another MRI late this week, although it's unlikely he would play so soon.

Trailing 27-24 with barely 7 minutes left in the first half, the Bears finally asserted their advantage inside to take control.

Big men Hardin, Benson and Jordan Wilkes led a 22-4 run that pushed Cal into a 46-31 lead that stood up for a 46-34 margin at the half.

The three big men scored 12 consecutive Cal points, often passing to one another from a high-low set in the post to create layups or dunks over the smaller 49ers.

### TIRELESS POWE ENERGIZED CAL PAST OREGON IN 2 OTS

*By Jake Curtis, San Francisco Chronicle*

*March 12, 2006*

After scoring a Pac-10-tournament-record 41 points in 47 grueling minutes in Cal's 91-87 double-overtime win over Oregon on Friday, then getting bounced around by a variety of UCLA defenders less than 16 hours later Saturday, Leon Powe should have been exhausted.

He wasn't about to climb into bed, though.

"I'm not going to tell you what I'm going to do, because there's too many pens (media members) around," a smiling Powe said after Saturday's loss, "but I'm not going to sleep."

He'll be up and around again today to see where Cal is headed for the NCAA Tournament. The Bears are nearly a shoo-in to land an at-large

# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

berth and are expected to get around a No. 8 or 9 seed. Possible first-round opponents would be Alabama, Arkansas, Southern Illinois, Bradley, Wichita State, Wisconsin and Nevada.

Any of them would have to pay special attention to the tireless Powe, who didn't wear down in Friday's semifinal win, which ended about 11:30 p.m.

He was the chief reason Cal was able to overcome a 32-16 deficit against Oregon and get into a Pac-10 championship game for the first time.

That win avoided a potentially sticky situation as far as Cal's NCAA Tournament berth is concerned. Had Oregon won Friday and then won again Saturday against UCLA in the championship game, the Ducks would have landed an automatic bid. With Washington, UCLA and Arizona apparently having NCAA berths in hand, the selection committee would have had to take five Pac-10 teams for Cal to get into the field. With the Pac-10's reputation as a weak conference this season, that might have been a hard sell, even though the committee says it evaluates each team individually, without considering how many of its conference brethren received bids.

By winning, the Bears eliminated that concern, and they did it by overcoming a 16-point deficit, their largest comeback win of the season. Cal also overcame a seven-point deficit with 2:45 left in regulation, with Ayinde Ubaka tying it by sinking a 7-foot floater with 2.2 seconds remaining.

Powe scored the tying basket to force a second extra period and scored the first four points of the second overtime to help Cal take a seven-point lead with 31 seconds left. The Ducks still had a chance to win when Ubaka missed the second of two free-throw tries with nine seconds left. That left Cal in front 89-87. However, Chamberlain Oguchi's long 3-point try was short.

"That was a crazy game," Powe said, "but with everything that happened, we made the plays at the end to get over the hump. That's something we wouldn't have done last year or the year before."

Powe missed the final 1:15 after injuring his shoulder, but he was the reason Cal prevailed.

"He single-handedly carried us for damn near the whole game," Ubaka said.

Complementing Powe's effort was a personal-high 18 points by freshman Theo Robertson, who hit several big shots.

## UBAKA HAS HIS GROOVE BACK, AS DOES CAL

*By Monte Poole, Oakland Tribune*

*March 13, 2006*

BERKELEY — One play during the Cal-UCLA game 11 days ago provided vivid illustration of Ayinde Ubaka's hoops evolution, from prep phenom to unexceptional underclassman to indispensable leader.

With the Golden Bears trailing by three, about 30 seconds remaining and Ubaka pushing the ball upcourt, Cal coach Ben Braun came off his seat signaling for a timeout.

Ubaka never slowed, even as he drew nearer to his coach. Spotting forward Theo Robertson open on the left wing, the junior guard zipped a pass to Robertson, who caught it, set his feet and drilled a game-tying 3-point shot.

Though Cal lost in overtime, one of the evening's lingering snapshots was of Ubaka's pride and self-assurance.

In his third year on campus, Ubaka has unleashed the player he was advertised to be upon his arrival. The player he was at Oakland High.

It is no coincidence that as Ubaka rediscovered his inner baller, the Bears have rediscovered the NCAA tournament. They spent Sunday afternoon afloat, leaving others to arrange a trip to Dallas for a first-round game against North Carolina State.

Of the many factors leading to Cal's invitation — Leon Powe's presence in the paint, DeVon Hardin's intimidating defense, etc. — none was more essential than Ubaka's ability to set tempo, provide leadership and maintain composure.

"I hate to single out anybody ... but he has been a significant, significant, significant part of what we've done," Braun conceded.

"If it wasn't for (Ubaka)," Powe said of his close friend, "I don't think we'd be here."

Ubaka, who spent his adolescence dribbling and shooting, is back to trusting his instincts and staying true to them. At 21, he has gone back to his basketball roots.

"I told him he took (his game) back to Oakland," Powe said, grinning. "We're in Berkeley, but we have to take it back to where we come from. We gotta play our game. That's the way we play."

Ubaka's approach this season has been as it was on the aforementioned play against the Bruins, when he had such faith in his judgment and vision that his coach was rendered practically invisible.

"I saw (Braun)," Ubaka admitted. "But Theo was wide open. That's probably the best shot we would have gotten. I mean, he was wide open. That's a good shot for him. I could see a problem if I was passing to somebody who couldn't shoot it."

Because Ubaka's decision turned out wonderfully, there were no complaints. That there is no second guessing by Ayinde is another indication that his self-esteem has regained full health.

For Ubaka spent so much of his freshman and sophomore seasons with his eyes drifting toward the bench, toward the coaching staff. The fluid moves he displayed as prep had become arrhythmic and mechanical, his flow undermined by a preoccupation with not getting it wrong.

He would do as he thought the coach wanted. Then he would do as he thought he should. Then he would do as he imagined was best for the team. He was trying to do too much. Or he would disappear.

"It was mostly mental," he recalled. "I didn't get any slower, my shot didn't get any worse. It was mental. And I needed to make the transition."

Ubaka had a lot on his mind. He saw teammates transfer out. He saw one teammate drop out due to academics. He questioned his decision to come to Cal. As a player, he was someone his friends barely recognized.

"My first couple years here, they got on me a lot," he said. "It was like, 'What the hell are you doing? You're acting like you don't know how to play. You're not playing with emotion.' And it was true.

"Now it's different. It's like, 'Finally, you're playing your game.'"



# 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS (cont.)

Ubaka's game is sneaky good. His most evident asset is his ability to lead. He runs the team. In terms of sheer talent, he is solid but unspectacular. Much more Gary Payton than Jason Kidd.

But while Payton brings a visceral cockiness to the court, Ubaka is more reserved and deferential. He felt the need to earn his stripes.

Consider them earned. Ubaka, averaging a team-high 37.3 minutes per game, was voted to the All-Pac-10 team and to the Pac-10 Tournament team.

Still, it took two years and one off-season of conscious-raising. He spent considerable time last summer with local hoop sage Lou Ritchie, a coach to some and a mentor to many, as well as Bernard Ward, recognized as the guiding figure in Powe's life.

All Ritchie and Ward did was help restore Ubaka's confidence. They reminded the kid that he can play.

And play he has.

## A LONG-AWAITED RETURN

*By Jonathan Okanes, Contra Costa Times*

*March 13, 2006*

BERKELEY - CBS Sports anchor Greg Gumbel made the announcement and every head in the club room at Haas Pavilion turned toward Cal guard Richard Midgley.

When Gumbel revealed that the Bears would be playing North Carolina State in the first round of the NCAA Tournament, it served as a reminder of Cal's last trip to college basketball's biggest stage in 2003. Midgley, then a freshman, drained a 3-pointer with 3.9 seconds left in overtime to lift the Bears to a 76-74 win over the Wolfpack in the first round.

Midgley, now a senior, didn't think it would take this long to get back to the NCAA Tournament. The Bears (20-10) followed with back-to-back losing seasons but rebounded this year to earn the No. 7 seed in the Atlanta Regional.

"Back then, I thought we'd be there every year," Midgley said. "I've come to find out it's a lot harder to get into the tournament than you think it is coming in as a freshman. You just think you're going to make it every year."

Cal plays 10th-seeded N.C. State in Dallas on Friday at 4:20 p.m. The winner meets the winner of the game between second-seeded Texas and No. 15 Pennsylvania on Sunday.

The Bears' 2003 NCAA appearance was their third straight, and the following season coach Ben Braun welcomed in his best recruiting class ever. There were lofty expectations at Cal.

But the Bears were simply too young to be competitive in 2003-04, and injuries and chemistry problems afflicted them last year.

"People tend to take the NCAA Tournament for granted," Cal senior Rod Benson said. "You come to realize you have to really earn it. When you're not going, it's an odd feeling, especially when you come to a school that has had such great success before."

The Bears finished in third place in the Pac-10 this season and notched quality wins over fellow NCAA Tournament teams UCLA, Washington, Arizona and San Diego State. But they also suffered bad home losses to Arizona State and Oregon State, giving them an uninspiring RPI of 57.

Cal may have already secured an at-large berth at the end of the regular season, but it really solidified its case by advancing to the championship game of the Pac-10 tournament.

"They had a good year in the regular season and presented a solid resume," NCAA selection committee chairman Craig Littlepage said. "We looked favorably on the work they did both during the regular season and the postseason tournament."

The tournament berth is especially meaningful for Leon Powe and Ayinde Ubaka, the only players left from that heralded 2003 freshman class. Both were consensus top-50 recruits and the Bears had been considered a disappointment since they joined the program.

"Everybody expected us to go to the tournament every year," Powe said. "Little did I know it wasn't going to be that easy."

N.C. State (21-9) has spent much of the season in the Associated Press top 25. It was ranked No. 25 last week, but figures to fall out of the rankings after losing to Wake Forest in the first round of the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament. The Wolfpack have lost four in a row, including the last two to the Deamon Deacons, who finished in last place in the ACC.

"We have a great body of work," N.C. State coach Herb Sendek said. "That's why we're in the field. Even if you have a strong finish, it doesn't guarantee you're going to win a first-round game. We could play a good game on Friday and not come away victorious because Cal is such a good team. We're going to have to play really, really well to advance."

The Wolfpack is led in scoring by guard Cameron Bennerman's average of 13.9 points per game, but the best all-around player is center Cedric Simmons, who averages 11.8 points and 6.4 rebounds per game. N.C. State no longer features former All-American Julius Hodge, a first-round draft pick of the Denver Nuggets last summer.

