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California™

2009

GOLDEN BEARS

POSTSEASON MEDIA CLIPPINGS



ALEXIS
GRAY-LAWSON

ASHLEY
WALKER

DEVANEI
HAMPTON

Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal Cal

2008-09 MEDIA CLIPPINGS**Sweet 16 party for the Bears****Contra Costa Times, March 24, 2009****By Jennifer Starks**

To hear her tell it, Cal guard Alexis Gray-Lawson's motivations in the NCAA Tournament have less to do with turning a page for the women's basketball program and more to do with extending the season for seniors Devanei Hampton, Ashley Walker and Shantrell Sneed.

"For me," she said, "it's about playing with them another day."

Still, the conditions went hand-in-hand Monday night, as the fourth-seeded Bears were inspired from the outset and disposed of No. 5-seed Virginia 99-73 in the second round of the NCAA Tournament at the Galen Center.

Cal advanced to the Sweet 16 for the first time and, in doing so, ensured the heralded senior class stayed together for at least one more game.

The win sets up a potential run-in with undefeated Connecticut, the No. 1 seed in the Trenton (N.J.) Region, on Sunday at the Sovereign Bank Arena. Geno Auriemma's Huskies play No. 8 Florida in the second round today.

"I knew this was in my team," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "It was there. They understand it has to come from all of them, and it really showed."

No doubt, Monday's breakthrough is the biggest win in Boyle's four-season run in Berkeley. She's led the Bears, once an afterthought on the West Coast basketball scene, to the NCAA Tournament every season, but the Sweet 16 had been uncharted territory until Monday.

That the accomplishment came against a Virginia team that had notched wins over Tennessee and Maryland during the regular season only makes Monday's one-sided affair more telling.

It took Cal just 12 minutes to mount a double-digit lead and deny Cavaliers coach Debbie Ryan her 700th career victory. Four players scored in double figures, including Walker, who led the way with 32 points and 10 rebounds. Gray-Lawson and Hampton added 22 points apiece, while Lauren Grief had 10 points and nine assists.

"We're just a different team right now," Gray-Lawson said. "We don't want to go home. We don't want to be without each other."

With that in mind, the Bears began the game with stunning efficiency, setting the tone for what was to come. Cal shot a blistering 54.8 percent from the floor and had just one turnover in 20 first-half minutes. The squad finished with just six turnovers against 17 assists.

The Bears led 53-35 at the break, bringing to mind inevitable flashes of their second-half collapse to Oklahoma in December, when they led by 26 points only to be humbled and embarrassed in an 86-75 defeat. This time, however, there was no letdown, no unexplainable combustion, only elation and jubilation.

"We said, 'This will not happen,'" said Walker, who was 14-for-20 from the floor. "We're too confident in this gym to let it happen. We didn't want to stop playing. "... We didn't want this to be our last game. We don't have anything to lose. We just played with our hearts and souls."

When it was over, Walker ran into the locker room screaming and giving high-fives to each of her teammates. The triumphant vibe remained 30 minutes later.

"We made history tonight," Grief said. "It took us awhile, and we had a dip, but now we're back. We have a lot of goals, and we have the chance to prove them now."

Walker scores 32 as Bears roll on**San Francisco Chronicle, March 24, 2009****By Tom FitzGerald**

Cal is going where no Bear has gone before in the women's NCAA Tournament - to the third round. The surprise is how this team did it, a team that hasn't been shooting well lately nearly reaching the 100-point mark.

"Defense is our forte," forward Ashley Walker said, and the Bears blanketed Virginia with a rare 3-2 zone defense. But they also hit 52 percent of their shots in a 99-73 steamrolling of the Cavaliers on Monday night at USC's Galen Center.

There will be plenty of time to contemplate their next game, Sunday night in Trenton, N.J., and it figures to be against unbeaten and top-ranked Connecticut, a heavy favorite today against Florida. For the moment, there's so much to celebrate.

Walker showed off the full arsenal of her talents, scoring 32 points (tying a season high) and grabbing 10 rebounds before leaving in the final minutes to an ovation from the sparse but enthusiastic crowd of 686. Only 1,292 had attended Friday's first-round double-header.

"We just love to play the game," Walker said. "If they show up, (fine). If they don't, they don't."

Fortunately for Cal, a national TV audience got to see the Bears at their best.

"I felt like they came out swinging, and we were taking punches and not swinging back," said Cavaliers coach Debbie Ryan, who was denied the 700th win of her 32-year career at Virginia.

The Bears haven't scored 100 points in a game since 2005, but they nearly did it against the Cavaliers (24-10), who love a fast pace. Virginia had 26 points from guard Monica Wright, but Lyndra Littles, who averages 20.2, had just 13.

It wasn't nearly good enough on a night when the Bears (27-6) were shooting lights out in Los Angeles. Alexis Gray-Lawson and Devanei Hampton each poured in 22 points, and Hampton grabbed 11 boards. Lauren Greif had 10 points and nine assists.

Coach Joanne Boyle liked the way the zone bottled up the Cavs, although she briefly switched to a man-to-man when they made their run in the second half.

"The key points were to keep them off the boards, keep them off the free-throw line, limit their transition, (show) poise and composure," she said. "Whatever we got out of that, if it's 99 points, I'll take it."

"We are just a different team right now," Gray-Lawson said. "I don't really know how to explain that. We just don't want to go home."

The Bears played a practically perfect first half, committing one turnover and hitting 55 percent of their shots. Walker had 20 and Hampton 14 by halftime.

With Wright taking charge, Virginia closed the gap to 68-57 with 12:45 left. And some Bears fans might have been flashing back to the Oklahoma game in December. That's when the Bears had a 52-26 halftime lead but lost 86-75.

In Monday's jubilant locker room, Walker said she and her teammates decided, "This will not happen."

Gray-Lawson held her ground for a charging call against Wright, and after Walker hit a jumper, Gray-Lawson sank a couple of foul shots and converted a layup on the break. Another jumper by Walker made it 76-57 with 7:10 left, and the Bears were on their way to Trenton.2



Pac-10 Tournament: Bears' buzzer beater that wasn't

San Francisco Chronicle - March 15, 2009

By Michelle Smith

It seems like every time Cal and USC meet in a women's basketball game, the game is decided by the narrowest of margins. This time it was a referee's call.

With 0.3 of a second left in Saturday's Pac-10 tournament semifinal and Cal down by two, Lauren Greif lobbed a pass to Ashley Walker under the basket. Walker jumped, caught the ball and shot it before landing, the ball being released before the clock expired. But Walker's apparent score was waved off after an 11-minute discussion by the officiating crew, which determined that only a tipped shot could be allowed with that little time remaining.

Cal walked to the locker room in disbelief and disgust, tagged with a 69-67 loss.

The controversial shot attempt came at the end of a Cal rally from 13 points down with 6:22 left. Cal got back into in the game thanks to Walker, who finished with 29 points, and USC's inability to close out the game at the free-throw line. The Women of Troy were 2-for-6 from the line in the final 36 seconds.

A pair of misses by USC freshman Briana Gilbreath with six seconds to go set up the final sequence. After the misses, Alexis Gray-Lawson lost the dribble after running into USC's Heather Oliver at midcourt and after a scramble a jump ball was called, the possession going to the Bears with 0.3 to go.

That's when Greif and Walker connected for the disallowed basket.

Cal coach Joanne Boyle said the officiating crew of Bob Scofield, Brenda Pantoya and Chuck Gonzalez did not explain its decision after the game. "They just ended the game and walked off the court," Boyle said.

Scofield, speaking to a pool reporter, said the crew determined that Walker "gathered" the shot. The delay had to do with whether the clock started on time. Scofield said they looked at the play three times and from three angles. "At the three-tenths of a second you can only tip at the basket," Scofield said. "We determined that it was gathered and that the shot was no good."

USC coach Mark Trakh said his team was victimized by the same rule last year.

"We had the same call against Oregon State. We had 0.3 seconds on the clock and the officials told us whatever you do, it's got to be a tip, not a catch," Trakh said.

"It's like a dagger in the heart," Walker said. "The same thing happened to us in the (NCAA) Tournament last year, the game was decided by a call."

Cal (25-6) has lost three of five and hopes to salvage a top-four seed in the NCAAs.

The Women of Troy (16-14), the No. 6 seed in the tournament, are the lowest seed to reach the title game.

In Saturday's stretch, Walker brought Cal back to life with 11 of the Bears' 18 points in the final 4:51. She and Devanei Hampton combined for 47 points and 28 rebounds. The Bears struggled from the perimeter, making 1 of 17 from beyond the three-point arc.

USC got 25 points from senior guard Camille LeNoir, who got sick at halftime, but came out and scored 21 points in the final 20 minutes.

Cal Women Advance to Pac-10 Semifinal

San Francisco Chronicle - March 13, 2009

By Michelle Smith

For the first time in the eight-year history of the Pac-10 women's tournament, the lower-seeded team had won the first three games. But No. 12 Cal emphatically bucked that trend Friday afternoon at the Galen Center.

The Bears got off to a hot start and then shifted into cruise control, finishing with a 61-41 win over Washington in its opening game.

Cal (25-5) has a surprise semifinal opponent in sixth-seeded USC, which pulled the upset of the day by ousting third-seeded Arizona State 70-65.

USC has lost twice to Cal already by a combined margin of four points. The last eight games between the two teams have been decided by nine points or less, two of them going into overtime.

"This is like our buddy team, we have a lot of friends on USC and that's why it's like a battle royale," said Cal forward Ashley Walker, who had 14 points and 10 rebounds in 16 minutes Friday.

Cal hit eight of its first 11 shots. Walker and Devanei Hampton scored 20 of the Bears' first 26 points with the Huskies defending them one-on-one.

It was a welcome change of fortune for a team that's struggled to score of late. It allowed Cal to empty its bench for a rare batch of extended playing time. Ten of the Bears' 11 players scored.

"Shots were falling, we were moving the ball better and we got some easy looks," said Cal coach Joanne Boyle, her voice barely there because of a virus. "We were able to rest our starters for what we hope will be three games in three days."

The Bears dominated the Huskies, who upset Oregon in the play-in round Thursday night, outrebounding them 37-20 and shutting out leading scorer Sami Whitcomb, who was 0-for-4 from the floor.

Washington coach Tia Jackson, whose team was the first No. 10 seed in the history of the tournament to win, made a vow.

"We will not be a No. 10 seed again," said Jackson, whose team finished 8-22.

The 18th-ranked Sun Devils (23-8), playing their first game since losing leading scorer Dymond Simon to a season-ending knee injury, paid a steep price for an uncharacteristically generous day on defense.

USC, playing on its home floor and coming off two losses to ASU during the regular season, was 8-of-10 from beyond the three-point line and shot 52.9 percent from the floor.

Senior point guard Camille LeNoir finished with 18 points, eight assists and no turnovers and scored on a layup with 27 seconds left to put the game way for the Women of Troy (16-14).

Cal seniors leave a winning legacy

San Francisco Chronicle - March 8, 2009

By Gwen Knapp

Devanei Hampton and Ashley Walker said they didn't do anything special to savor their last time as players at Haas Pavilion. They went through the senior day rituals with their families before Saturday's game against Arizona, but didn't get too sentimental. After all, they have two tournaments to play before they're really done. They're more concerned about the future than history.

Except at Cal, they will always be cornerstones, and Saturday was a critical date in the school's basketball history. It marked the end of a beginning.

"Whatever we do in 10 years, this is the team that started it," said their coach, Joanne Boyle, who arrived at the same time as the two seniors and their red-shirt junior compatriot, Alexis Gray-Lawson. "When we win a national championship, this is the team that started it."

Or, as Arizona coach Niya Butts said more succinctly after her team's 51-48 loss: "Thank God they're gone."

When Hampton and Walker came to Berkeley four years ago, their team had no identity. In the Bay Area, women's basketball meant Stanford and Tara VanDerveer. Today, the Bears are ranked in the Top 10, winners of 24 games and favored to get even better in the years to come.

A mother-lode recruiting class arrives next season to play in the house that Hampton and Walker redecorated. Along with Boyle and Gray-Lawson, they took a program that had endured 12 straight losing seasons to an 18-12 record and the NCAA Tournament.

Their first home game, against Eastern Washington, drew 658 fans. Saturday's pulled in 2,693.

The two seniors could barely remember their early days with the team. So much has changed. But as they started reminiscing, they had some laughs.

They said they first got attention and respect freshman year with a win over a superb UCLA team.

"They were like 'Cal, who?'" Hampton said.

The following year, they beat Stanford at Maples Pavilion, and a long-awaited rivalry started to hatch.

"I think a lot of people were rooting for someone to compete with another great team in the Bay Area, which shall remain unnamed," Walker said.

The first time their team played Stanford at Haas, a record crowd of 4859 showed up. The last two years, 10,000-plus have been in the stands each game.

This year's team appears to be fading in the final weeks, losing two in a row after climbing as high as No. 3 in the national rankings. The close win over eighth-place Arizona, in which the Bears looked weary for most of the game, revealed further discouraging signs for the tournament portion of the year.

Boyle made the point that playing gritty basketball in early March can be a good test for the postseason, and the Bears can hope that Gray-Lawson will grow more dynamic as she distances herself from a knee injury sustained at UCLA a week ago.

The team, despite all its progress, has never made a big stand in the NCAAs, winning only one game in three trips. It would be sad to see the Hampton-Walker era end without a big push in the tournament. But the Bears may have to wait for the 24-carat recruits to reach a new pinnacle, and then, as Boyle said, Walker and Hampton will still be around.

Agostini: Walker has been Cal's warrior

Modesto Bee - March 8, 2009

By Ron Agostini

When it was over, Cal's Ashley Walker waved goodbye and blew a kiss to the standing and cheering crowd at Haas Pavilion.

She enrolled four years ago with a blank sheet for expectations and predictable anxiety for what was ahead: Will I play much? Will I start? Am I up to this? Will I lose my lunch the first time I walk onto this court?

On a sunny Saturday in March 2009 as she made her 125th consecutive start and completed her final home game, Walker -- the pride of Grace Davis High -- answered all the questions.

She's good, all right. Real good. Unforgettable good.

Walker will leave this campus with more than a diploma. She'll exit as Cal's career record holder in rebounds and second-leading career scorer. This program always will remember her -- headband, ponytail, knee pads and high socks, a 6-foot-1-inch package of want-to and get-it-done.

"I couldn't ask for a better family and a better group of sisters," Walker said.

Moments before, the ninth-ranked Golden Bears (24-5, 15-3) pounded out a 51-48 win over Arizona, a victory more efficient than pretty, more workmanlike than artful.

In other words, a Walker kind of win.

Her 11 points, six rebounds, two assists and three steals -- a modest line for her -- belied her contribution in the game's crunch. Simply, she didn't allow her team to lose. There she was, netting a baseline 3-pointer for a 44-32 lead with 6:13 left. Then, with the margin melted to 50-48 with 22.2 seconds to go, she clawed for a held ball and another important possession.

And, with Arizona needing a triple to tie, Walker forced a desperate and not close attempt by Arizona's 5-8 Reiko Thomas. If Walker were forced to sell popcorn if it meant one more win in front of family and friends, she would have asked, "Which concession stand?"

Special group

She and fellow seniors Devanei Hampton and reserve Shantrell Sneed enjoyed the spotlight. But more to the point, it was Walker, Hampton and junior guard Alexis Gray-Lawson who pushed this program out from under the dark and intimidating shadow belonging to Stanford.

When Walker signed up for this task, she and her teammates barely registered an aftershock against the Cardinals' Richter-scale accomplishments. But while she was here, the Bears twice beat Stanford and even packed Haas for two memorable meetings (one of them a win in January).

"The people in the Bay Area were waiting for a team to just battle with the other Bay Area school, which will remain unnamed," Walker



said, "but you know who I'm talking about."

Yes, Ashley, we get it.

"I don't think they (the seniors) have any idea what they've done for this community," fourth-year Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "In 10 years if we win a national championship, this is the team that started it. It was four years of putting their heart and soul into it. They made it what it is. This group did that."

The mileage showed Saturday. Gray-Lawson struggled late in the game, laboring due to a recent knee injury. Hampton, the twin anchor along with Walker since Game 1, at times almost dragged that brace on her right knee up and down the court. None of her 12 points and 10 rebounds came easily. Walker was rendered almost a nonfactor during the first half as the Arizona zone collapsed around her like a closing fist.

Those long minutes, four seasons' worth, may be catching up to them. Cal, which was ranked as high as No. 3, fell out of the Pacific-10 Conference title chase with losses the previous two games. How it fares in the Pac-10 and NCAA tournaments will depend on what's left in their energy tank.

Regardless, their legacy is cemented.

"Thank God they (Hampton and Walker) are gone," Arizona coach Niya Butts said. "Obviously, they've done a great job in this program. They deserve everything written about them. I'm just happy they're gone."

An early start

Walker arrived in the basketball world in fourth grade, a kid seemingly more interested in cheerleading than hoops -- until she scored 40 points in a youth game.

"I thought, 'She is going to be a player,' " father T.J. Walker Sr. recalled.

The father watched his daughter's last home game from 15 rows up during the first half, then from courtside for the second half. Like Ashley, he focused when the game was decided.

"It's been a long four years. We're just ready to move on," he said. "She's a warrior. She's a Walker. We don't give up. We play hard all the time."

No argument there, while a green "Spartan Pride" sign hung from a spot just above Cal's Straw Hat Band. Yes, the Grace Davis team attended the farewell game of its most famous graduate.

"When we beat UCLA when we were sophomores, it was like, 'CAL WHO?' " she said.

Walker has answered that question, too.

Losing finale not option

San Francisco Chronicle - March 8, 2009

By Tom FitzGerald

The tears were flowing as the seniors on the Cal women's basketball team were introduced. Later, with 30 seconds left in a tense game with Arizona, another emotion took over - steely determination.

A six-point spurt by the Wildcats made it a two-point game with less than a minute left, but Ashley Walker grabbed a critical offensive rebound with 24 seconds left, helping ninth-ranked Cal survive a 51-48 pressure cooker Saturday at Haas Pavilion.

Losing the final regular-season game at home? "We were not going to let that happen," senior Devanei Hampton said.

For just the third time in school history, the Bears won 24 games, against five losses, and they finished tied with Arizona State for second in the Pac-10 with their second straight 15-3 record. They open conference tournament play in Los Angeles on Friday at 1:15 p.m. against the winner of Thursday's Oregon-Washington game. Cal, which split its series with Arizona State, earned the No. 2 seed because, in the next tiebreaker, it split with Stanford, which swept the Sun Devils.

The Bears, though, are not driving into the postseason with a finely tuned engine. They lost their previous two games by plenty and nearly squandered a 10-point lead in the final 10 minutes against the Wildcats (11-18, 4-14).

"I know it was a grind-out game, but that's going to be what tournament play is going to be like for us anyway," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "We're used to that."

In the end, it was too much Hampton (12 points, 10 rebounds) and too much Walker (11 points). "The only thought is, 'Thank God they're gone,' " Arizona coach Niya Butts said.

Cal's Natasha Vital scored 10 of her 12 points in the second half, but backcourt partner Alexis Gray-Lawson struggled for the third straight game since injuring her knee against UCLA. Although Boyle said her knee is "completely fine," the team's second leading scorer (12.3) mustered just nine points Saturday, mostly at the foul line.

She wasn't Cal's only cold shooter, especially in a 25-percent first half after which Cal trailed 23-20.

The Bears had trouble stopping Ify Ibekwe, a 6-1 senior who finished with 21 points and 13 rebounds.

"I think there were a lot of nerves and emotion with senior night," Boyle said, "but we found a way to win and that's what's most important."

Bears spiral out of control

Contra Costa Times - March 5, 2009

By Jonathan Okanes

BERKELEY — Alexis Gray-Lawson was able to play Thursday night against Arizona State, but Cal now has much bigger concerns.

The No. 9 Bears were thoroughly outplayed by the No. 18 Sun Devils on their home floor in front of 1,755 at Haas Pavilion, and the 63-41 setback gives them back-to-back losses for the first time this season.

With one regular-season game remaining Saturday against Arizona, the Bears aren't exactly heading into the postseason at the top of their game.

"Two losses down the stretch is not what you want to do heading into tournament play," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "Obviously, it's a very disappointing loss. There was a lot on the line this weekend, and their team came in and took care of business, and we obviously did not."

The loss eliminated the Bears' fleeting chances at their first-ever Pac-10 title, while the Sun Devils, who have won 15 in a row since their loss to Cal on Jan. 4, can still earn a share of the conference title with a win at first-place Stanford on Saturday.

The best Cal (23-5, 14-3) can now finish in the Pac-10 is in a tie with the Sun Devils for second place. That would give the Bears the No. 2 seed in next week's conference tournament in Los Angeles. The Bears will finish no worse than third.

Boyle kept her team in the locker room for about 45 minutes after the game.

"We had a team meeting downstairs, and we talked about what kind of season we want to have," Boyle said. "As a coach, you sit there and question everything. I wish I had a magical answer. We have about a day to figure it out."

The loss was Cal's worst at home and in the Pac-10 since a 69-44 setback against Stanford during the 2006-07 season. The Bears shot just 31.8 percent from the floor and lost the battle of the boards, 37-32. The Sun Devils (23-6, 15-3) had 15 offensive rebounds, which led to 14 second-chance points. Cal also committed 13 turnovers, resulting in 11 ASU points.

Devanei Hampton led Cal with 14 points but Ashley Walker, the Pac-10's leading scorer, was held to just 8 points on 3-for-10 floor shooting.

"I think they smelled blood," Walker said. "Before, nobody wanted to play us. Right now, everyone wants to play us. I think we need to buckle down and do what we know we can do."

Gray-Lawson, who sprained her left knee during Sunday's loss at UCLA, started and played 33 minutes. She played all 20 minutes of the first half and finished the game with seven points.

Tukiainen leads second-half run as UCLA knocks off No. 4 California

Associated Press- March 1, 2009

LOS ANGELES -- Erica Tukiainen had the biggest game of her career, and UCLA was happy it came against No. 4 California.

Tukiainen scored 18 of her career-high 25 points in the second half, and UCLA upset the Golden Bears 71-56 on Sunday. The win was UCLA's biggest against a ranked opponent since Jan. 7, 2008, when the team beat Stanford (No. 2 ESPN/USA Today, No. 3 AP).

"Coach told us we needed an extra spark," Tukiainen said. "I was in the zone and we got it done."

The Bruins (17-10, 8-8 Pac-10) sure did, knocking Cal (23-4, 14-2) from the top spot in the conference standings. The Golden Bears were sharing the No. 1 position with Stanford, which defeated Southern California 85-74 on Sunday, before the loss.

The Bruins hit two key 3-pointers, one by Christina Nzekwe at 5:55 and another by Tukiainen at 5:20, to give the Bruins the lead for good at 54-49.

"She knocked down big shots for us," UCLA coach Nikki Caldwell said. "She did a fantastic job in anchoring us. She battled in there when she was undersized and offensively, she had one of her most productive nights."

Tukiainen, who finished 11-of-16 from the field, also had three 3s for UCLA, which beat California for the first time since December 2006. Cal managed to score just one basket in the final 7:39 and was 1-for-9 down the stretch.

The Golden Bears' final six points came from the free-throw line.

"We were not focused. We were sloppy and we turned it over," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "We got away with one on Friday [against USC], but it caught up with us today."

Darxia Morris had 18 for UCLA, which is 1-4 against ranked opponents this season.

Ashley Walker led Cal with 17 points and 11 rebounds and scored her 2,000th career point when she made a layup with 18:17 remaining in the second half. Walker became the second player in Cal history and the 11th in Pac-10 history to do so.

Devanei Hampton, who finished with 11, reached her own milestone when she scored on a jumper at 7:40 to post her 1,500th career point. Both Hampton and Walker declined to speak with the media following the loss.

"It's a great accomplishment," Boyle said. "It should be a joyous occasion for these two kids but losing makes it difficult."

Lauren Greif had 13 for Cal, which started out the second half on a 9-2 run to take a 36-32 lead, its first since 5:12 of the first half. Hampton had two layups and a free throw and Walker added four in a 2:20 span.

Cal, which had won the last four matchups, couldn't get shots to fall down the stretch, though, and missed opportunities when it mattered most.

Casey Morris turned the ball over with 18 seconds left and both she and Greif missed 3-pointers with less than a minute remaining that would have brought Cal within six.

The Bruins started out short-handed as starters Tierra Henderson and Monique Alexander were suspended before the game for violating team rules and both sat out against Cal.

The Bruins didn't miss them, though.

Morris, a sophomore guard and six-game starter this season, stepped in to give UCLA a boost.

Morris went 6-for-10 from the field for 12 points and helped the Bruins' defense cause fits for the Golden Bears' post players even while two of their better defensive players were not dressed.

"Our offense rolled off of our defense," said guard Doreena Campbell, who finished with seven points. "We put more ball pressure on their guards and tried to make it more difficult for them to get the ball into the post."

It worked.

Cal had trouble getting a pass into Walker and Hampton and threw the ball away when trying to force it in.

Hampton was 0-for-1 in the first and Walker had eight points, mostly on putbacks.

The Bruins were down for most of the first until Morris scored six straight to give UCLA a 24-21 lead.

Cal, 16-1 when leading at halftime, took a 30-27 halftime lead behind Morris and seven points from Tukiainen.

It didn't help when Cal lost sophomore Alexis Gray-Lawson, who went down with a sprained left knee with over two minutes left in the first half. Gray-Lawson, who finished with six points, didn't return in the second and was on crutches after the game.

With Gray-Lawson out, Cal lost a long-distance threat -- the guard was 10-for-15 in 3-point shooting over the past four games and had two Sunday before going down with the injury.

The sophomore, who had 22 points in a win over USC on Friday night, will be reevaluated when the team heads home.

Tukiainen surpassed her previous best, a 21-point performance against Arizona on Feb. 12, when she scored on a layup with 1:25 remaining.



Gray-Lawson scores 22 to help Cal hold off USC

Associated Press- Feb. 27, 2009

LOS ANGELES -- Camille Lenoir was setting up to take a possible winning shot with less than 15 seconds on the clock. When she got the ball, Nadia Parker was wide open and Lenoir shoveled the ball to her teammate.

The pass, a smidgen off, left Southern Cal without an attempt and another close loss.

Alexis Gray-Lawson scored 22 points and hit two key free throws with 15 seconds left, helping No. 4 California defeat USC 66-64 on Friday night and keep the Golden Bears atop the Pac-10 standings.

California shares the top spot with Stanford (No. 2 ESPN/USA Today, No. 3 AP), which held off UCLA 69-58 on Friday.

"It was there," said LeNoir, who finished with 12 points. "I spun and went sideline and just saw Nadia wide open and just threw the pass. I thought it was perfect."

Not perfect enough.

USC has lost eight straight against California, including a 73-71 letdown earlier this season. Five of Southern Cal's games have been decided by three points or less this season, not to mention an overtime loss to Duke (No. 11 ESPN/USA Today, No. 10 AP) by eight.

The last three matchups between Cal and USC have been decided by five points or less.

"We're close. We're darn close," USC coach Mark Trakh said. "Cal's good at winning games at the end like that."

USC hit 3-pointers to get close, one at 2:04 by Lenoir to make it 61-59 and another with 1:10 remaining by Heather Oliver to make it 63-62.

But Gray-Lawson was too much.

The junior guard carried California (23-3, 14-1) on an off night for leading scorer Ashley Walker, who came in averaging 20.3 points but was 1-for-10 from the field and didn't score her first field goal until there was 4:05 left in the game.

The senior finished with 12 points for Cal, which has won 15 of its last 16.

"My coach told me it was an ugly double-double," said Walker, who also had 13 rebounds. "I had good looks but they kept rimming out. I was not getting any love."

USC kept changing the defense on Walker and even double- and triple-teamed her. That worked, but keeping her off the line didn't. Ten of Walker's points came from the charity stripe for Cal, which has only lost one game on the road this season.

"We're road warriors," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "We're older and more experienced, and we know how to grind it out. Our players know what is at stake."

What's at stake is a Pac-10 title and an NCAA Tournament bid. And the Bears look like they're on their way.

"Our team is gelling and playing as well as we have all season," Gray-Lawson said. "It's definitely not out of the question."

The Golden Bears took an 11-point lead, their biggest of the game, when Natasha Vital hit a 3-pointer with 13:33 left. USC (14-12, 8-7) rallied back and Oliver's 3-pointer with 1:10 remaining made it 63-62 before Gray-Lawson helped Cal hold on.

"I wasn't nervous taking the free throws at the end of the game. It felt like practice. I was cool, calm and collected," Gray-Lawson said.

Hailey Dunham came off the bench to score 10 and Parker added 13 for USC, which faces Stanford on Sunday.

USC couldn't build off a 27-26 halftime lead, even though California committed a season-high 27 turnovers.

"We got tired and lackadaisical in the pace of our passes," Boyle said. "It seems like every year when we play USC it comes down to the final minute."

Vital helped Cal come back from the one-point halftime deficit by scoring 10 points in a five-minute stretch. She hit two 3-pointers, including the one that gave the Golden Bears their biggest lead, and a jumper during that span.

Vital finished with 14 points.

California, which reached the 23-win mark for the first time in school history, led by nine with 7:36 left in the first half, mostly behind 3s from Gray-Lawson.

Parker sparked a 13-2 run for Southern Cal late in the half with a layup, and LeNoir and Oliver each hit 3-pointers down the stretch.

Dunham scored eight of her points in the first half, and a turnaround jumper with 13 seconds remaining gave USC its halftime advantage.

Gray-Lawson surpassed her scoring average of 12.3 points when she hit a 3 with 12:27 left in the first half, giving her 13 points and Cal a 15-10 lead.

Questions for: Joanne Boyle

Turning a Pac-10 also-ran into a power eight years removed from a near-fatal brain hemorrhage

Wall Street Journal – Feb. 26, 2009

By Stu Woo

When Joanne Boyle arrived in Berkeley four years ago, the University of California women's basketball team had finished its 12th-straight losing season. Its previous coach was fired after going 52-91 in five years. The team was a local-media footnote compared to cross-bay rival Stanford.

But the Golden Bears have found themselves since then, reaching the last three NCAA tournaments. Now ranked as the nation's No. 4 team, they are contenders for the national title this year.

As Cal's coach Ms. Boyle has emphasized a defense regarded as one of the country's stingiest. The former Duke standout began her coaching career as an assistant at her alma mater. In 2002, she took over at Richmond, leading them to three straight 20-win seasons before California called.

California head coach Joanne Boyle signals to her team during the second half of a November game against Rutgers.

In an interview, Ms. Boyle talked about rebuilding a program, managing higher expectations and continuing her career after a nearly fatal brain hemorrhage eight years ago. Excerpts:

The Wall Street Journal: After being an assistant coach at Duke and then leading Richmond to three straight 20-win years, were you hesitant in taking a job at a school coming off 12 straight losing seasons?

Ms. Boyle: You need to take risks, like anybody does, but you need to make sure the move you make especially as a head coach is somewhat of a smart move, because if not, you could be out of the profession in a year or two.

The only team that was really dominating at the time was Stanford in this conference. In order to be successful in this business, you have to be able to go to the NCAA tournament, so you have to finish in the upper echelon of your conference. At the time, nobody was just dominant every year. And I thought, the Miami job, the ACC was so top-heavy, the Big 12 was top-heavy, and in order to really get your career moving and to get your team in a tournament, I thought the Pac-10 had some openings for that to happen.

We had a new athletic director, female, who was really pushing women's athletics. And then you had the fifth-best recruiting class in the country [recruited by previous coach] walk in the door as freshmen. So you put all those pieces together, and you say, okay, that's a pretty good foundation. There's still risk involved – they haven't won.

You just got to take a leap of faith in some ways.

WSJ: What were the first things you changed when you got to Cal?

Ms. Boyle: We were different than most teams. We have 12 or 13 kids on the team, and all the upperclassmen were great. But the talent was in the freshman class.

So it was shifting the culture, which is a really hard thing because you had to get the upperclassmen to buy into, "You can help us so much, and be more of role players."

WSJ: You've struggled in the postseason since arriving here. With California ranked so high now, would it be considered a failure if you didn't get past the first two rounds of the NCAA tournament?

Ms. Boyle: We're old enough to know that we can go deep in this tournament. Once you get in the tournament, a lot of it is about match-ups. To some degree, you can control your own destiny, part of the way. For us to get a great seed in the tournament is finishing out the season really well and doing really well in the Pac-10 tournament.

None of these kids have ever been to a Sweet 16. They don't have anybody that's ever done it. So the fact that we put ourselves in a situation last year where we fell short will hopefully only help us this year.

WSJ: You've been at Cal long enough to understand the Stanford rivalry. How does having both teams ranked the top four affect it?

Ms. Boyle: It's great. What I really appreciate as a coach is that people in the conference saying, "Oh, gosh, I really can't stand to make that trip now" [to the San Francisco Bay area]. Tara [VanDerveer, the Stanford coach] has always joked about how at least they have to come now and prepare for two teams instead of one. Just to be mentioned in that humbling way – I'm humbled and have a lot of respect for my colleagues.

It's fun. We have two teams in the top 10. The West Coast, a lot of the time, has not gotten a lot of recognition with the time change, and East Coast basketball and all that. A lot of the time, we got brushed to the side. So it's really nice to start this year in particular and even last year, having a lot of exposure for two teams in the Bay Area.

WSJ: Two years ago you were offered the top spot at Duke. How hard was it to turn down the job at your alma mater?

Ms. Boyle: It came down to a lot of different things. Initially, it was, I get to go back to Duke. My mom lives in North Carolina, my dad had just passed away in October, so it was only five months after my dad's passing. My mom was really struggling and didn't have a lot of support. None of my brothers or sisters live there. It was an opportunity to go back there, and she loves basketball and she's at every game. Duke has done so much for me in my lifetime. It was a chance for me to give back.

On the other side of it, I had come in here, and we had this group of young women who never knew who I was before I got here. I asked them to trust me, and I said, "I know how to do this. We can do it together."

I don't know if I would've taken the Duke job if I would've looked back in five years and wondered where this program would've been.

WSJ: Eight years ago, you were nearly killed by a brain hemorrhage that left you unable to speak and move for days. How does that affect how you coach today?

Ms. Boyle: Everybody has things that happen in their life that are reality checks. That happened to me my last year at Duke, and it gave me the strength to actually leave Duke. Some people become very comfortable in their situations. We were going to the Final Four every year. I don't know if I would've left my comfort zone if something like that wouldn't have happened to me.

It was one of those things that, if you can survive that, who cares if you fail as a head coach?

As a coach, you really realize as you get older, as you get caught up in the wins and losses and succeeding and the fear of failure and move, move, move. Along the way, you miss the things that are put in our lives to really enjoy, and that's the kids and the relationships. I've gotten much more at peace with just enjoying the process and the journey more so than the outcome.

Walker grabs rebound mark

San Francisco Chronicle – Feb. 22, 2009

By John Shea

Ashley Walker wouldn't normally be on the floor with 5 1/2 minutes remaining in a blowout victory, particularly when she's in foul trouble, but Cal women's basketball coach Joanne Boyle wasn't about to pull her best player Saturday night.

At least not until Walker broke Cal's all-time rebounding record.

"I wanted her to get it at home," Boyle said after sixth-ranked Cal's 62-40 victory over Oregon State.

When Walker grabbed the ball after a miss by Oregon State's Kirsten Tilleman, it was her 1,030th rebound, most in the 33-year history of women's basketball at Cal. A half-minute later, Boyle called time to remove Walker and give the senior a moment in the spotlight.

The Haas Pavilion public-address announcer informed the crowd that Walker broke a record Colleen Galloway owned since the 1980-81 season. The crowd roared, and Walker responded with a big smile and a wave.

"It's really cool," said Walker, who finished with 20 points and nine boards. "Colleen Galloway has had it for years, decades. It's ridiculous. She holds every record here. My teammates were telling me, 'Go get it, go get it.' I'm excited."

Now Walker can add to her record with four conference games and two tournaments remaining. At 13-1, Cal remains tied atop the Pac-10 with Stanford, and the conference season continues with games at USC and UCLA next weekend and concludes at home against the Arizona schools.

If both Stanford and Cal win the rest of their conference games, they'd finish 17-1. Cal would win the tiebreaker based on a better overall record against Division I schools. Cal is 22-3, Stanford 22-4.



Cal's two victories in three days over the Oregon schools were by 64 points. Against the Beavers (15-10, 6-9), the Bears started hot, hitting 9 of 10 shots. A 16-0 run put them up 20-4, and the rest of the night was a cruise. Devanei Hampton and Alexis Gray-Lawson had 11 points apiece, and Cal held Oregon State's leading scorer, Talisa Rhea, to 1-of-10 from the floor.

Walker needs 23 points to become the second player in the program's history to reach 2,000. Galloway scored 2,320 points.

Asked if she had any doubt Walker deserves the conference player-of-the-year award, Boyle said "none ... I couldn't be more proud of her for everything she's done for this program in the last four years. I'm so happy she's getting the recognition."

Red-hot Cal women double up Ducks

San Francisco Chronicle – Feb. 20, 2009

By John Shea

The post-Stanford blues turned into a sea of pink, and suddenly all was right with the blue and gold.

The Cal women's basketball team, recovering from a humbling Valentine's Day loss at Stanford, walloped Oregon 84-42 Thursday night at Haas Pavilion to remain tied with the Cardinal for first place in the Pac-10 (12-1) with five games remaining.

On a night the schools helped promote breast cancer awareness - Oregon players wore pink uniforms with gold trim, Cal players tied their shoes with pink laces and fans sported free pink T-shirts - the Bears scored their most points in conference play this year.

"We just needed to get back on the floor after the last game and kind of regroup," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "I thought the kids were anxious the last few days. ... It was, 'I'm hungry, give me a game right now.'"

Ashley Walker, who was 5-for-16 from the floor against Stanford, was a new woman Thursday, virtually driving and scoring at will against every combination of Ducks in her way - single team, double team, zone. The senior hit 11 of her 22 shots and collected 24 points and 11 rebounds, her eighth double-double of the season.

"She certainly came out on a mission, and they came out looking to help her take that mission," Oregon coach Bev Smith said of Walker, who is eight career rebounds behind Cal record-holder Colleen Galloway (1,029 in 1978-81).

Walker scored 20 points in the first half and sat much of the second half as Boyle gave ample time to her reserves. Five Bears scored double figures, including little-used senior Santrell Sneed, who drew praise from the starters. "We were excited for her," Natasha Vital said, "especially with that Kobe (Bryant-like) turnaround" jumper.

Vital, who had badly bruised her forehead in a late-game collision with Stanford's Jeanette Pohlen, started and had nine points and a game-high six assists. Lauren Greif opened the game hitting consecutive three-pointers, and Cal made eight of its first 10 shots and led 46-23 at the half. The Bears shot 61 percent in the half and 54 percent in the game and were 7-for-12 beyond the arc.

"When our guards hit shots from the outside, the middle just kind of opens up," Walker said.

Alexis Gray-Lawson had three threes, giving her 135 in her career, tying Liz Rizzo (1994-97) and trailing only Jennifer Self (159 in 1989-92). Gray-Lawson was coming off a 1-for-4 performance in the Stanford game that saw the Bears blow a 10-point lead and lose by 17, then slip from third to sixth in the AP poll.

Bringing out personality in players at Cal and Stanford

San Francisco Chronicle – Feb. 18, 2009

By Michelle Smith

The a cappella jingle starts and the Stanford women's basketball crowd stirs and begins to clap. On the Maples Pavilion video screen at midcourt is the newest installment of "Totally Useless Talents" featuring guard Rosalyn Gold-Onwude.

Gold-Onwude is running through the "Peter Piper picks a peck of pickled peppers" tongue-twister expertly.

On the bench, Cardinal coach Tara VanDerveer is discussing strategy coming out of the timeout and trying to keep her players focused on her.

"In another game, they showed a clip from our trip to Hawaii with the kids singing on the bus," VanDerveer said. "We're trying to draw up a play and the kids are all looking up and laughing at themselves. That's probably the only down side to all of this."

The "all of this" to which VanDerveer refers is the team's foray into videos. New team video coordinator Bud Anderson, a professional musician with a background in video production, has given the team a presence on YouTube with videos showcasing the personality and passion of the Cardinal players.

Cal, meanwhile, is imaging its women's basketball team in a different way, behind the vision of team photographer Mollie McClure.

McClure's photos are alternately gritty and personal, serious and playful, showing the competitive intensity of the Cal players, as well as their softer sides, as individuals, teammates and friends.

McClure travels with the team and captures the smallest, most intimate moments of the season, from pregame team meetings to weight-room workouts and players getting taped before practice.

"She's a storyteller," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said of McClure, who was an assistant coach at Kentucky and William & Mary before leaving coaching to pursue her career in photography. "She's not just taking pictures of women's basketball players. She's a part of our team. She travels with us, she takes pictures of sweat and tears. She's capturing our season."

The photos and videos are a tool to sell the team to recruits and ticket-buying fans. The Cal and Stanford approaches have a common goal: establishing a connection to the athletes. The videos are on YouTube, linked through the Stanford sports Web site. The photos illustrate Cal's site and its media guide, which is distributed to recruits, among others.

"That connectivity is why people want to be part of your program, whether they are donors or recruits," Boyle said. "We are trying to create a feeling of family and fun that other people will want to be a part of."

VanDerveer had seen other programs such as Maryland and Texas feature their athletes on Internet clips.

"I thought, 'We are in the middle of the Silicon Valley and we should be doing this,'" VanDerveer said.

The coach knew she wanted something fun and light-hearted, and Anderson, the videomaker, has delivered.

"I know people think of Stanford as all business and 'Tara's so serious,' and this is about showing a light side," VanDerveer said. "I'm thrilled with it."

Anderson has produced more than 50 videos in six months. He has interviewed many of the individual players about their backgrounds, their relationships and inside jokes with their teammates, and yes, those totally useless talents.

"They wanted somebody to come in and be creative," Anderson said. "At first, it took me a little bit of time to get to know everybody. You have to earn trust, you can't just say, 'OK, I'm going to put a camera in front of you.' But they've really given me a lot of freedom to do what I do."

Senior Morgan Clyburn, who has missed all of this season with a foot injury, sat in the team lounge in Maples last month, taking her turn in front of the camera. She chatted about her hometown in Texas, all of the surgeries she has had on her feet, and sharing a house with teammate Michelle Harrison. Clyburn blushed at the idea of doing her "random scary voice" on camera for the talent segment.

She blushed even more when it was shown on the video screen a week later.

"Sometimes it's a little embarrassing," Stanford junior Jayne Appel said. "But we like them and it's incredibly easy working with Bud. My (video) is going up this week. We'll see how it turned out."

McClure provides the team with what the photographer calls a "visual brand."

"Every year, Joanne and I discuss what's unique about the season and we try to capture that," said McClure, who chronicled the Bears' trip to Africa last spring. "I want to mirror their style of play, their strength, their intensity, their toughness. I want that to come across."

The photos also serve to give the players a record of their experience.

"I catch them as they are, I'm there for all their mundane things and that's part of their story," McClure said. "When I started out, my mind was on recruiting, but now I don't think about that at all. I want to be true to them. I don't think about how I can sell them, but how I can portray exactly who they are.

"I want them to be able to look at the pictures later and say, 'That's what I remember my experience to be.'"

Cal senior Ashley Walker said McClure is like "family" to the players. She remembers seeing the first media guide that McClure produced and designed four years ago. It was a significant stylistic departure from the stat-filled books produced each year.

"I thought it looked like a Nike ad, like we belonged up on a billboard or something," Walker said. "But the pictures I like are the portraits, where we are all sitting around and joking around and hanging out."

Both Anderson and McClure have been tapped by other programs at their respective schools.

"So many people have said such nice things, (booster club) members have stopped me in the halls, parents have told me they love it and they send it to all their friends," Anderson said. "But the best feedback is when you play a spot at a game and people applaud after it's over. That's shocking to me that people will stop and watch and applaud."

Fit to be tied - Cardinal even Pac-10 race

San Francisco Chronicle – Feb. 15, 2009

By Michelle Smith

Cal wants what **Stanford** has, and they still might get it. But the Bears may have to settle for a share.

Sixth-ranked **Stanford** set up a photo finish for the Pac-10 title Saturday night at Maples Pavilion, coming back from a 10-point second-half deficit to upset the No. 3 Bears 58-41 in front of a sellout crowd on Valentine's night.

The two teams moved into a tie in the conference standings at 11-1 with six games to go as the Cardinal staved off a regular-season series sweep with a 30-4 run that turned the game on its ear and blocked the Bears' most direct path to their first conference title.

Jayne Appel led the charge for the Cardinal (20-4) as they rallied from being down 30-20 with 17:21 to go in the game. Appel, a junior center, finished with 22 points and 14 rebounds for her 10th double-double of the season, in the process pushing the Cardinal's home-court winning streak to 25 games. Appel had 17 points in the second half.

"We knew we had to stick in there," Appel said. "Even if we were down, we knew we would eventually battle back and that's what our team wants to be known for."

Cal (20-3 overall) lost for the first time in 13 games as its offense dried up after a promising stretch early in the second half. The Bears, who posted a season-low scoring total, went more than 11 minutes in the second half without a field goal after Ashley Walker scored inside with 12:23 to go in the game to give the Bears a 34-31 lead.

Alexis Gray-Lawson, who downed **Stanford** in the first meeting with 37 points, finished with four points on 1-for-4 shooting from the floor, playing 31 minutes because of foul trouble. Walker, the leading scorer for the Bears and in the Pac-10, struggled and ended up with 11 points and eight rebounds, shooting 5-of-16 from the floor.

Stanford's Rosalyn Gold-Onwude drew the defensive assignment on Gray-Lawson.

"Tonight, we were like, 'If you are going to do it, you are going to have to be consistently good to take what we have,'" Gold-Onwude said. "So I think we made our statement, too."

Cal coach Joanne Boyle said the Bears were "haphazard, lazy and lackadaisical" and that they "fell apart" in the final 14 minutes of the game.

"It's not our season. It's one game, but it says a lot," Boyle said. "We talked about leaving a legacy and this game is not it. This is mid-February with a veteran team on our part. It's just not acceptable."

Stanford executed its rally with hustle plays, big perimeter shots and Appel in the paint. Appel was 5-of-7 from the floor in the second half and 7-for-8 from the free-throw line. Senior Jillian Harmon pitched in 18 points.

But it was freshman guard Lindy LaRocque who came off the bench to ignite the Cardinal and the sellout crowd. She hit a big three-pointer to get the Cardinal within 32-29 and then had the hustle play of the game, executing a long headfirst slide to snag up a loose ball from a Cal defender under the basket and then feed it to Harmon while still on her stomach for the assist. The play cut it to 32-31 and the rally was on.

Appel said it was the "play of the game." Gold-Onwude said she cheered so loud she got light-headed.

California extends best start in school history with win over Wash. St.

Associated Press – Feb. 8, 2009

California coach Joanne Boyle was troubled by the No. 3 Bears' high number of turnovers in their rout of Washington State.

The Bears committed 22 turnovers even as they pounded Washington State 77-57 to remain in first place in the Pacific-10 and win their 12th straight game.

"That's too many," Boyle said. "We made it too easy for Washington State to score."

California (20-2, 11-0 Pac-10) jumped to a 16-5 lead, but then frittered most of that away with sloppy play that allowed the Cougars to close to 23-21.

Lauren Greif's 3-pointer broke WSU's momentum, and the Bears outscored the Cougars 20-7 the rest of the half for a 43-28 halftime lead. Cal shot 63 percent in the first half, while WSU was shooting just 34 percent.

The Bears scored the first seven points of the second half for a 50-28 lead and coasted to a 12th straight win that extended their school record.

Ashley Walker, leading scorer in the Pac-10, scored 18 points and grabbed 11 rebounds in just 24 minutes. Walker's 11 rebounds gave her 1,002 in her career, second to Colleen Galloway's team record of 1,029 set in 1981.

"It's very cool," the 6-foot-1 senior said of her 1,000th rebound. "It's something that hasn't been done in a very long time."

Walker made 8-of-13 shots and added seven assists. Devanei Hampton chipped in 15 points and Alexis Gray-Lawson added 11 for the Bears. Cal shot more than 60 percent most of the game before cooling off at the end to finish at 53 percent, including 8-of-14 3-pointers. They held Washington State to 34 percent shooting in the game.

Boyle was able to clear her bench after her team got up by 30 in the second half.

"It's very important to get the seventh, eighth and ninth players in the game," Boyle said. "They sacrifice every day in practice. Down the road it's going to be so important for those young girls to have minutes."

Washington State was outrebounded 43-32.

They were led by 22 points from freshman April Cook, who scored 17 of those in the second half. Heather Molzen added nine points and eight rebounds.

"Wow, rough weekend," said WSU coach June Daugherty, whose team lost by 30 to No. 7 Stanford on Friday.

Washington State (9-13, 2-9) fell to the Bears for the ninth consecutive time.

The Cougars start three freshmen, and Daugherty was proud of them for staying in the game even as the deficit grew.

"They used it as a learning tool," Daugherty said. "A weekend like this is a great weekend for a team like us. We are learning what it takes to win. We want to climb there."

Cook said her teammates remain confident that their potential will be realized. It was also a pleasure to play against a great team like Cal, Cook said.

"They are so good, they make us all better every time we play them," Cook said.

California's next game is a rematch next Saturday against Stanford, a team they beat 57-54 earlier this season.

UW women have no answer for Cal

Seattle Post-Intelligencer – Feb. 6, 2008

By Dick Rockne

A Pac-10 Conference women's basketball game played out about as expected Friday night when No. 3 California extended its winning streak to a school-record 11 games at the expense of the overmatched Washington Huskies at Hec Edmundson Pavilion.

Led by senior forward Ashley Walker, the Pac-10 scoring leader, the Bears (19-2, 10-0) established their superiority in the first half, then made sure there would be no UW comeback with a 16-4 run at the start of the second half on the way to a 70-40 victory.

The outcome extended Washington's school-record losing streak to nine. The Huskies (5-15, 1-9) haven't won since beating Washington State in their Pac-10 opener Jan. 3.

Walker, who began the game with a 20.5-point scoring average, finished with 24 points. She made 11 of 15 field-goal attempts. She also had nine rebounds, which left her needing just nine for a career total of 1,000.

Collectively, the Bears had 17 offensive rebounds en route to a 49-29 advantage on the boards.

"You cannot give a very good team 17 offensive rebounds," UW coach Tia Jackson said.

In addition to playing well offensively, the Bears were exceptional defensively in holding the Huskies' top three scorers—Sami Whitcomb, Kristi Kingma and Laura McLellan—in check.

Whitcomb, who scored 29 points against Arizona State in her previous game, and McLellan each scored six points.

Kingma was scoreless.

Combined, the Husky trio made just 5 of 25 shots.

"They were playing really solid defense against me," said Whitcomb, who was averaging 12.5 points. "I don't know that I was necessarily what they were focusing on or not. I definitely felt the pressure from whoever was guarding me for the most part."

The Huskies were led in scoring by junior guard Christina Rozier, who equaled her career high with 12 points, and freshman forward Liz Lay, who had 10.

Jackson said that in anticipation of Whitcomb and Kingma attracting considerable defensive pressure on the perimeter, the offensive plan was to go inside.

"We had some success with it with Liz Lay having 10 points and Mollie Williams having four points inside, but we need to score more in the paint," Jackson said.

With Walker and senior Devanei Hampton patrolling under the basket, consistent scoring inside was not easy for the Huskies.

Hampton had 15 points and eight rebounds.

Walker's versatility left a favorable impression on Whitcomb.

"I think that she does so much for her team and she can score in so many ways that it makes her tough to guard," Whitcomb said. "She does a lot of little things for them. I would say that she is one of the better players we're going to face."



Cal coach Joanne Boyle said she thought the Huskies had a good plan and "we weren't settled, we were rushing things" in the first half. The second half was different.

"Our team came out in the second half and did a great job of playing our caliber of basketball," Boyle said.

In the first five minutes of the second half, the Bears stretched their 27-18 halftime lead to 43-22.

Hampton's renewal

San Francisco Chronicle – Feb. 1, 2009

Michelle Smith, Chronicle Staff Writer

Welcome back Devanei Hampton.

The Cal senior center hasn't been waiting for a breakout; she's been working for one. That work paid off Saturday.

Hampton scored off an offensive rebound with 2.2 seconds to go to lift the No. 7 Bears to a 73-71 win over USC at Haas Pavilion. The game-winning score capped an outstanding day in which Hampton collected her second straight double-double with 17 points and 11 rebounds in 23 minutes.

It was undoubtedly her best effort of the season, and it helped - along with the 21-point, 11-rebound effort of forward Ashley Walker - lift the Bears to a big win against one of the handful of quality Pac-10 opponents this season.

Cal has won the last seven games in this series, none decided by more than nine points and two that went overtime. This one looked headed that way as well when USC freshman Briana Gilbreath stepped in front of an Ashley Walker pass and converted the layup on the other end with 18.2 seconds left to tie the score at 71-71.

But Cal, embracing its weeklong theme of "poise," pulled it out despite giving up the double-digit lead it had early in the second half.

The Bears worked the ball through USC's intense halfcourt defensive pressure and got it to Walker, who moved down the baseline and into the double-team. Playing through calf and hamstring cramps, Walker shot the ball over the rim. Hampton snagged it on the weak side and scored on the putback for the game-winner.

"I didn't really see anybody in front of me," Hampton said. "Seventy percent of rebounds come off the weak side, so I just had to go to the ball."

Thus Cal survived and heads into the second half of the Pac-10 schedule as the conference leader at 9-0.

"We've been tired, and I knew we needed to get through this weekend and get a day where we can mentally rest," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "In December, when we had the Oklahoma and the TCU games, we didn't handle the adversity well and we kind of fell apart. We're really finding out how to handle adversity."

Cal won behind the play of their talented interior players and in spite of 22 turnovers, mistakes that allowed the Women of Troy back in the game after the Bears went up 49-37 in the early minutes of the second half.

Gilbreath - the long, lithe freshman whose older sister Stefanie is also on the roster but missing her second consecutive season because of right knee injuries - finished with 21 points, 10 rebounds and three steals. Senior guard Camille LeNoir ended up with 19 points, 12 of them in the second half.

"Hampton and Walker, I'm going to send them flowers when they graduate," said USC coach Mark Trakh. "Those two, I'm glad I only have to see them once, maybe two more times."

Cal women overcome bad start, beat UCLA

San Francisco Chronicle – Jan. 30, 2009

By Henry Schulman

As Cal prepared to host UCLA on Thursday night, a site committee was giving Haas Pavilion a look-see in advance of the NCAA Tournament regional to be held here in March, a first for this august building.

Good thing for Cal it was not the tournament seeding committee, which would have scribbled some unflattering notes while watching the seventh-ranked team in the nation take its home court, turn the ball over six times in its first seven possessions and shoot 29 percent in the first half.

By the end of a 64-48 Cal victory, however, the committee would have had to agree with head coach Joanne Boyle that the Bears, still perfect in the Pac-10, did well to overcome a bruising, quality defensive team such as the Bruins.

"I just thought it was a great game for us," Boyle said after Cal (17-2, 8-0) matched its best conference start. "I talked to the kids. I'm so proud of them. I think we grew in a lot of ways. I was just really proud of our team for responding to their pressure defense, their rebounding. They're the fourth-best rebounding team in the country.

"Where we grew the most was our poise. We were very poised and very composed, particularly down the stretch. It was a huge game, a great challenge, and our kids responded."

The Bruins (14-5, 5-3) threw a box-and-one at Cal to stifle Ashley Walker and did an excellent job denying the ball to the Pac-10's leading scorer. She was held to four points in the first half.

But superb play by Walker's teammates, particularly Alexis Gray-Lawson, forced UCLA to defend elsewhere, and Walker took off. She scored 13 of her game-high 17 points in the second half, which would not have been possible without the hot hand of Natasha Vital (16 points) plus 11 points and 12 rebounds from Devanei Hampton.

Rama N'diaye got no points but a huge ovation when she entered for her first three minutes since she injured her knee in March.

Hampton had her first double-double of the season amid a slow, steady return from her own serious knee injury. On Wednesday, Boyle decided to light a fire under her center.

"We've been waiting and she's kind of been waiting," Boyle said. "I said, 'You're ready for this. Don't wait anymore. Go and take it, it's yours. Don't second-guess yourself.' I had her watch one of her best games from last year. I said, 'Just take over this team. You know how to do it.'"

Which game was it?

"Stanford, at home," Hampton said. "Stanford always motivates me."

After falling behind 11-2 and shooting 29 percent in the first half, the Bears wore down the Bruins and shot 65 percent in the second



half. Walker stayed focused and did not get frustrated despite her lack of touches in the first half, saying she was taught to concentrate on other things when she cannot score.

In the second half, she scored at will.

"Walker stepped up her game and really established herself inside, which we really didn't have an answer for," UCLA head coach Nikki Caldwell said. "Cal did a great job of isolating her and getting her easy looks."

Beauty, then beast of futility

Ten points in the first half and 15-plus minutes going scoreless sum up Oregon's loss to Cal at Mac Court

Eugene Register-Guard – Jan. 24, 2009

By Rob Moseley

The play was a thing of beauty.

Amanda Johnson stood near the three-point line on the wing, holding the basketball. As Taylor Lilley lunged toward her, a Cal defender shadowed the move, and Lilley suddenly broke the other direction toward the basket. The defender couldn't react in time, allowing Lilley to streak to the hoop unguarded. Johnson bounced a pass to Lilley, and Oregon's junior guard laid it in for two points.

The backdoor play was textbook and gave the Ducks a 10-10 tie with 12:41 remaining before halftime. It was also Oregon's final scoring play of the first half Saturday.

The 10 points in a half were a school record for futility and led to a 65-50 loss to the No. 8 Golden Bears before 2,419 in McArthur Court. Two days after wilting in the second half of a loss to Stanford, Oregon didn't show up Saturday until making a barrage of second-half three-pointers that made the final score more respectable.

"We were very hesitant," UO coach Bev Smith said. "We looked like we were running in mud, just couldn't get anything to work."

Somehow, some way, the Ducks (7-11, 4-4 Pac-10) must find a way to regroup today. They return to the court Monday for a makeup nonleague game with Portland, before breaking until Saturday's Civil War game in Eugene.

This week's sweep at the hands of the No. 11 Cardinal and No. 8 Golden Bears ended a streak of four wins in five games for Oregon, which culminated in last week's road sweep of the Washington schools.

"Those are two totally different type of caliber teams, but we have to come prepared for that," said Lilley, who played with tape and a splint protecting the pinkie finger on her left hand that was injured Thursday. "We have to know that coming into these games and make our practices extra hard — be really sharp in practice, mentally and physically."

Oregon's totals from the historic first half Saturday: 5-of-27 shooting, including 17 straight misses to close the half. Johnson's backdoor pass to Lilley was the team's only assist of the half against 12 turnovers (after the UO women had a season-low eight Thursday).

Oregon was 0-of-10 on three-pointers, even 0-of-2 from the free-throw line.

Lilley had four of the Ducks' five field goals before halftime. She finished the game with a team-high 17 points, including one of Oregon's eight three-pointers on 14 attempts in the second half.

"I want to thank our fans for hanging in there with these young women, who came out in the second half and really tried to work and try to get just some respectability back," Smith said.

Once the Ducks tied it at 10-10, Cal responded with three successive baskets to retake the lead. Oregon followed with three straight possessions that featured a missed jump shot followed by a missed second attempt. Two days after being outrebounded by 25, the Ducks had a margin of minus-three Saturday, but those missed putbacks took their toll mentally.

"When you're working so hard and things aren't falling for you, it crushes you a little bit," Johnson said. "But we've just got to keep together as a team and push through it. That's part of the game."

Smith described her efforts to coach the Ducks through the dry spell, which eventually reached 15:16 and included 20 consecutive misses and eight turnovers before a Lilley layin 2:35 into the second half.

"At first you're concerned: Are they intimidated?" Smith said. "We've just got to talk about their confidence and getting them to feel good about taking the shots that they shot. Because we did get some good shots; like the second half against Stanford, I really felt that they were (good) shots, but we seemed to rush them. We seemed not to get our feet set. And we hadn't had a shot blocked yet, so you try to work a little bit to massage that ego and see if we can get them back.

"And then we just said, we've got to work harder defensively. We've absolutely got to work harder defensively and maybe that will give us some flow offensively. At halftime we just talked about the good thing about that half is that it's over. ...

"We've got to make sure we're starting anew, change our mentality and try and get after it. It took a few minutes in the second half, but I thought we were more aggressive."

Once down 28, at 42-14, the Ducks got as close as 14 twice in the second half, the second coming with 1:53 left at 57-43.

"We need to focus on 40 minutes playing hard," Johnson said. "And something we can take from today is just knowing we have the strength to stick together and work back. When we're 21 down at halftime, to come out and hit some shots and pull together and try to make a run and weather the storm, that's something really positive."

Oregon State women come up just short

Missed opportunities late cost Beavers a chance for upset of California

Corvallis Gazette-Times – Jan. 24, 2009

By Brooks Hatch

Oregon State flirted with a victory over a top-10 program for the second time this season on Thursday night.

And once again they failed to hit the big shots and make the crucial play in the closing minute of a 77-72 loss to No. 8 California in a Pacific-10 Conference women's basketball game before 1,033 fans at Gill Coliseum.

The Beavers (11-6, 2-5) were within 71-68 and had freshman Kirsten Tilleman at the foul line shooting two shots with 31 seconds remaining. However, Tilleman — 23 of 28 from the line at the time — missed both attempts and teammate Alex Mitchell misfired on two

point-blank stickbacks.

Cal's Natasha Vital rebounded the second miss, was fouled and made two free throws with 26 seconds to play for a 73-68 advantage. Cal's Ashley Walker made two more with 16 seconds left after OSU's Talisa Rhea missed a driving layup and the Golden Bears' (15-2, 6-0) seventh consecutive victory was assured.

"We're right there, but we need to take and make shots," said coach LaVonda Wagner, whose Beavers lost 82-78 to No. 2 North Carolina on Nov. 29 in their only other encounter with a top-10 opponent. "The bottom line for me is, we should have made our free throws and our layups. That was difference" on a see-saw night that featured eight lead changes, five ties and no double-digit advantages by either team.

"We (must) take and make shots under pressure. We're right under the rim, we need to finish. They took and made big shots. They got to the free-throw line, when they needed a rebound they got a rebound and when they needed to get a stop they got a stop.

"That's why they're ranked in the top 10. We've played with some very good teams. Now it's time to finish a game out."

It was that close. Rebounds were equal at 32, OSU had 15 turnovers to Cal's 16, both teams were 18 of 23 from the line and had 14 assists, and California had 26 baskets to the Beavers' 25.

The Beavers haven't defeated a ranked team since a Dec. 16, 2003 victory over No. 19 Utah, and haven't knocked off a top-10 opponent since stunning No. 3 Stanford on Feb. 4, 1995. The stage was set for both streaks to end when Cal's Alexis Gray-Lawson and Devanei Hampton, two of California's premier players, went to the bench with four fouls with 9:15 and 8:46 left, respectively, with the Beavers down 54-50.

But Lincoln High grad Lauren Greif hit a big 3-pointer from the left corner and Vital scored 12 of her 18 points in the final 6:34 to keep the Beavers at arm's length.

"We were struggling a little bit on offense, so I was just trying to be more aggressive. We always have the X on our back now" because they're ranked and leading the Pac-10, Vital said. "We have to be ready to play every game now, no matter who it is."

The Beavers recruited Vital hard but the Stockton native decided to stay close to home when California made a late offer.

"She did a nice job," Wagner said of Vital. "The bottom line is we didn't execute what we need to do and we didn't finish under pressure. That's got to get fixed."

OSU senior guard Brittney Davis' offensive renaissance continued as she scored 20 of her game-high 24 points in the second half. She had 25 in a win at Washington this past Saturday and has raised her Pac-10 scoring average from 8.0 on Jan. 15 to 12.7 points.

"It's just credit to my teammates" for finding her when she comes open, she said. "I'm taking my time, not forcing anything. I'd had trouble this season altering my shot, so it's about being more patient, taking it to the basket under control, and playing my game."

Rhea added 20 for OSU, while Walker scored 20, Gray-Lawson 19 and Greif 10 for the Bears.

California was coming off an emotional 57-54 victory over Stanford this past Sunday that put them one game ahead of the Cardinal in the Pac-10 race.

"You always think you're going to have a hangover," California coach Joanne Boyle said. "I think our team has grown a little bit in that sense. Our team knows it's going to be a tough trip, coming up to the Oregon schools."

Inspired Cal women beat Stanford

"We are the change we seek"

Contra Costa Times – Jan. 18, 2009

By Jennifer Starks

The words were borrowed from President-elect Barack Obama and written on a whiteboard in the bowels of Haas Pavilion, a touch of motivation Cal women's basketball coach Joanne Boyle hoped to parlay to her team before its clash with Stanford.

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we have been waiting for. We are the change we seek."

"Perfect," Boyle said. "It's our time. We were so ready for this game."

Behind a career afternoon by junior guard Alexis Gray-Lawson, No. 11 Cal stunned No. 9 Stanford 57-54 in front of 10,126 fans Sunday, providing the ideal impetus for change. Gray-Lawson torched the Cardinal from everywhere on the floor and finished with 37 points, the most by a Cal player since 1987. More than that, though, the performance lifted the Bears to their first home win over Stanford in 16 years and gave them an early edge in the race for the Pac-10 title.

"This moment, it's just celebrating a great game," Boyle said. "I'm so thankful for the crowd. I want to deliver a good product. That's my pressure. We've got a lot of basketball left; we can't take a dip. This is where you say, 'Push, push, push.'"

Against Stanford, Gray-Lawson did just that. She caught fire early and never let up, scoring four of Cal's (14-2, 5-0 Pac-10) final six points, including a clutch layup with 21 seconds remaining. The Cardinal (13-4, 4-1) had two chances to send the game into overtime, but a pair of desperation 3-pointers by Kayla Pedersen and Jillian Harmon fell short.

When it was over, the Bears unleashed a triumphant celebration at midcourt. After coming up empty against Stanford three times last season and failing to take care of Oklahoma this year, they'd finally finished the job.

"Thank you Alexis Gray-Lawson!" senior forward Ashley Walker said. "I love her to death. It's just how much you want to win this game. It's a big deal for us."

Gray-Lawson was 12-for-20 from the floor and 5-for-7 from 3-point range. That proficiency was just what Cal needed since its interior game was completely blanketed by Stanford's frontline. Walker, who left the game briefly in the second half with leg cramps, was held to five points after being regularly triple-teamed, and Devanei Hampton finished with six points.

"I told Ash, 'This is your half,'" Gray-Lawson said. "She was like, 'No, it's yours.' I was feeling it. I knew the ball had to be in my hands."

The end result was perfect vindication for Gray-Lawson, who last season missed the potential game-winner in Cal's 60-58 loss to the Cardinal. But it was also one Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer thought could be coming. In 2006, Gray-Lawson, then a freshman, lit up the Cardinal for 30 points.

"Alexis Gray-Lawson was just phenomenal," VanDerveer said. "Unfortunately, I've seen this before. I knew she was capable of that. She just got in a zone."

Stanford came to Berkeley having lambasted Washington and Washington State by a combined 126 points the week before. But Cal



presented an entirely different challenge.

Still, with several key players struggling offensively, the Cardinal led 50-42 with 7:29 remaining. Stanford managed just two points over the final 6:08, giving the Bears plenty of time to mount a comeback.

Jayne Appel, a Carondelet High graduate, got in foul trouble early but still led the Cardinal with 18 points, eight rebounds and four assists in 29 minutes. Stanford shot 36.7 percent from the floor.

"When we got the lead, we needed to put the hammer down and just roll with it," Pedersen said. "Their defense was very intense at the end, but that shouldn't make us worry. We just need to execute better and get the ball to Jayne."

Cal women reign supreme after defeating Stanford

San Jose Mercury News – Jan. 18, 2009

By Ann Killion

A year ago, Alexis Gray-Lawson was devastated. In a postgame press conference, she sobbed, her jersey pulled over her face, heartbroken over her team's last-second defeat to Stanford and her missed shot at the end of the game.

"I was crying about this time last year," the Cal guard said. "I didn't want to be in that position again."

So she did something about it. A little something called "complete domination."

Gray-Lawson took over the game, scoring 37 points, and changing the balance of power in the Pac-10 in the process. The 57-54 victory over the Cardinal gives the Bears sole possession of first place in the conference.

It was a watershed moment for the Bears, who had catapulted into the national rankings under Coach Joanne Boyle but had remained thwarted by their crossbay rival.

The Bears hadn't defeated Stanford at home since 1993. When the Bears won at Stanford in 2007, with a talented homegrown sophomore class, it looked like the rivalry could be jump-started.

But last season, the Bears lost all three games to the Cardinal — both regular-season meetings and the Pac-10 championship game, in which they were completely dominated.

Gray-Lawson grew up in Oakland and attended Oakland Tech. She played AAU ball against Stanford star Jayne Appel. She knows as well as anyone the long shadow Stanford casts and how much it means to her program to beat the Cardinal.

The Bears want to challenge

Stanford for Pac-10 supremacy. Yet it was starting to look like the problems weren't just physical but mental as well.

"Maybe," Boyle conceded.

Cal's mental state wasn't improved last month, when the Bears squandered a 26-point halftime lead against Oklahoma — a game in which Gray-Lawson had a great first half and a terrible second-half.

Sunday's game against Stanford was the Bears' first test against a ranked team since that collapse. The Bears needed to find out something about themselves: their resiliency and ability to finish a game. Gray-Lawson wanted another chance. Her teammates even reminded her Sunday not to have a second half like she did against Oklahoma.

"They know I can rise to the occasion," Gray-Lawson said.

The Bears even have turned to self-help books for guidance. Boyle gave her team "The Traveler's Gift: Seven Decisions That Determine Personal Success." The book, fiction combined with historical figures and spiritual inspiration, has been used by other coaches. Gray-Lawson has embraced the book more enthusiastically than anyone else, sharing quotes she uncovers with Boyle and her teammates.

"It opened my mind about things," she said.

One of her own seven decisions for personal success was to be more aggressive, and "to have the mentality that nobody can guard me." That was true on Sunday. Though the Cardinal did a good job containing the Bears' talented forwards, Ashley Walker and Devanei Hampton, Stanford had no answer for Gray-Lawson.

"She's a great player — always has been," Appel said. "And once you start making them, the basket gets bigger and bigger."

By the time Gray-Lawson tossed in a layup for the final points of the game, the basket was the size of Lake Tahoe.

The third of eight children, Gray-Lawson comes complete with her own enormous rooting section. When the game ended she found her father in the stands. He wrapped her in a bear hug and other family members mobbed her. When she went out on the court to sign autographs, she perched her 1-year-old niece on her lap. She was treated like a rock star by the fans who stayed to have their "Battle of the Bay" poster autographed.

The Battle of the Bay has become a resounding marketing success. On a Sunday afternoon when outdoors-minded folks had glorious weather to lure them, and sports-lovers had NFL conference championship games to watch, Haas was packed to the rafters. It was the second straight year that a 10,000-plus crowd has come to Berkeley to watch the women's rivalry game.

"It was as loud as I ever heard it over here," said Stanford Coach Tara VanDerveer, who compared the game to a heavyweight fight.

When Boyle looked up in the stands before the game, she felt pressure.

"As a coach, you want to deliver them a good product," she said.

Thanks to Gray-Lawson the Bears delivered a great product. First place in the conference. And a watershed moment.

Casey Morris set for an up-close view

Contra Costa Times – Jan. 17, 2009

By Jennifer Starks

The sea of blue and gold. The pockets of Cardinal red.

The roar of the crowd reaching such a crescendo, she nearly had to plug her ears.

This was the scene when Casey Morris was sitting in the "nosebleed" section, one of over 10,000 fans jammed into Haas Pavilion, when the Stanford women's basketball team last rolled into Berkeley.

The No. 9 Cardinal returns today, and for Morris it means the wait is finally over.

She was still a senior at Piedmont High School on the aforementioned night at Harmon, the ink on her letter of intent to Cal still fresh.

As she watched the Bears go down to a narrow, two-point defeat, she knew her time was coming.

She also knew she desperately wanted to be a part of it.

"I was just thinking luckily they will all have another year to play (together), and they can get it back next year," Morris said. "I'm really excited to play in a game like that. I got more excited when I saw that crowd."

Morris has made a seamless transition from spectator to key contributor for the No. 11 Bears. And though her rookie season has been marked by a certain fearlessness, even she admits her palms may be a bit sweaty before the opening tipoff.

"I get butterflies. It's a good feeling," said Morris, a 5-foot-9 guard. "I like when I feel like that. It gets me ready to play. I feel like that every game, but I feel more pumped up for big games like this. The game could determine who could win the Pac-10 championship."

For the past eight years, that distinction has gone to Stanford. Still, Cal has closed the gap, and this is one more chance for the Bears to move closer to the conference title they covet so badly.

"They still have it, we want it. Hasn't changed," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "That's just the level of respect we have for them. Not a fear in any sense, but just a level of respect that we want what you have and we're trying to take it."

Cal had several chances last season to just that. But they had to settle for second place.

The Bears also have dropped six of the past seven against Stanford. And Boyle still considers this Cardinal team to be "complicated and very good," even though it no longer boasts the talents of former All-American Candice Wiggins.

Stanford has won five consecutive games, including back-to-back romps over Washington and Washington State by a combined 126 points, showcasing its undeniable balance and depth.

"That's who we all want to be," Boyle said. "When you're playing like that, it makes you really dangerous. You can see from the numbers they're putting up, it's major numbers. You've got to pick your poison. Where do you think their weaknesses are, and what can you take away to not make them feel that comfortable?"

Chances are the answer lies somewhere in Stanford's backcourt.

With a post rotation that includes 6-4 junior (and Pleasant Hill native) Jayne Appel, 6-4 sophomore Kayla Pedersen and 6-2 freshman Nnemkadi Ogwumike, Boyle knows what her team is up against given its lack of depth in the paint. But since losing point guard JJ Hones for the season with a torn anterior cruciate ligament, Stanford has shown hints of vulnerability at the guard position.

That's where Morris comes in. She has made an immediate impact at Cal, averaging 7.1 points and 2.8 rebounds in 19.1 minutes per game.

A prolific passer, Morris' strength is in the open court where she's able to push the pace and create for her teammates.

While she concedes she had the "triple green light" at Piedmont, the challenge at Cal is reeling it in while still maintaining some of the flash that made her such a standout.

"She's coming in and she has no fear," Boyle said. "She brings a different element to our team. Just give me the ball and I'm going to attack the basket. The (challenge) for any freshman is finding the balance between feast and famine."

Bullish Bears

Cal is ready for a run at its first Pac-10 championship—if it can end its streak of futility against Bay Area rival Stanford
Sports Illustrated – Jan. 19, 2009

By Kelli Anderson

A FEW YEARS ago, Cal athletic director Sandy Barbour began receiving e-mails—from Stanford fans, of all people—thanking her for resurrecting the Cal women's basketball program, which had gone 13 seasons without a winning record before finally breaking the string in 2005--06. But now that the Bears are ranked No. 11 in the AP poll and are again a threat to break Stanford's eight-year Pac-10 title streak? Barbour laughs and says, "I haven't had one of those e-mails in a while."

When Joanne Boyle took over the Cal program in April '05 and inherited a highly ranked recruiting class, which included 6'1" forward Ashley Walker, now a national player of the year candidate, guard Alexis Gray-Lawson, center Devanei Hampton and forward Shantrell Sneed. Together they've helped transform the program from a Pac-10 afterthought into a championship contender, increasing home attendance to an average of 2,503 fans a game and advancing to the last three NCAA tournaments. But they have yet to win a Pac-10 title, and they haven't had much success against their cross-bay rivals, who have beaten them in 43 of their last 50 games, including six of the last seven—and all three meetings last season.

Cal (13--2, 4--0 in the Pac-10 through Sunday) will have another chance to address that imbalance when it faces the ninth-ranked Cardinal (13--3, 4--0) on Jan. 18 in Berkeley in a clash for the Pac-10 lead that is expected to draw more than 10,000 fans. "It's always great to beat Stanford, but it would be really great to beat them this year because the Pac-10 is so crazy," says Walker. "We all think the [conference] title is going to come down to one game, and we want it. This is the last chance for our class."

Though there is a lot on the line for both teams, their rivalry is informed more by mutual respect than by the hostility that marks, say, a Duke—North Carolina game, or by the insults and pranks that attend the Stanford-Cal football rivalry. (Stanford center Jayne Appel ruefully recalls being blasted awake by the Cal trumpet section at 4 a.m. on the day of the 2006 Big Game.)

"Our rivalry with Cal is kind of like a sibling thing," says Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer. "We're O.K. with them doing really well as long as we do better."

Bears' Walker steals victory

ASU coach says her team won game

San Francisco Chronicle – Jan. 5, 2009

By Michelle Smith

Ashley Walker didn't have her best day of the season, but she produced its biggest basket.

Cal's senior forward scored on a steal and putback with 1.8 seconds on the clock to lift the 13th-ranked Bears to a 54-53 victory over Arizona State at Wells Fargo Arena on Sunday afternoon.

Walker's basket came on Cal's final possession of the game, the Bears getting one last chance after ASU's Dymond Simon hit a go-ahead three-pointer from the top of the arc with 8.7 seconds left.



Cal (11-2, 2-0) had squandered a 10-point lead over the final 4:47 with a spate of turnovers, allowing the Sun Devils back into the game and into the lead, 53-52 on Simon's shot.

Following Simon's trey, Cal took the ball for the inbounds. Bears guard Natasha Vital - who scored 17 of her 19 points in the second half - called timeout when she couldn't find an open teammate.

On Cal's second try, Vital lofted the ball into open space at center court, where it was meant for Walker, but tracked down instead by Cal sophomore Kelsey Adrian. Adrian grabbed the ball, went in for a layup try and missed. Sun Devils center Sybil Dosty got the rebound and Walker said she had a decision to make.

"It was either foul or go for the ball. My first instinct was to foul, but then I thought, 'No, I'm going to go for the ball first' and I think I slapped the ball out of her hand," Walker said. "I just laid it in and said, 'Please go in.'"

Arizona State coach Charli Turner Thorne was defiant after the game. She indicated she believed that Adrian traveled on her way to the basket and that Dosty was fouled.

"We won the game," Turner Thorne said. "We made our shot, we forced a travel (on Adrian), we got the rebound and we got hacked. In my mind, there's not any more we could have done. We won the game. Report that."

Turner would not directly criticize the officiating, but said she will be contacting the Pac-10.

"I think we got it done today. I don't care what the record is," Turner Thorne said.

Cal coach Joanne Boyle said her team implemented the lessons learned from their 86-75 loss to Oklahoma on Dec. 13 in which they gave up a 26-point halftime lead.

"It's just one of those of wins, where as a coach, you think. 'Thank god we got this and let's just get out of here,'" Boyle said. "They make us play tough, they make us play ugly. They do a great job."

The loss completed a rough weekend for ASU (8-6, 0-2), which gave up a 14-point lead against Stanford on Friday night to lose the conference opener. The Sun Devils have lost seven in a row to the Bay Area schools and are 0-5 against ranked teams this season.

The Bears were able to pull out the win despite a late run of turnovers - five in a row at one stretch in the final four minutes - while the Sun Devils climbed back from a double-digit deficit with big shots.

Vital led Cal in the second half, hitting 3 of 3 three-point attempts and breaking down the ASU defense off the dribble. She scored on a drive along the left baseline with 39 seconds to go after ASU had tied the game at 50-50 on a three-pointer by post Lauren Lacey.

"I was on her in the first half. Arizona State puts so much pressure on your guards," Boyle said. "You have to take care of the ball down the stretch and I thought Tasha did a really good job, coming up with some big plays, really attacking the basket. We need that kind of dribble-penetration."

Walker, who sat much of the first half in foul trouble, finished with nine points and six rebounds in 26 minutes, her second-lowest scoring effort of the season and the second time all season she has been held to single digits.

Cal forced 25 turnovers and kept the Sun Devils offense at bay for much of the game. ASU made five of its 12 second-half field goals in the final 3:40.

Simon led ASU with 17 points.

Wildcats find a good seat as Cal's Walker puts on a show

Arizona Daily Star – Jan. 2, 2009

By Sarah Trotto

Cal's Ashley Walker found a spot she liked on the McKale Center court and returned over and over again to drain jumpers in front of the Golden Bears' bench.

The Arizona Wildcats' defense never slowed the power forward's outside shooting, tumbling 56-46 to 13th-ranked Cal in their Pac-10 opener Friday night.

Walker, an honorable mention All-American last season, scored 16 of her game-high 23 points on 8-of-11 shooting in the second half. The Bears (10-2, 1-0 Pac-10) snapped Arizona's four-game winning streak.

"You take away her second-half, short-corner shots and it's certainly a different ball game," UA coach Niya Butts said. "She missed one shot from that corner ... in the second half.

"We anticipated she would come out and get the points. It was the fashion in which she scored those. We never made the adjustment defensively to get out there and put a hand in her face."

Meanwhile, Cal limited Arizona's top post player, Ify Ibekwe, to six points — nine below her season average — by sagging in on the forward to limit her touches.

Foul trouble also prevented Ibekwe from establishing a rhythm, Butts said. The sophomore had as many turnovers as points — three — in the first half, as two fouls limited her playing time to nine minutes.

"It was very physical, especially for the posts. They have two big, solid, good posts and it was a very physical game," Ibekwe said, referring to Walker and Devanei Hampton.

Ibekwe grabbed 11 rebounds, but she also committed five turnovers.

The Bears' zone defense shut down Ibekwe and forward Amina Njonkou (zero points) down low, instead allowing Arizona (7-5) looks from the outside. But the Wildcats once again struggled from the perimeter, shooting 4 of 18.

They shot 28.1 percent overall from the field. Freshmen guards Reiko Thomas and Courtney Clements led the UA with 16 and 12 points.

"You play percentages," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "I thought we did a good job playing the zone and mixing up a little bit. Where we did a poor job is keeping them off the boards.

"That's the chance you take with zone. They were quicker and more aggressive to the ball than we were."

Boyle credited Arizona for playing with a "new energy" and forcing her team to adjust its game plan.

Cal led 29-23 at halftime after shooting 37 percent. Reserve guard Casey Morris carried the flailing offense with 18 first-half points, 11 above her season average.

"She saved our butts," Boyle said of the freshman who finished with 18. "If it wasn't for Casey, we'd have been down 20 at the half."

In the second half, Walker took over. After the Wildcats drew to within 33-30 with 18:35 left, the Bears responded with a 14-6 run

during which Walker scored eight points.

Arizona cut the lead to seven on Thomas' three-point play with 3:18 left, but Walker answered with a jumper, and the Cats drew no closer than eight. Afterward, Ibekwe called Walker the best post player the Cats have faced.

Cal finished shooting 41.5 percent but scored nearly 20 points below its season average (75.5).

Arizona will face its second nationally ranked opponent in three days when it hosts Stanford on Sunday.

Emotional breakdown

Cal blows 26-point lead to Oklahoma, bringing shock, tears

San Francisco Chronicle – Dec. 14, 2008

By Michelle Smith

It was stunning, from the beginning to the end.

And the Cal women's basketball team was at the horribly wrong side of that feeling when the final horn sounded at the San Jose State Event Center on Saturday night.

Fifth-ranked Oklahoma roared back from a 26-point halftime deficit to celebrate an 86-75 win over the No. 9 Bears in the final game of the Basketball by the Bay tournament.

The Sooners (8-2) trailed 71-55 with 8:14 left and outscored Cal 28-0 over the next 7:32 to not only assume the lead but go up by 12, 83-71.

Their amazing comeback was Cal's heartbreak.

After building a 52-26 halftime advantage playing some of their most confident and impressive basketball of the season, the Bears (8-2) quite simply fell apart.

This was not the "focus on the finish" that Cal coach Joanne Boyle has been preaching since before the season began.

Boyle was fighting back tears after the game.

"It's the thing we wanted to improve on ..." Boyle said, her voice breaking with emotion. "I never as a coach have lost a 30-point lead, so I obviously did not do my job to prepare them to be in that situation. And that's on me."

The Sooners were in grave danger of having the homecomings of Piedmont's Courtney and Ashley Paris and San Jose's Danielle Robinson turn into a humiliation. So they rallied at both ends of the floor over the final 20 minutes.

The comeback began as soon as the second half did, Oklahoma going on a 15-3 run to get back within 55-41 with 14:57 to go on a pair of free-throws by Courtney Paris.

Cal was up 69-52 on a pair of Devanei Hampton free-throws with 9:40 to go when the game unraveled for the Bears, even as the Sooners were in serious foul trouble with three starters - including Robinson and Courtney Paris with four fouls each.

Robinson got a steal, drove the length of the floor, scored and drew the foul with 6:22 to go. She drained the free throw to put the Sooners behind 71-62, their first single-digit deficit in the game since it was 11-4 in the opening minutes.

Nyeshia Stevenson, who came off the bench to score 21 points, stole the ball and converted the layup to tie the score at 71-71 with 3:42 to go. Then she hit back-to-back three-pointers on consecutive possessions to give the Sooners a 77-71 lead with 2:36 remaining, completing the reversal of fortune.

During Oklahoma's 31-2 run, Cal was 1-for-12 from the field, 0-for-3 from the line and committed six turnovers.

"That was one of the craziest games I've ever been a part of," Oklahoma coach Sherri Coale said. "Give Cal credit, I thought they were fabulous in the first half, almost played flawlessly, about as perfectly as you could play. And we didn't obviously."

Robinson said Coale challenged the Sooners at halftime, told them that she "would not coach effort."

"It was kind of like a pride thing," Robinson said.

After shooting 64 percent in the first half, the Bears shot 27.6 percent in the second half, struggling with Oklahoma's intensifying pressure defense and its own confidence.

"We panicked against the 1-3-1 pressure," Boyle said. "They got momentum with some steals at the top. Danielle (Robinson) did a great job and it's layoffs at that point when you are turning the ball over at the top of a 1-3-1 press. They had 20 points off turnovers (in the second half) and we had zero."

Ashley Walker, who scored 22 first-half points and finished with 26 for the game, said the Bears "went away from everything that went right in the first half."

"And then nothing fell in the second half," Walker said. Lauren Greif had a season-high 18 points for Cal, including five three-pointers. Alexis Gray-Lawson finished with 16 points, 13 in the first half.

Courtney Paris kept her double-double streak intact with 18 points and 13 rebounds, making it 102 straight games. Paris said she and her sister Ashley (seven points, 11 rebounds) had something to prove to those who thought they should have gone to Cal four years ago.

"For me, when Ashley and I decided to come to Oklahoma, people were saying, 'Why are you doing that?' " Courtney Paris said. "And this is a chance to show people why. And this was the best game to do that."

Cal women face Oklahoma in showdown

San Jose Mercury News – Dec. 12, 2008

By Laurence Miedema

San Jose State is the host school for the Basketball By The Bay Classic this weekend, but the Cal women's basketball team looked right at home Friday night on Walt McPherson Court.

The No. 9 Bears made quick work of the rebuilding Spartans in a 76-40 rout before a crowd of 1,123. Cal scored the first 10 points of the game and then put the contest away by opening the second half with a 12-0 run.

Cal's romp was a warm-up for tonight's main attraction of the inaugural event — the Bears against No. 9 Oklahoma.

The Sooners, led by Bay Area products Courtney and Ashley Paris (Piedmont) and Danielle Robinson (Archbishop Mitty), cruised past Cal State-Bakersfield 105-84 in Friday's opener.

The Cal-Oklahoma matchup, possibly an NCAA tournament preview, will reunite a number of former teammates and rivals. Cal has six players who played with or against the Paris twins and Robinson in high school or AAU leagues, led by Ashley Walker and Alexis Gray-Lawson, who combined for 27 points against the Spartans.

"They are a really good team and we are a really good team. I think it will be a great game," Walker said. "It's going to be a fun game to play, especially playing people I grew up with.

"This is another big game for us."

The Bears had reason to focus in their warm-up against the host Spartans (1-7). Cal was coming off a disappointing 82-73 loss to Texas Christian on Sunday that dropped the Bears from a program-best No. 3 spot in the polls.

"After last weekend and taking it on the chin, we came out really focused and played 33 good minutes of good basketball," Coach Joanne Boyle said.

The rebuilding Spartans, who have 11 new players this season, figured to be overmatched. But SJSU held its own with Cal for stretches in the first half, notably a 14-4 run that cut the halftime deficit to 14.

"This was a good game for us," second-year SJSU coach Pam DeCosta said. "We're not used to playing top teams in the country. I thought in the first half our team fought. We had the momentum going into the locker room."

It didn't last. SJSU missed its first six field-goal attempts in the second half and Walker keyed the 12-0 Cal run with six points.

Cal's defense stifled SJSU in the second half, holding the Spartans to 15 points, and was particularly effective against Natalie White. White, SJSU's leading scorer — and only double-digit scorer — missed all seven of her field-goal attempts and didn't score a point.

Walker led Cal with 17 points, while Kelsey Adrian added 15 and Gray-Lawson scored 10. Cal also was encouraged by the continued progress of Devanei Hampton from off-season knee surgery. Hampton played 15 minutes and could see more time today as the Bears try to slow down Courtney Paris, who recorded the 101st consecutive double-double of her career earlier Friday.

The Paris twins, making their final Bay Area collegiate appearance, combined for 30 points and 23 rebounds. Mitty's Robinson added 10 assists, matching a career high.

The homecoming efforts helped Oklahoma pull away from the surprisingly pesky Roadrunners, who cut a double-digit deficit to 56-53 early in the second half before the Sooners pulled away for good.

"We knew we had to take it to another level," Courtney Paris said.

Cal women upset by No. 22 TCU

San Francisco Chronicle -Dec. 8, 2008

By Michelle Smith

If you aren't going to defend, then you had better knock down shots. And if you can't knock down shots, you aren't going to win.

Third-ranked Cal took a major tumble Sunday evening, falling 82-73 to No. 22 Texas Christian in the final game of the Bears' two-day tournament at Haas Pavilion.

Cal (7-1) will lose its lofty ranking today, but maybe gain a valuable lesson or two. It doesn't get easier from here. Two of the next three opponents are ranked: No. 6 Oklahoma on Saturday at San Jose State and No. 10 Baylor in Berkeley on Dec. 22.

"TCU had a great game plan and it executed and we just struggled," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "We made some good runs to come back, but we never got over the hump and that hurt us."

TCU (8-2) was every bit the worthy foe, having knocked off then-No. 3 Maryland on Nov. 14. The Horned Frogs put up more points against Cal than any team since Stanford in an 87-75 Cardinal win on Jan. 14, 2006. Cal came into the game allowing an average of 49.3 points per game.

TCU exploited the size advantage of its guards and the Bears broke down defensively. The Horned Frogs hit 11 three-pointers, were 17-for-20 from the line and committed only five turnovers.

"It was bad matchup and I don't think we did a good job," Boyle said. "We have small guards and they were posting us up. We did a poor job. We didn't adjust well to what they were doing."

Guard-forward Rachel Rentschler, who's 6-foot-2, finished with 24 points and 10 rebounds for the Horned Frogs. Helena Sverrisdottir, who is 6-1, had 10 assists to go with 17 points inside.

When the Bears had the ball, TCU dared them to shoot from the perimeter by frequently switching defenses from a zone to a sagging man-to-man and Cal couldn't respond effectively.

With points in the paint tough to get, the Bears made 7 of 27 three-point attempts and hit 10 of 35 field-goal attempts in the second half.

Cal senior forward Ashley Walker did everything she could. She stepped away from the basket to hit short jumpers and finished with 31 points and 12 rebounds.

"She's the best inside (player) we've seen all year," TCU coach Jeff Mittie said.

Guard Natasha Vital finished a strong weekend with 21 points.

The lack of perimeter production was Cal's undoing.

"They didn't guard us and there weren't a whole lot of openings inside," Boyle said. "Sometimes you've got to find another way to win and that's what we didn't do."

The Bears went into the locker room down 39-37 - their first halftime deficit all season - and then played from behind most of the second half. The Bears erased a 61-52 TCU lead with a 10-0 run midway through the half, taking their last lead at 62-61 with 8:30 to go on a sequence of four straight free throws, two of which came after a technical foul was called on the TCU bench.

Walker scored on an offensive rebound with 7:27 to go to tie the score 64-64, but the Horned Frogs slowly pulled away, outscoring Cal 12-4 following the tie to assume a 76-68 advantage with 2:25 to go.

The 4 Musketeers

Cal's special group of women have forged a bond and remade a program into a power

San Francisco Chronicle – Dec. 6, 2008

Michelle Smith

They arrived at Cal together less than four years ago, hoping that they would be the reason for the revival of the Golden Bears' women's basketball program after 12 straight losing seasons.

All four players - Oakland's Devanei Hampton and Alexis Gray-Lawson, Modesto's Ashley Walker and Fairfield's Shantrell Sneed - stayed close to home, a major part of the grand plan. Play in front of family and friends, make them proud. Take the local team and make it relevant again.

They came because then-coach Caren Horstmeyer convinced them to come together, already close friends and teammates in high school and on AAU club teams.

They stayed when coach Joanne Boyle was hired before their freshman season. And Boyle ultimately stayed for them when she had a chance to go to Duke a year and half ago.

"I owe them a lot," Boyle said. "I told them what I thought we could do when we got here, and they bought in. But if they don't do that, we're not here."

As the Bears play this weekend in the Cal Classic tournament as the No. 3-ranked team in the country, these four players have to know they have done what they came to do.

Cal is no longer up-and-coming. The nation is paying attention. So are recruits.

But the work is not done and time is running out. A Pac-10 title is still on the to-do list and a long NCAA Tournament run has yet to materialize.

As a group, they have until spring to get it all accomplished.

"We are leaving a legacy behind that we are a group of girls that came in and turned this program around," Walker said. "That is kind of what we expected to do. We wanted to make a difference and that's why we chose to come here."

Boyle said "legacy" has been a big subject for this group this season.

"They have laid a foundation, with help of course, for what this program could be for the next 10, 15, 20 years," Boyle said. "They were the first group to do it. No one else is going to be able to say they were first."

"It wasn't just getting a program off the ground and into the Top 10. It was getting a community involved, getting 4,000 and 5,000 people into the gym, creating a buzz in this area."

Hampton, Gray-Lawson, Walker and Sneed sat down recently for a group interview with The Chronicle, their friendship, chemistry and shared experience at Cal abundantly evident.

There are inside jokes, jabs of affection, laughs and a few near-tear moments at the prospect that, four months from now, they won't play together again.

But they've had distinct individual journeys as well.

Walker has been the mainstay in the Bears' lineup, while Hampton has traveled a bumpier path of injury and burgeoning maturity. Sneed's college career has largely been viewed from the bench, while Gray-Lawson prepares to stay behind (because of a medical redshirt) as the other three move on.

Walker - the steady one

Walker has been in the lineup every day since she arrived in Berkeley in 2005 - 102 games, 102 starts.

Playing through other people's injuries, providing everyday consistency and energy, honing her own game to become one of the top power forwards in the nation, that has been Walker's job.

"Every season I've had to do a little extra to start," Walker said, giving Hampton a nudge with her shoulder. "Working through that and changing my game, doing a little more here and there, it's made me a better player and helped our team."

Boyle said Walker has been consistent and a leader.

"She's the mom of this team," Boyle said. "She's not worried about what other (accolades) other people are getting. She's just taking care of her business."

Hampton - the rough road

Nothing about Hampton's college basketball experience has been easy. Not getting into school initially, not staying healthy while she's been here.

But when Hampton is in the lineup as Cal's center, she's a force.

Asked who has changed the most in four years, the answer is unanimous, "Dev."

"Her hair is all one color," Gray-Lawson joked.

Hampton's Cal career has had almost as many shades and textures as her trademark braids.

As a freshman, Hampton lived down a high-profile suspension days before her first Stanford game. She broke out as a sophomore to become the Pac-10 Player of the Year. She's played big in big games, and been taken out of a few as well because of foul trouble. She played through aches and pains much of her junior season.

In fact, she's battled injuries almost the entire way. Keeping her on the floor has taken vigilance. Hampton missed nine games at the opening of last season recovering from knee surgery. She sat out the first three games this season, but came off the bench for three games at the Paradise Jam in the Virgin Islands.

"We've all been through a lot together," Hampton said. "These guys know me. I've grown up. I used to be very outspoken, but now I'm actually listening to other people."

Boyle said Hampton's passion is always on display.

"She can be as stubborn as she wants to be and as warm-hearted as she wants to be and she can go either way with it," Boyle said.

Gray-Lawson - left behind

Gray-Lawson will be back next year because a season-ending knee injury sustained at the start of her sophomore season earned her a redshirt and a fifth season of eligibility. In a few months, she will sit and watch Senior Day.

Next fall, she will shepherd in Cal's seven-player freshman class. And she will do it without her closest friends, without the people



who understand what it was like to be a freshman here when opposing teams didn't respect them, when they all lived together in the dorms and yelled at one another out the windows to make sure they all got to practice on time.

"It's going to be a little weird," Gray-Lawson said. "I'll be old. I'm supposed to graduate. I hope we have that same family feeling. For me to come to practice every day, I'll be looking around for them. They won't be 10 minutes away, when something goes wrong I can't call them. If something happens in practice, I can't ask them what they thought about it."

Boyle believes Gray-Lawson will expand in her new role.

"She's going to have to lead a totally different group of people that changes how she has to be a leader," Boyle said. "It's different, but not a bad thing. It's another experience."

Sneed - the observer

Sneed's experience at Cal has been to bear witness to her friends' success from her seat on the bench.

Sneed has never been a starter for Cal. In fact, for most of the past three years, she's barely played, despite the Bears' serious depth issues. She's appeared in 62 games without a start and has averaged 7.5 minutes a game.

But Sneed is taking on an increased role this season, averaging 16 minutes a game with Hampton and Rama N'diaye missing time. She said she feels like her career took a "detour" before arriving where it should be.

"I've watched them play and turn into superstars," Sneed said. "I learned how to be supportive of them and cheer for them sincerely with my time finally coming now."

Boyle said Sneed has been her utility player, moving in at various positions based on the team's need that day.

"Of all of them, she's the one who has had to sacrifice the most," Boyle said. "She's had to be really flexible and that's a tough role. But she is the most incredibly bright kid."

Sneed said that if Hampton, Walker and Gray-Lawson weren't at Cal, she's not sure she could have stayed.

"I definitely feel like I couldn't have made it this far without their support," Sneed said. "Coming in with them made it easier and more worthwhile to stay and stick out the situation. Probably if they weren't here, I would have considered leaving.

"We came in together and most of us are leaving together, and I want to leave feeling like I contributed."

The time when these players will go their separate ways is coming. Hampton and Walker will each probably make a go at a WNBA career, or perhaps play overseas. Gray-Lawson will be back on campus come fall.

But for now, there is more to be accomplished. Together.

"My mom told me after one of our exhibition games that we look like we are playing in the Final Four," Gray-Lawson said. "This is our final four. It's our last season together. Who knows what's to come? We need to make that push to get where we need to go."

As for their legacy. It's not complete yet either.

"We have to do better," Walker said. "We are hard workers. We fell short last season, and we are all still kind of living with that. We don't want to be known as those girls who came in but fell short. We want to leave something that those seven freshmen can say, 'That's what we want to do, we want to build on that.'"

Building better Bears

Cal earned its first NCAA Tournament berth in 13 years when Ashley Walker, Devanei Hampton, Alexis Gray-Lawson and Shantrell Sneed were freshmen.

No. 3 California cruises past Iowa for Reef Division crown

The California Lady Bears celebrate their Paradise Jam Reef Division championship

St. Thomas Daily News - Dec. 1, 2008

By CHRIS WALSH

The No. 3 California Bears got off to their best start ever as they defeated the Iowa Hawkeyes, 76-43, on Saturday night at the UVI Sports and Fitness Center for the Paradise Jam Reef Division championship.

The Bears (6-0) were led by Reef division MVP Ashley Walker, who one night after becoming just the third Bear to be perfect from the charity stripe with 10 or more attempts, tied her career high with 32 points against Iowa.

Cal's Alexis Gray-Lawson, who was also named to the All-tournament team, became the 20th member of the 1,000 point club at Cal when she made a jumper with 1:52 remaining in the first half. She finished with 10 points in the game.

Iowa began the game jumping out to an 8-2 lead with 17:10 remaining. But after that it was all Cal for the next seven minutes as they went on a 24-2 run that featured 16 points from Walker, who got the run started with 11 unanswered points over four minutes as Iowa struggled to find an answer for her in the paint.

Following a jumper and a couple of 3-pointers from Iowa, Cal's Lauren Greif answered back with two straight threes of her own and at the half Cal held a 40-20 lead.

California forward and Reef Division MVP Ashley Walker puts up a shot against Iowa.

Cal shot 59.3 percent from the floor and 42.9 percent from behind the arc as they held Iowa to just 26.7 percent shooting overall in the first half. Iowa shot just 33.3 percent from the floor on the night.

The Bears went to their bench in the second half and continued to dominate as the bench alone scored 23 points. Iowa was also hurt by their 16 turnovers to Cal's eight.

Iowa's lone All-tournament selection, Wendy Ausdemore, was the only Hawkeye to score in double digits. She had 10 points in the game.

Cal's Casey Morris came off the bench to score 10 points and Shantrell Sneed had six points and five rebounds.

REEF DIVISION ALL TOURNAMENT TEAM

Shantia Grace - South Florida

Dominic Seals - Texas Tech

Wendy Ausdemore - Iowa

Alexis Gray-Lawson - Cal

Lauren Greif - Cal

MVP - Ashley Walker - Cal

Cal women roll over No. 3 Rutgers

Contra Costa Times – Nov. 22, 2008

By Jennifer Starks

In the days leading up to the Cal women's basketball team's clash with powerhouse Rutgers, coach Joanne Boyle refused to analyze the magnitude of the opportunity that was about to present itself.

"I can't do that," she said. "I get too worked up for stuff like this."

Boyle may not have wanted to give it much thought before, but good luck stopping her now.

Sparked by the inspired play of guard Alexis Gray-Lawson, No. 7 Cal knocked off No. 3 Rutgers 66-52 at Haas Pavilion on Friday night, further cementing itself as one of the nation's elite programs. It was the Bears' first victory over a top-five opponent since they beat No. 2 Stanford 74-65 on Jan. 10, 1992.

Gray-Lawson, a redshirt junior, finished with 25 points, nine rebounds and four assists and helped kick-start a pivotal 22-2 run that turned a nip-and-tuck affair into a complete rout. Senior forward Ashley Walker posted her second double-double of the season with 16 points and 10 rebounds.

"I was ready for this game for a really long time," said Gray-Lawson, who was 9-for-15 from the floor. "I'm at a loss for words. This is a game we knew would be a challenge."

Cal (3-0) made that challenge manageable by, once again, clamping down on defense. The Bears repeatedly limited the Scarlet Knights (2-1) to one good look at the basket and continued to burn them in transition. Lauren Greif nailed a 3-pointer to push the lead to 48-22, and Gray-Lawson followed with an uncontested layup to balloon the lead to 50-22 with 12:58 to play.

Rutgers coach C. Vivian Stringer refused to call a timeout to stop the bleeding as her young team came apart at the seams. The Scarlet Knights, who advanced to NCAA title game in 2007, managed just two field goals in the opening eight minutes of the second half. Rutgers shot just 38.6 percent from the floor and committed 17 turnovers.

"We just wanted to make another run and show them who we are," Walker said. "It was like, 'OK, we're just going to keep going.'"

Post players Devanei Hampton and Rama N'diaye, both of whom have been sidelined with knee injuries, remained out of the lineup. But with the way Cal played as a unit, their absence was hardly felt.

"Missing two of their outstanding players, they were probably on high alert," Stringer said. "We were sluggish; we were slow. We didn't push the ball, not once. ... Anything is OK as long as you learn from the experience. With a new group, I have to determine what we learned."

Rutgers, which beat Cal 56-51 last season, came to Berkeley averaging 84.5 points per game, but Stringer said the Scarlet Knights may have been "falsely comfortable" after blowout wins over Saint Joseph's and Princeton. Star center Kia Vaughn was limited to four points, and junior guard Epiphanny Prince was held to 15 points, well off her 20.5 average.

"Some of our freshmen thought this was going to be easy," Stringer said. "Oh, yeah. We got our heads handed to us."

Cal's Walker healthy, ready for No. 3 Rutgers

Associated Press – Nov. 20, 2008

By Janie McCauley

Ashley Walker received intravenous fluids before each Pac-10 tournament game for California last March, exhausted from anemia and dehydrated from the lack of iron.

Yet it was impossible to tell as Walker still went hard every possession on both ends of the floor. Thanks to daily iron pills and better nutrition — she is learning to eat leafy greens like spinach — she's that much stronger leading up to the seventh-ranked Golden Bears' big game Friday night against No. 3 Rutgers.

In Cal's season opener last Friday, she had 23 points, eight rebounds and four steals in a 24-point victory against Albany. Two days later, she topped that performance with 27 points, 17 rebounds, two assists, two steals and two blocked shots in a win over Nevada, surpassing the 1,500 career points in the process.

Walker has been carrying the load for a team that's been missing starting posts Devanei Hampton, the 2007 Pac-10 Player of the Year, and Rama N'diaye. Both are recovering from right knee surgery. Cal said Thursday it will be a game-time decision whether Hampton and N'diaye make their season debuts against Rutgers.

Walker seems unconcerned about any national hype surrounding her — such as being considered the top power forward in the country by some basketball experts.

"That's just what I do, I guess," Walker said. "I'm playing without Devanei and Rama, so I have to do a little bit more. I think what makes me such a good player is I don't think about that stuff. There are a lot of talented power forwards out there."

Cal coach Joanne Boyle can already see an improvement in Walker, who is determined to go out on a high note in her senior season after the Bears were shocked on a buzzer beater by George Washington in the second round of the NCAA tournament last season.

She noticed Walker tired at the end of games or practices late in the season and had some cramping in her calves. Walker hadn't been anemic before but thinks the sheer number of minutes she was playing and a diet short of iron-rich foods probably contributed to the problem.

Boyle figures Walker's experience provided a good lesson.

"They really worked on her nutrition over the summer and gave her a lot of guidelines on that. We all needed to reassess our nutrition," Boyle said. "That was such a big learning curve for this group. You can't shove it down their throat as freshmen. It's a progression."

Walker remembers when she first noticed the fatigue — last Feb. 23 in a 60-58 home defeat to rival Stanford. It was the day before her birthday. Walker still wound up with 17 points and 14 rebounds.

After the IVs during the conference tournament, Walker played in the George Washington game with an infected, swollen left eye and had been sick with the flu and a cold the day of the game.

"Lousy," she recalled about how she felt. "Super exhausted after games. I was really tired. I was cold and my body temperature dropped really low. Dehydration was a big one. A lot of stuff went into it."



"My levels were really low. They put me on iron and it started to pick up and I was so much better — a whole change in my personality, my body, everything. My levels came back up, but it took the rest of the year and into the summer."

Walker was part of a talented recruiting class four years ago that featured Hampton and Alexis Gray-Lawson, and the loss to George Washington still stings. They are using the early exit as motivation, not to mention the fact they haven't won a Pac-10 title.

Walker, who is from nearby Modesto, met up with teammate Natasha Vital back home after the loss. They moped around for a while until Walker's big brother, T.J., told them to pull themselves together and move forward.

"We were watching TV and we were both just sitting there dazed, not paying attention or doing anything. My brother is a basketball player, so he knows, and he walked into the room and said: 'You guys look like sad puppies. You've just got to let it go,'" Walker recalled.

"It will definitely be one of those heart-wrenching games that lasts with you forever. You let it go but it fuels you to do better."

Pac-10 basketball preview: Cal women

San Francisco Chronicle – Nov. 12, 2008

By Michelle Smith

When the Cal team sat down for its annual meeting to set goals a few weeks ago, consensus came quickly. The **Bears** begin a new season with a singular focus: the finish.

For all things Cal accomplished last season - a school-record 27 wins, a best-ever second-place finish in the Pac-10 and the first finals appearance in the conference tournament - the 2007-08 season sticks in the minds of players and coaches for what the **Bears** couldn't do.

They couldn't hold a two-game lead in the Pac-10 and ended up losing a share of the title to Stanford on the last day of the regular season.

They couldn't beat a top-10 team.

They couldn't get to the Sweet 16 in the NCAA Tournament, falling to George Washington in the second-round in heartbreaking fashion, on a buzzer-beating shot.

Guard Alexis Gray-Lawson said all of Cal's disappointments are driving the **Bears** into this season, which begins at home against **Albany** on Friday.

"To basically be in the situation where we said, 'We're going to be in the Sweet 16,' and then (to just fall) short at the buzzer ... I think we all thought we could have been there," Gray-Lawson said. "We know what we are capable of. We can battle with some of the best players and teams in the country. We don't just want to be in the game, but finish the game. That is our big thing."

Cal coach Joanne Boyle said her team has had many conversations in the last six months about how things should change in an approaching season with high expectations. The **Bears** have four seniors, five returning starters and a preseason top-10 national ranking.

"We took a look ourselves and said what could we be doing better? What more could we be doing?" Boyle said. "We came to terms with the fact that we don't have the depth that Stanford does. So, then what can we do? We can be a team in the best shape possible."

Conditioning has been the biggest point of emphasis for the **Bears** in the offseason, even when there were only guards on the track because the post players weren't healthy enough to participate.

"With the motion offense we are running, there's a lot of movement for 40 minutes and we still need to be able to shoot a three-pointer and be able to get it up to the rim," junior guard Lauren Greif said.

For the four local players who rejuvenated the **Bears** upon their arrival - Ashley Walker, Devanei Hampton, Shantrell Sneed and Gray-Lawson - this is one last chance to play together.

Walker, Hampton and Sneed are seniors in their final season, Gray-Lawson technically is a fourth-year junior because of the knee injury that cost her most of her sophomore season.

The starting lineup (Gray-Lawson, Walker, Hampton, Greif and point guard Natasha Vital) is back intact, but might not be at full strength right away. Knee swelling has kept Hampton out of early practices and likely will give her another late start to the season. Junior center Rama N'diaye is recovering from her knee injury (a torn ACL) and won't be available until late this month. Cal very well could start the season with four guards on the floor and Walker holding down things in the paint.

Cal's margin for injury remains slim after more recruits failed to materialize. Last year's top recruit, Shawna-Lei Kuehu, decided over the summer not to come to Berkeley from her native Hawaii. Junior-college transfer Kendra Calvin is also not on the roster.

Freshman guard Casey Morris from Piedmont High already is making an impression, playing a mature game and outrunning teammates on the track.

"She's ridiculous," Greif said. "Casey came out the first day of workouts and went out and broke six minutes in the mile. She's trouble."

Gray-Lawson said one moment in a recent practice defined the season for her.

"We were running at the end of practice, we had just finished conditioning for, like, an hour," Gray-Lawson said. "We were doing the runs and we all go up the line, and somebody called out, 'We've got to play Stanford,' 'We've got to play Rutgers,' and it made everybody run that much faster."

Bears in brief

Coach: Joanne Boyle, 4th season (68-28)

Last season: 27-7, second in Pac-10; lost 55-53 to George Washington in second round of the NCAA Tournament

Returning starters:

Devanei Hampton (13.5 ppg, 8.0 rpg), Ashley Walker (15.3 ppg, 9.3 rpg), Alexis Gray-Lawson (11.5 ppg, 3.5 rpg), Lauren Greif (5.9 ppg, 35 3-pointers), Natasha Vital (7.8 ppg)

NCAA oddity

Cal will host an NCAA regional in March at Haas Pavilion, but the **Bears** will not be able to play there, even if they reach the round of 16.

The NCAA does not allow teams to play on their home court in the regionals. Cal's efforts to get the regional moved to Oracle Arena in Oakland were unsuccessful.

Cal's Gray-Lawson off to a fast start

Same ol' Lex

Contra Costa Times – Nov. 20, 2008

By Jennifer Starks

Same ol' Lex.

Nearly 14 months ago, those were the very words Cal guard Alexis Gray-Lawson used to describe her return to the basketball court. She was convinced she'd fully recovered from the anterior cruciate ligament tear that derailed her sophomore season. She figured it was all behind her.

Only through the passage of time has Gray-Lawson come to realize she may have been fooling herself.

"I definitely wasn't back 100 percent," she said. "Everybody saw that at that point, I think."

For those familiar with Gray-Lawson's game, it was hard not to notice. She wasn't regularly driving to the hoop and taking on defenders with the same verve and authority that she'd done in the past. She wasn't punishing smaller guards in the paint or showcasing her lethal mid-range game, instead settling for 3-pointers.

But two games into the 2008-09 season, those same individuals who once picked up on the Oakland native's hesitancy are now starting to notice something else.

"I see a change in her being in a different place," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "Even in the last five games (of last season), she became a pretty player. She wanted to stand outside and take jumpers. Now, she's taking the ball to the basket hard."

Gray-Lawson, a redshirt junior, admits the "mental challenge" of overcoming her knee injury is ongoing. After all, knowing the knee is fine and actually believing it when she's barreling toward the

basket are two different things. She also knows she has to be at her best if the No. 7 Bears (2-0) are to have a chance in tonight's showdown with No. 3 Rutgers (2-0), easily one of the biggest women's games ever played at Haas Pavilion.

"Here you're faced with one of those battles," Gray-Lawson said. "We can get through it and come together as a team. In the end, we can be victorious. Or we can shy away from it. Win or lose, we can just be Cal. "... We have this opportunity to say, 'Here we are.'"

Such responses are typical of Gray-Lawson. Nothing is flippant or unreasoned. She's genuinely proud to be a part of laying the groundwork for Cal's recent rebirth, "even if nothing else happens." She doesn't mind that her phone has been ringing at 2 a.m. with friends asking for tickets to tonight's game, because that means the Bears are doing something right.

What's more, she wants to be entrusted to carry more of the load while post players Devanei Hampton and Rama N'diaye work their way back from knee injuries of their own.

"When you call yourself a leader on this team," Gray-Lawson said, "obviously you have to do a little bit more."

Both Hampton and N'diaye have returned to practice but it remains to be seen if they'll play tonight. Boyle said Hampton is day-to-day, and N'diaye isn't far behind.

"They have great balance," said Rutgers coach C. Vivian Stringer, whose team beat Cal 56-51 last season. "Dev is a monster, and it doesn't get any better than Alexis Gray-Lawson, who's shooting the ball well right now. We've got a decision to make. How are we going to defend them?"

That is one question Gray-Lawson hopes to influence.

"She needs to do more," Boyle said. "She wants to do more."

For Cal Women, More Than Basketball in Africa

Cal women are about to go on a journey

Contra Costa Times – May 23, 2008

By Jennifer Starks

While strolling through the halls of Haas Pavilion, one might hear rumblings of desert safaris, 15-hour plane rides and malaria pills coming from the women's basketball office.

On the surface, it's an odd topic of discussion. Given some context, though, it makes perfect sense. The Cal team will embark Saturday on an 11-day trip to Africa, where they will sample international competition in Tunisia and Senegal.

But this overseas adventure is about far more than just hoops. It's a chance for Cal to broaden its horizons, while giving a teammate the opportunity to reunite with her family and a coach the chance to possibly expand her own.

"Why are we doing this? For the bonding and cultural experience," Coach Joanne Boyle said. "I want them to understand that basketball is basketball, but there are bigger things in life. This is a reward going into what could be a really special year for us. You have to line up all the pieces to be successful, and this is one of the pieces."

Under NCAA rules, teams are permitted to take one foreign trip every four years. Boyle, who went to Australia, Portugal and Spain during her coaching stints at Duke and Richmond, began contemplating the idea when she arrived in Berkeley in 2005. After three years, including last season's landmark 27-7 finish, she decided the timing - and the destination - was finally right.

The Bears' voyage will start in Tunisia, with two games against the Tunisian national team, and then take them to Dakar, Senegal, home of center Rama N'diaye.

"I was really surprised," N'diaye said. "And for them to do it at my home? You just feel really good. Sometimes I think, Why did they choose Senegal? What did I do to make people go there? It makes you feel like everyone likes you. It's crazy."

The anticipation was somewhat tempered in March when N'diaye tore a knee ligament in the first round of the NCAA tournament, ruining any chance she had to showcase her talent and play in front of her parents for the first time. (N'diaye went to high school in Japan.)

While in Senegal, Cal plans to stop at the Vivre Ensemble orphanage in Mbour, a facility that, Boyle said, houses 300 children, including 150 babies. Boyle hopes to start the adoption process there. It probably will take a year to complete, but Boyle insists she is ready.

"I've been thinking about it for two years," she said. "I wanted to meet the people face-to-face, and this just worked out. The baby could have been from any country. Who cares if it's in Senegal or Mali? They don't have parents."



The Bears will then go to a nearby village to conduct a basketball clinic for middle-school children. They will teach the finer points of the sport on a dirt court, battling the sweltering heat while donning long-sleeved shirts and shorts to respect the Muslim faith.

Boyle hopes Cal's presence not only introduces some of the youngsters to basketball but also gives them something to strive for later in life.

"If you can draw any interest that you might have an opportunity like Rama, to get the seed planted early, that can take you a lot of places," Boyle said. "It gives them a little bit of hope."

A Journey of Spirit

Cal women to explore the past, present and their coach's future in Africa

San Francisco Chronicle – May 24, 2008

By Michelle Smith

If Joanne Boyle wanted her Cal women's basketball program merely to have a pleasant bonding experience and a little re-acquaintance with basketball in late spring, she would have booked a trip to Italy or France.

But Boyle wants something more for both her players and staff - and for herself.

So today, the Bears will board a flight for an 11-day trip to Africa, a journey that already has life-changing implications.

While guard Alexis Gray-Lawson looks forward to her first opportunity to experience what she regards as "the motherland," Boyle could take her first steps toward motherhood.

The team's trip to Tunisia and Senegal - including three exhibition games against international teams - will have an itinerary that includes conducting clinics, speaking to schoolchildren, a safari, an extended visit with the family of Bears center Rama N'diaye and a trip to Goree Island, also known as the "House of Slaves," a historic site that dates back to the 15th century.

After stops at Port el Kantaoui and Monastir in Tunisia, the team will head to Dakar and Mbour in Senegal. The Bears will make a stop at a Senegalese orphanage where Boyle will take the initial steps in the process of adopting a child.

"This is not just a matter of scheduling a trip to Africa so we can play a few games," said Boyle, who is single. "We've worked very hard to make it more than that. I want to give them a taste of everything."

On the other hand, Boyle said she can't fully prepare them for what they will see.

"They are going to experience cultural differences," she said. "Senegal is primarily a Muslim country and there will be things related to that. They are going to see what extreme poverty looks like. There is poor and then there is an extreme, different level of poor. And we are going to try to give back.

"It's going to be much different for them. Most of them have never been out of the country."

Boyle's personal mission has turned into a big part of the trip. She said she has been thinking about adoption for several years and had always been leaning toward finding a child from Africa or Eastern Europe.

The 44-year-old coach has been in touch with an orphanage in Dakar, the Senegalese capital. She will visit it, and plans to make a donation and fill out some paperwork, the first steps in a process that could take 18 months before she can return to adopt a child.

"The kids think I will be coming home with a baby and that's not what's going to happen," Boyle said. "We did not plan this trip because I want to adopt. But this is something I've always wanted to do, and the timing might work out. I don't even know what an African orphanage looks like, I don't know exactly what happens.

"For me, it's a matter of getting a first look and getting a feel for things. If I'm going to do this, I'm happy I'm doing this with my team and they will be a part of it with me."

The one damper on the trip is the fact that N'diaye will be unable to play in front of her friends and family. N'diaye was injured in the closing moments of Cal's NCAA second-round loss to George Washington in March, sustaining a torn anterior cruciate ligament in her knee. She is still on crutches as she recovers from surgery.

"It's the worst thing that could have happened," Boyle said. "It was the first thing I thought of when she went down. Maybe 30 seconds after she went down, but I said, 'She's not playing in Africa.' But we will get to meet her family, and the players will get to see her in her element."

N'diaye acknowledged her initial disappointment.

"It would have been the first time my mom would have seen me play," N'diaye said. "It's bad, but it is kind of OK. It's been a month now (since the injury) and I'm excited to go home. I want my family to meet my team and spend time with them."

The team has shipped old uniforms, T-shirts and basketballs to take to their clinics and to local schools. Players have shopped individually for items they'd like to leave behind with their African hosts.

"To play there, in front of Rama's family is very exciting," Gray-Lawson said. "We're sad she can't play, but we're happy she gets to go home. As an African American kid, I have always wanted to have this experience, and to have it with my team is even greater."

Boyle said she is hoping to set the table for a big 2008-09 season, with Devanei Hampton and Ashley Walker heading into their senior seasons.

"This trip is the start of what we could potentially do next year," Boyle said. "We want this to be a jump-start. It's not all about the Xs and Os, just the commitment to each other and what we want to do to prepare for next year."

