

# CAL WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

## 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS

### CAL WOMEN GET FIRST NCAA INVITE SINCE '93

*By Jay Heater, Contra Costa Times*

*March 14, 2006*

BERKELEY - Cal freshman forward Ashley Walker could have been speaking for the entire Cal women's basketball program when Washington was selected as an NCAA Tournament team midway through the selection process Monday.

"Oh crud!" she said.

With USC already in the tournament, and UCLA, Stanford and Arizona State locks, Walker knew Washington's selection meant that five Pac-10 teams would be included in the field of 64.

Never before had the Pac-10 put six teams into the NCAA Tournament, and that didn't bode well for Cal.

But when the last available at-large berth was announced, Cal was going to the Big Dance.

"Our name went up there (on the television screen), and then there was a full two-second pause," Walker said. "Then coach B (Joanne Boyle) ran between us screaming."

Indeed, Cal had made the field for the first time since 1993, chosen as the 10th seed in the Albuquerque Regional. The Bears (18-11, 10-8 Pac-10) face No. 7-seed St. John's (21-7, 11-5 in the Big East) on Sunday at 9 a.m. in a first-round game at Penn State's Bryce Jordan Center.

"I kept seeing bubble teams get in ahead of us," said Boyle, who has changed the face of Cal women's basketball in her first season. "And when our name came up, it took us a couple seconds to realize it. I kept waiting to see if there was a 'Davis' or 'Riverside' after the Cal."

There wasn't.

"This puts us on the map and puts us on the national scene," Boyle said. "It will showcase our four (starting) freshmen."

Boyle admitted that she thought her team's shot at the NCAA Tournament might have disappeared after a first-round loss to UCLA in the Pac-10 Tournament. "This weekend, I kept thinking that no, this was not going to happen. But I kept getting calls from ESPN analysts who kept telling me that we would be in. When that buzz hit me, I started thinking that maybe we do have a chance."

That chance appeared to have slipped away as the final matchups were being announced. Then came bedlam at Haas Pavilion. "It was out of control," Boyle said of the celebration.

It was a huge swing in emotion for Cal freshman guard Alexis Gray-Lawson, who had a tough outing in Cal's conference tournament loss. "I thought that maybe it was over for us," Gray-Lawson said. "I was ready to break down and cry."

That all changed Monday afternoon. "We all had to do a double-take," she said. "But this team has made it through so much together. We've been through it all."

They haven't been through the heartache that senior Renee Wright has experienced, going through three losing seasons, then experiencing a joy ride her senior year before considering that her dream of playing in the NCAA Tournament might not come true.

"Everything is a blur," Wright said. "I tried to keep positive after we lost to UCLA in the Pac-10 Tournament. Now I'm excited to have this opportunity."

"This is something I can tell my grandchildren. It will be something that is in my memory forever. You can have your marriage, your wedding, but this is something that will always rank up there."

None of Cal's starters was familiar with St. John's, not even knowing that it plays in the Big East Conference.

But on Monday, that hardly mattered. "I kept saying that we were a double bubble team," Walker said. "Well ... St. John's ... here we come."

### CAL'S WRIGHT DEFTLY HANDLES TRANSITION GAME

*By Michelle Smith, San Francisco Chronicle*

*March 4, 2006*

BERKELEY—Renee Wright grew up in a military family, which meant moving every three years or so. Those frequent moves, the transitions to cities and schools, neighbors and friends, made Wright quite adept at adapting to new situations.

They don't get much newer than the one she has navigated this season as the only senior on the Cal women's basketball team.

Wright has played her final season at Cal surrounded by new faces — from the four freshmen who take the court with her as starters each game — to first-year head coach Joanne Boyle.

Then there's the winning. That's certainly new.

"I tried to come into this season without a lot of preconceived notions," Wright said, "but this season is everything that I hoped for."

And it might last longer than any of Wright's other seasons. Cal opens the Pac-10 tournament at 11 a.m. today as the No. 6 seed, taking on No. 3 UCLA. It's the first time in the five-year history of the tournament that the Bears are not playing on opening night, a tangible reward for the program's best season in 13 years. There could be more. Cal has 18 wins and a legitimate chance at an NCAA berth, the Bears' first since 1993.

"It's been so amazing, I don't think I can actually describe the feeling," Wright said, who said winning is like experiencing the night of her high school graduation over and over again. "I know as quickly as you can win, you can lose. But I'm so thrilled with the idea that you can play hard, work hard and have something to show for it."

Wright is a stabilizing force, a source of experience. She has started 27 of 28 games and is second on the Cal roster in minutes played, averaging 35.2 per game.

Though Cal's young players have taken over much of the scoring load, Wright is the Bears' most reliable on-ball defender, usually assigned to the opposing team's top scorer, and a tenacious rebounder, averaging 6.7 boards a game.

"My thing with Renee is that she's such a great defender and rebounder and I want her to do that and do it well," Boyle said. "She's the backbone of our defense. She doesn't come out of the game much."

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Wright was a role player before this season. She played in 29 games last season, starting nine, and was voted the team's most improved player. Now, Wright is a team captain.

Wright said taking the court every night surrounded by freshmen has been "a learning experience," one that has at times tested her patience and forced her to mature. She's tried to think like a coach and act like a friend, occasionally at the same time.

"I've had to step up and be a calming force and somebody that other people look up to and I'm not used to that," Wright said. "It's exciting, never a dull moment. It's been fascinating, because they are freshmen in name, but they are playing like juniors and seniors. It's made things a lot easier for me."

Freshman forward Ashley Walker has looked at Wright as a mentor.

"She's definitely helped us all," Walker said. "She's humble enough to know how it feels to lose and she's ready and willing to win. She's helped us through a lot of things, keeping us positive. This is her last year and all this change happens, and she only gets to experience the beginning of it."

## RENEÉ WRIGHT PROFILE

*By Viet Nguyen, The Bear Insider*

*March 2006 Issue*

The first time I saw Reneé Wright in a Cal uniform, I gasped. I couldn't believe how sculpted and strong her body looked. And those shoulders...

It was the fall of 2002, and Wright was a freshman forward for the Cal women's basketball team. But more than that, the sight of her represented to me the future of the program. On her broad shoulders rested the potential, the promise of what could be...

Flash forward four years, and Wright is now completing her final season as a Golden Bear. It's been a tough few years, with more losses – games, a teammate, and coaches – than anyone should have had to endure.

Yet this is not a story of loss, but of growth. It's a tale of one young person's journey, and a tribute to a loving, supportive family. Finally, it is a story about a young woman whose shoulders are no longer as muscular, yet who is stronger than she's ever been.

Elizabeth-Reneé Wright was born on May 31, 1984, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Wright Patt, Ohio, to Ernest and Nondis Wright. As the youngest of three daughters, she was daddy's girl from the first time she picked up a basketball.

"My dad and I were connected at the hip," said Wright. "He used to play for the Air Force, and I'd always go to his games as a little kid. This one game, I remember it so well. He had put me in this red and white Jell-O shirt, and I had on these red pants and red Chuck Taylors. I was 4, and I was running around, and normally I'd just keep to myself, but this time, I picked up the ball and started shooting. And ever since..."

Ernie Wright fostered little Reneé's interest, taking her to the gym and teaching her the game. He signed Reneé up to play at the local youth center, where she competed against boys until she entered middle school. He coached her throughout her prep career, joining her team's coaching staff and following Reneé from her freshman team through her senior year. Reneé's mother, who had played in high school, eventually joined in, and basketball became a way for the three of them to forge an unbreakable bond. But it was not always easy.

"In high school, I was a post player. So my dad would take me into the post and he'd really beat up," Wright recalled. "I'd get so mad, I'd come home not speaking to him. And my mom would ask, 'What'd you do?' And he was like, 'We were just playing!' He was one of those people – it didn't matter, girl or boy, he was going to play you the same way."

But battles with her father helped Wright develop toughness in her game, and she flourished. However, basketball was not her only sport.

"I was a softball player," said Wright. "Everyone always told me that I was a better softball player than a basketball player. Basketball was just a way for me to unwind, to hang out with friends. It wasn't about winning or losing to me. Basketball was the sport I played for fun."

All that soon changed. While playing at the youth center, Wright often practiced with her "big brother" L.J., who pushed and challenged her to take basketball more seriously. Wright credits him with helping her choose basketball over softball. Yet L.J. also had an impact beyond sports.

"He wasn't my real brother, but he was like a brother," explained Wright. "My mom and dad knew his mom, and we grew up on a military base, so everybody knew each other, and he and I just clicked. He taught me everything about boys, school, basketball. If I needed someone to confide in, he was always there to listen. He's the one who kept me out of trouble. You know how a lot of kids don't have anything productive to do after-school? He was always like, 'I'll meet you after school at the youth center, and we'll work out and we'll shoot.' So there wasn't any time for me to get caught up in boys, or violence or drugs or anything like that, because he was always there. Even now, when I go home, I go see him and thank him for helping me."

The kind of close friendship Wright had with L.J. was rare for her, due to the nomadic existence of a military family. Wright recalled that her family would seem to move every three years or so – including stops in Texas, Ohio, and California – all of which had an effect on young Reneé.

"It was really hard to make a set of friends and then have to move away from them, and then make a new set of friends. Eventually I closed myself off, so I wouldn't be hurt as much," explained Wright. "So I think that hurts me a little bit right now, because I'm not as open to people as I could be. I don't make a lot of friends at all. I have a lot of people I know, and I have a lot of acquaintances, but I don't have a lot of friends."

But moving around wasn't all bad. Wright recalled a particular stop that ignited her love for traveling, a passion she retains to this day. Her eyes light up as she recalled her time living in Panama.

"It was so amazing," said Wright. "We were there for about 3 years. We lived on base, but there was a jungle across the street. I remember that us kids would have games of dare, 'I dare you to go two steps into the jungle.' You go, and you step in, and then you get too scared and come running back. We'd get to go to the beach with another family, an island getaway; I didn't want to leave."

When her father retired from the Air Force, Wright and her family finally settled down in Antelope, Calif. There, she realized for the first time

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she might be good enough to play basketball in college and set out to earn a scholarship. Wright led her team to section and league championships her junior year, averaging 20 points and 12.6 rebounds a game. She was listed as one of the top 40 wings in the country by Mike White's Scouting Report. Yet she almost skipped the recruiting process entirely. After attending a camp at Santa Clara University, Wright was all set to join Caren Horstmeyer as a Bronco. When Horstmeyer moved on to Cal before her junior year, Wright followed and became a Golden Bear.

Wright reflected on why she committed to Horstmeyer so early. "She was just really intense," said Wright, "I just love that intensity, that's how my high school coach was – you couldn't breathe wrong without him correcting you. I think it was part my military life, that structure. Everything had to be perfect. She had that, and I was just drawn to it."

For Wright and her family, getting a scholarship to Cal seemed like a dream. But when she got to campus, the reality was much different.

"To be honest, my freshman year, I didn't think I was going to make it," said Wright. "Everything seemed huge. I felt lost. I've always had my parents to help me out. I had always known everyone. Coming from high school as the popular kid, and now having to start over; I was so terrified. I didn't know who I was personally; I thought I did, but once I got here... Then I was almost on academic probation, because I hadn't learned the study skills I needed for college. I called my mom everyday, 'I don't know why I'm here. This school is not meant for me. I need to come back home.' It was really terrible."

In addition to her troubles in the classroom, Wright also was struggling on the court. Despite playing in almost every game, she often seemed tentative on the court.

"I didn't feel I had a niche," Wright recalled. "I was the leading scorer and rebounder from high school, and now I had to play a different role. Plus I was converting from being a post to being a wing, and that was pretty tough in itself. At the same time, I was trying to build a new relationship with coach Horstmeyer and the coaching staff... but when you're on an emotional rollercoaster, you can't be stable enough to build a lasting relationship with someone else. My outside life affected my basketball life, and vice versa. It was total chaos, and I was just trying to survive."

While both she and fellow frosh Sarah Pool were "terrified of making mistakes," it was Wright's perfectionist streak that also undermined her relationship with the coaches. Her inability to hide her disappointment in her own lack of progress was often interpreted as poor attitude and negative body language.

With everything seemingly falling apart, Wright was ready to quit, but her family and friends refused to let her. Wright's parents made many trips to Berkeley, sometimes just to take her to lunch to cheer her up. Wright's mother also imparted some tough love at times, telling her to "stop crying and suck it up." Her boyfriend, former Cal linebacker Perron Wiley, also provided much-needed support and advice based on his own experience. And of course, she had help from her teammates.

"Leigh [Gregory], Kiki [Williams], Amber [White], and KI [Kristin Iwanga], they tried to help me, taking me under their wing," said Wright. "I remember, there were tons of times after practice, when Alisa [Lewis] and I were in the locker room, talking. She would tell me, 'You can do it. I do it everyday. We'll stick together. We'll all be here for you.'"

Wright pushed through, and by her sophomore year, things had calmed down. She became more comfortable with the coaches and began to regain confidence in her game. And the Bears were winning, running off to their best start in 11 years.

Then, on the morning of January 19, 2003, tragedy struck. Junior forward Alisa Lewis died suddenly from bacterial meningitis. Wright was hanging out at Wiley's house when she was summoned to the gym at once.

"Oh man..." Wright whispered and paused to collect her thoughts before recounting the events of that terrible day. "My phone rang, and I just felt something was wrong, you know? So I get to the locker room, and all of us are sitting and just looking around and everyone knew something was wrong. So we were looking to see who was here and who wasn't here, just counting, 'OK Jocko's [Jacqueline Sanchez] here, Olga [Volkova] here... Where's Kiki, KI, Leigh, and Alisa?' But some of us had seen Kiki earlier. And some had seen KI and Leigh, and we just assumed Alisa was with them, since they lived together."

"And then the coaches came down and made sure everyone was there. Then Leigh, Kiki, and KI all walked in, just huddled together and crying. And we're all looking around – where's Alisa? I don't even remember who told us, but I just remembered someone telling us, 'You guys, we called you because... Alisa passed away this morning. We don't know what happened. We got a phone call from Chris – her boyfriend – and she passed away.' Then I remembered everyone was just screaming and crying. And I was just sitting there – didn't know how to feel and didn't know what to do."

"The thing is, I've had four other close friends who died on me, in high school. So I kept thinking, 'I can't do this again. I can't go through this. This can't keep happening to me!' But then I remember trying to be the strong one for everyone else, like, 'You can't cry. You have to be strong. You have to be there for everyone else who's having a harder time than you because you've been through this before.' That's what I remember."

These memories came flooding back to Wright this fall with the death of University of Arizona's Shawntinice Polk. Along with Pool, Wright flew to Tucson to lend her support to the grieving Wildcats.

"We had to be there for them," said Wright. "Once again, I got there, and I couldn't cry. But the girls, when they walked in, their faces were just like our faces... just everything was déjà vu, but too close to home. Sarah and I went around and we said, 'We know what you're going through. Just call us. We'll help you. We'll listen.' We had to let them know that it is OK. It's going to be hard; it's still hard for us today. But it gets easier. It doesn't get better, but it does get easier."

This kind of empathy for others has served Wright well as she has helped to lead a very young Golden Bear team in this transition year. As a captain, having so many freshmen and a new coaching staff has posed some challenges for Wright. This past summer, she felt the weight of responsibility in not only learning the new rules, but also in passing on these expectations to the freshmen. When a freshman was late to a workout, Wright and co-captains Pool and Krista Foster had to enforce the consequence of a 6am workout. The team ended up suffering through a week of early-morning practices.

"Transition is very hard," said Wright. "But Coach Boyle, she sat us down and told us our roles. My role was to be a leader by example. Just

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constantly rebound, play defense, be a calming factor on the court, and be a sparkplug. At first I was like, 'Man, this role kinda stinks, you know? I can do so much more!' But now I think this is the best role I could have had; I'm really thankful for her just putting it out there, 'This is what we need from you. You don't need to feel like you have to score 20 points just because you're a senior.' It's made my life a lot easier for me.

"Coach Boyle, she's such a great person. I love how she asks me, 'What do you want to be remembered for? What will be your legacy be when you graduate?' There have been a lot of tough times, and a lot of times when I've asked myself, 'What am I doing?' But I know now all the effort is for a good cause. Like I've said, the transition, it's been hard, but having someone who is so open and honest and can communicate even the bad times to me, it's made it so much easier."

Besides her discussions with Boyle, having so many freshmen around has helped Wright to reflect on her own growth over the last four years. I asked her what she has discovered about herself.

"I didn't know I was as strong as I am," said Wright. "My belief in myself, my confidence, not having to look at others for their approval. That's what I've been working on – just worrying about how I feel about what I'm doing. If I mess up, and I'm OK with it, even if coach gets on me, then it's not personal. It's just about the game. There's been a lot of growth."

Wright also credits Pool for expanding her horizons by introducing her to new ideas and perspectives, including many books on destiny. She sees herself as someone still searching, still learning, still "finding herself." For example, Wright has been exploring and questioning about her faith.

"I'm just trying to test everything," explained Wright. "I kind of question, 'Am I Christian or Baptist because it's something I was born into, or is it something I want to be?' I feel I don't need the labels to be true to my faith. I strongly feel now that if I have faith and I believe, it doesn't matter what I am. I've been reading books about the Buddhists, about the different monks. I'm in the process of learning about different religions, different faiths, to figure out if Christianity is right for me."

When I asked about whether her search and growth have impacted her relationship with her parents, Wright beamed.

"Our relationship, it's just unconditional, unaltering, full of love, pride, emotion... I'm searching and I'm finding myself, and they've been so supportive," said Wright. "One day, I'd be like, 'I'm not Christian,' and my mom, she's kind of free with everything – I'm so much like her, I didn't even know, it drives me nuts! – but she's like, 'OK, why aren't you? Let's talk about it.' My dad, he's very strong in his Baptist beliefs, and we'd actually sit down and have debates about what I'm thinking and feeling. And because I have my mom's opinion, my dad's opinion, and my own opinion, all together, I feel that I can grow even more. Just anything I decide to do, they say, 'Go ahead and do it. I support you one hundred percent. Whether you get through it, whether you fall, I'll be there for you, no worries, no doubt about it.' It's just really nice not to have that burden of having to wonder about if I'll let them down or not. The way they love me, I can never do so."

For the last couple of years, Wright's mom has been fighting a mysterious and debilitating illness, which has affected her mobility.

"We still don't know what's going on with her," said Wright. "We still don't know what's causing her to not be able to walk without her walker. But she's accepting it, and she's so optimistic... Still, she has her good days, and she has her bad days. Yesterday was a bad day, and she didn't want to talk or to eat. But today, she is full of energy, 'Dad and I are going to a movie!'"

"My dad, he's been really good about it. I don't think a lot of men could have kept such a positive attitude. He comes home from work – he works double shifts since she's had to medically retire – and he still comes home and takes her out. They have date nights, and he takes her to his bowling league. I think they are more in love now than they were when they met."

I wondered if her mother's illness has created a role-reversal between them at times.

"It's so funny you should say that," Wright laughed, eyes widening. "Because I always tease her, sometimes she'll forget that she has to use her walker, and she'll go taking off, and she'll teeter and she'll totter. And I'd yell out, 'Love, what are you doing? Wait! Let me get this for you!' And she'll say to me, 'Remember, I'm the mama!' And I'd say, 'I know, just let me help you.' Or when she starts walking after she's been sitting a long time, she just looks so cute, like a baby trying to walk, so I'd say, 'Love, baby's first steps!' She'd be like, 'Shut up!'" It took us a while, but we really have a really good sense of humor about her illness."

And soon, her parents will get to watch Wright take her final steps as a Bear as she crosses the stage to receive her diploma in social welfare. Wright plans to take an extra semester to complete her degree and to experience life as a college student without the pressures of big-time athletics. She also plans to use that time to take some science classes in preparation for a nursing program.

"My dad works in a hospital, and I go to his job when I have time and just sit and watch him work," said Wright. "I love people. I love helping people, and I love the adrenaline rush you get from being at a hospital and just having to be on your toes."

Before that, Wright hopes to lead the Golden Bears to their most successful season in many years. But ultimately, she hopes that her legacy will not be measured in wins or losses.

"Just passionate," she explained when asked how she wanted to be remembered. "Everything she did, she did through love and passion." That's all I want. I just feel that as long as I did everything passionately, then it doesn't matter the outcome. Because I know I gave it everything I have."



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### CAL FRESHMEN HAVE MATURED ALONG WAY

**By John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle**

**February 26, 2006**

BERKELEY—The four highly touted freshmen on the Cal women's basketball team have come a long way. The Bears opened and closed their Pac-10 schedule against Washington, and Saturday's 81-58 victory over the Huskies showed how much the frosh class has improved.

The conference opener on Dec. 20 was a seven-point loss in Seattle.

"It seems they're experienced kids now," Washington coach June Daugherty said.

Saturday, Ashley Walker (19), Jené Morris (19), Alexis Gray-Lawson (17) and Devanei Hampton (16) combined for 71 points, and the only senior on the roster, Reneé Wright, who played her final regular-season game for Cal, scored eight.

Walker's 16 first-half points led the Bears to a 36-27 lead, and their pressing defense also played a role, forcing the Huskies into 14 first-half turnovers to the Bears' five. Morris directed the second-half charge and at one point scored seven straight points during an 18-2 run that clinched the Bears' first winning conference record (10-8) since 1992-93.

They'll open the Pac-10 tournament Saturday in San Jose as the sixth seed.

"A lot of people have talked about our youth, but they've worked through the chemistry issues," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "They're young, except for Reneé, so our chemistry has had to develop all year long. I feel like we're maybe peaking at the right time."

The Bears will head into the tourney coming off perhaps their most gratifying win of the season. It kept alive their chances of advancing to the NCAA Tournament and ended an 11-game losing streak to Washington. Their 23-point victory was their largest margin over the Huskies in the schools' history.

Credit the four freshmen.

While Walker and Hampton dominated the inside game, Morris and Gray-Lawson were consistent from the perimeter. The team shot 55.9 percent from the floor, the team's high in conference play.

"I wasn't looking to shoot, but they left me open, so I kept shooting it," said Morris, who helped the Bears break away after Washington trimmed the deficit to five at 54-49 with 71/2 minutes remaining.

Morris dished an assist and then hit two free throws, a corner jumper and a 3-pointer from the opposite corner, and suddenly the Bears were up 65-49. The 18-2 run ended with the score at 72-51, and the Huskies had little hope with 31/2 minutes to go.

Walker and Hampton played much of the second half with four fouls apiece, and Boyle tried resting both players. But just before Cal went on its run, Boyle decided to keep both in the game and call for a zone defense, trying to lessen the chances of a fifth foul. Sure enough, neither fouled out.

The Bears are 18-10 overall, and the lone senior is finally playing for a winner after her first three seasons were sub-.500. Wright, who was honored before the game, collected a game-high six assists.

"Playing with four freshmen, it's definitely a lot of fun," Wright said. "A lot of ups and downs, but I was looking forward to it since I heard they were coming here. There were a lot of emotions before the game, and it was a great way to go out.

"But I'm not done yet," added Wright, looking ahead to the tournaments, "and that's even better."

### SKYWALKER: FRESHMAN FORWARD ASHLEY WALKER HAS GONE FROM RELUCTANT TALENT TO SURPRISING STAR

**By Steffi Chan, Daily Californian**

**February 15, 2006**

BERKELEY—Watch Ashley Walker dominate on the court at Haas Pavilion-or any other court for that matter. It almost seems as if the freshman forward was destined to play basketball, destined to come to Berkeley this year and destined to rejuvenate the Cal women's basketball team.

But destiny almost had a different idea.

With an uncle who played for the Utah Jazz and a brother who plays professional basketball abroad, it may seem like basketball was a natural calling for her.

Growing up, however, that didn't seem to be the case.

More than one unexpected turn of events had to happen in order for Walker to be where she is now. In fact, she was the last person who thought she'd end up playing college basketball, and for one simple reason.

"I hated basketball when I was a kid," says Walker. "I was a gym rat, not willingly, but forcefully because of my brother. I was young and they weren't going to leave me home, so I always had to go."

Her real passions were soccer and volleyball, but her fateful decision to cave into her dad's badgering led her to grudgingly try her hand at basketball.

"In third grade, my dad asked me if I wanted to play for the Y," says Walker. "I was like-all right, just this one time, don't ask me again."

That one time, however, resulted in what seemed like a 50-point performance, as Walker recalls. After that, she started playing basketball regularly, eventually becoming good enough to be recruited by coach Joanne Boyle as a freshman.

Walker contemplated snubbing her hometown school to go to Georgia Tech, but the California native ultimately decided to stay close to home. Agonizing over her decision, the freshman was the last recruit in the star-studded recruiting class to sign with the Bears.

"It was so close," says Walker. "It was really close-I loved both schools. It basically came down to my family and my friends."

Even after she signed on with Cal, Walker still might not have held her starting forward position had it not been for one unfortunate incident.

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Last season's leading scorer Jessica Lawson tore her ACL in practice shortly before the season, opening the door for Walker.

Walker may have been exactly what the team needed to turn around the program's decade of mediocrity.

As only a freshman unexpectedly thrust into the starting lineup, she leads the Pac-10 in blocks and is second in the conference in rebounding, far surpassing most expectations.

When Walker is out of uniform, people usually describe her as pleasant, laid-back and good-humored.

That temperament, coupled with the fact that she is small for a post player, may be why opposing teams are surprised to see the six-foot freshman dominate the area under the basket with remarkable ferocity and effectiveness.

Because Walker is often overshadowed by leading scorer Devanei Hampton and standout guard Alexis Gray-Lawson, people tend to forget about her.

"Not too many teams plan their game plan around the smallest post player on the floor," says Walker. "Teams key in more on Devanei and Lexi because they're leading scorers, and I can come in and hurt a team in a different way than they can."

Even though Walker is aided by Hampton's presence, she still has to overcome her size disadvantage. Although she revels in the battle she often engages in with much larger players in the low-post, she doesn't rely on her brawn alone.

Walker says that all season long, the key to her success has been her strategic play. Faced with a taller opponent, Walker pump-fakes and draws the foul. Faced with a smaller opponent, Walker posts up and backs her opponent down to score.

"I think it's worked so far," Walker says. "I don't think of them as they're bigger than me or they're stronger than me. I think-what can I do to counter what they do best. I've always got bruises and black eyes, but I'm willing to throw my body into it. It's fun."

Walker has exploded onto the scene her first year at Cal-only it doesn't always show on the scoreboard. She is undoubtedly a solid offensive component for the Bears as the third-leading scorer on the team, just behind Hampton and Gray-Lawson. She is also tied with Hampton for a conference-leading eight double-doubles, but she quickly brushes aside her offensive accolades.

"The first thing I look at is how many rebounds I got," says Walker. "I wish they would put on the scoreboard rebounds instead of points because I don't really care how many points I score. I always tell people-I didn't have enough (rebounds) tonight."

Whether she is driving into the lane for a layup off the glass, posting up on an opponent down low, battling for a rebound or rejecting an opponent's shot, the freshman may be the team's most dependable and flexible player. And the scariest thing is, she's only begun.

"She's probably our most consistent player, and when she has a bad game offensively she doesn't let it affect her defensively, and vice versa," says Boyle. "Her potential is unlimited. I don't think she's touched what she's really capable of."

## ON WOMEN'S HOOPS: CAL'S BOYLE LOOSENS ATMOSPHERE

*By Dick Patrick, USA Today*

*February 8, 2006*

BERKELEY—The freshmen who have led California to a turnaround season finally encountered a situation they couldn't handle last week.

New coach Joanne Boyle posted signs "Watch or Play" in the locker room. For the Bears (15-8) to gain their first NCAA berth since 1993, they'll have to finish strong to be playing rather than watching in March. The team promptly lost 63-55 to Oregon State, a team they had beaten 71-50 earlier in the year.

"I had meant it to be a light-hearted theme," Boyle said. "I think they started thinking, 'Oh, my gosh, we're about to play Oregon State, and we have to win everything.' That freaked them out, and I didn't think it would.

"The next day we took everything down. We don't talk about (the NCAA Tournament) now. We take one game at a time."

The Bears start four of their five freshmen. Center Devanei Hampton (15.8 ppg), point guard Alexis Gray-Lawson (15.0), post player Ashley Walker (13.1) and guard Jené Morris (8.6) are the team's leading scorers. They were recruited by Boyle's predecessor, Caren Horstmeyer, who was fired after last season's 11-18 record.

"I didn't know what to expect because freshmen, you go on the roller coaster with them," said Boyle, an ex-Duke assistant who spent the previous three seasons as head coach at Richmond. "They've all come out of winning high school programs, especially Lexi and Devanei. I think they didn't know any better.

"I'm a structure coach, but I've learned with this team that I had to let the reins go a little more. They play their best when have a little more freedom. They play with a reckless abandon."

Gray-Lawson, playing out of position but effectively at the point, and the 6-3 Hampton led Oakland Tech to California state titles the last two years. They help set a physical tone.

"Devanei is a beast of a post," says Boyle, who lost her projected starting center, Jessica Lawson, in October to a knee injury. "She can dominate inside. She's got unbelievable strength and tenacity. She's very versatile. She's got a lot of tools. Lexi is a strong, physical guard. She can take you off the dribble and has a great little pull-up and can get to the basket. She's not a finesse kid. She's more of a bull-in-the-China-shop-type kid."

The future looks bright for the Bears, whose signees include 6-5 Adjí Ramatoulaye N'diaye of Senegal, called by Boyle a female Kevin Garnett.

"It's exciting to look at our future," Boyle says. "At the same time, I don't want them to give a year away. You never know what can happen — injuries, chemistry changes. I want them to take advantage of what we have going right now."

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### CAL FOLLOWS USC AS PAC-10'S TEAM WITH FUTURE

**By Michelle Smith, San Francisco Chronicle**

**January 27, 2006**

Last year, USC was the Pac-10's up-and-comer, a team rife with young players and possibilities. A year later, Cal is that team.

The Bears have posted a 5-4 record through the first round of Pac-10 play (13-6 overall), and are tied for fourth place in the conference standings, heading into tonight's game against second-place USC in Los Angeles.

Whether Cal can hold on to its spot in the upper half of the Pac-10 depends largely on whether this team, with its four freshman starters, can find consistency. Last weekend certainly showed Cal to be an up-and-down enterprise.

The Bears upset No. 15 Arizona State on Thursday and then lost 80-76 to a struggling Arizona team Sunday, a winnable game in which they missed 19 free-throws and 12 of 14 3-point attempts.

And with the second half of the Pac-10 schedule bringing difficult road games, including USC, UCLA, Arizona State and Arizona, Cal coach Joanne Boyle said the pressure is on her team. Cal is 4-5 away from home this season.

"If we had won that (Arizona) game, maybe we wouldn't be feeling like our backs are against the wall," Boyle said. "But I feel like our backs are against the wall as far as our team taking care of business on the road. We need to go into these games ready to compete."

Both of the Southern California teams came into this season with expectations that they would be contending for the Pac-10 title. USC is holding up its end at 7-2, one game behind league-leading Stanford.

The Women of Troy (13-5 overall) have righted themselves after dropping two games in the Bay Area over New Year's weekend, including a 21-point loss at Stanford. USC is being led by junior guard Eshaya Murphy, who has posted 12 consecutive games in double figures. Sophomore guard Camille LeNoir is coming off a career-high 27 points last week against UCLA.

"We're making a few more baskets I guess," USC coach Mark Trakh said. "Defensively, we are playing a little better and we've been rebounding a little better. But the way Cal goes after it on the boards, that will be the main factor when we play them."

USC is playing without junior forward Jamie Funn, a part-time starter this season who was lost for the season with a hip injury that required surgery. Sophomore guard Brynn Cameron is also questionable for the weekend with a hip injury.

Stanford — bumped three spots to No. 11 in the national rankings this week — begins the weekend at Pauley Pavilion against UCLA (10-8, 5-4). The Cardinal own a 14-game winning streak in this series. UCLA's last win came at Pauley on March 3, 2000.

The Cardinal (13-4, 8-1) have won seven in a row since dropping consecutive road games to Washington and Boston College in December.

The Bruins, meanwhile, are struggling despite their loaded backcourt of Nikki Blue, Noelle Quinn and Lisa Willis, fueling speculation that coach Kathy Olivier's job may be on the line. UCLA has lost four of its last seven games.

"People had high expectation for us and it's hard to lose games in the manner in which we've lost them," Olivier said. "We need to get our act together and do all we can to make this season something we aren't going to dread later in life."

### CAL HOLDS ON FOR VICTORY

**By John Crumppacker, San Francisco Chronicle**

**January 20, 2006**

The Cal women's basketball team was on the short end of a shockingly lopsided 39-0 disparity in bench scoring against Arizona State on Thursday night.

Fortunately for the Bears, their starters outscored the Sun Devils' 66-25 and that was enough for an overall 66-64 victory at Haas Pavilion.

The win over the 13th-ranked Sun Devils gives Cal a 13-5 record overall and a 5-3 mark in the Pac-10. ASU is 14-4 and 5-3 in the conference.

"Just a great game for us," Cal coach Joanne Boyle said. "You saw how hard this team plays. There was nothing left in the tank. I thought we ran out of gas with 10 minutes left and were on fumes with five minutes left."

With a penchant for throwing the ball away and missing free-throw chances, the Bears turned what looked like a rout in the early going into a frantic and uncomfortable finish. Cal had 24 turnovers and made only 13 of 25 free throws.

The Sun Devils made it 62-60 on a 3-point shot by Amy Denson with less than a minute left. The Bears held on thanks to an inside basket by Ashley Walker with 37 seconds left and single free throws by Reneé Wright at 0:13 and Jené Morris at 0:08.

"That's our struggle," Boyle said. "I don't know if that's our youth, if it's a young team learning to work for each other. We struggle with turnovers and free throws. We were 13-for-25 for free throws. That could have helped us, too."

On the plus side, the Bears pounded the Sun Devils on the boards, 45-35, and shot 55 percent from the floor while ASU shot 38 percent.

"We're slumping," Arizona State coach Charli Turner Thorne said. "We're not playing good basketball. We're in a little funk right now."

Cal welcomed back Boyle and freshman Devanei Hampton after brief absences. Boyle returned from a family emergency in North Carolina while Hampton returned from a one-game suspension for being involved in a fight at her former high school.

"It's in the past. Got to look for the future," Hampton said of her one-game sit against Stanford. "You learn from mistakes and grow from them."

Hampton was an early spark for the Bears but was slowed late in the second half with an ankle injury that literally had her crawling off the court on her hands and knees. The 6-foot-3 front court player had 17 points and 14 rebounds.

It was peripatetic guard Alexis Gray-Lawson who carried the Bears, however. Asked to take the ball out on every possession and play most of the game, the 5-foot-8 dervish had a game-high 23 points in 36 minutes.

"That was huge. That's a leader for you," Boyle said.

Said Gray-Lawson of her night's work: "I was really tired. I got used to it after awhile and got my second wind."

The Bears had a 56-46 lead with 7:22 remaining in the game but could not hold up to a fresher ASU team. But a Gray-Lawson driving layup

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with 1:13 to go put the Bears up 62-57 and helped stave off an ASU comeback.

The Bears bolted to leads of 8-0 and 25-9 before the Sun Devils began pressing to get back in the game. With a 10-2 run, they narrowed Cal's lead to 27-19 but two baskets by Morris and one by Hampton pushed the lead to 36-24 at halftime.

Briefly: The Bears marked the two-year anniversary of former player Alisa Lewis' death with a halftime tribute. Lewis was a 20-year-old junior on the Cal team when she died suddenly on Jan. 19, 2004, from bacterial meningitis.

### FROSH RECRUITS PUTTING CAL WOMEN ON MAP

*By Michelle Smith, San Francisco Chronicle*

*January 14, 2006*

BERKELEY—How's this for a made-for-Hollywood story?

Five young, talented basketball players arrive at college at the same time, become fast friends and even faster successes, turning a beleaguered basketball program with a dynamic new coach into an instant contender. There's even a little drama involving the star center.

All the Cal women's basketball team needs now is an NCAA ending.

Cal's heralded freshman class — which includes a quintet of home-grown talent (Oakland's Alexis Gray-Lawson and Devanei Hampton, Modesto's Ashley Walker, San Francisco's Jené Morris and Fairfield's Shantrell Sneed) — has so far lived up to the considerable hype and catapulted the Bears into the upper half of the Pac-10 standings. At 12-4 and 4-2 in the Pac-10, Cal is off to its best overall start in 14 years.

They are, as Morris puts it, "changing the face of Cal basketball."

The Bears may be able to gauge how much has truly changed today when they travel to Maples Pavilion to take on No. 14 Stanford. The Cardinal have won the last 11 games in this series by an average 24.3 points, and 26 of the last 27 meetings.

"We've never played in a game that's this big," Walker said.

The challenge got even bigger Friday with the news that neither first-year coach Joanne Boyle nor Hampton will be participating. Boyle has not returned from North Carolina, where she has been since early in the week tending to a family emergency. Hampton, the team's leading scorer, was suspended for one game Friday for unspecified conduct detrimental to the team, her second suspension of the season.

Still, there's no evidence to suggest that the young Bears will be intimidated. They are either playing beyond their years or laying the groundwork for a remarkable future.

"They are going to be scary for a long time," said USC coach Mark Trakh, whose team lost to Cal in Berkeley on Dec. 30. "And I'm including this year when I say that."

That New Year's weekend sweep of USC and UCLA, considered two of the better teams in the Pac-10, marked a turning point for a program desperately in need of one. Coming off a friendly preseason schedule, Cal proved it could play. And with confidence building, the Bears, who haven't been to the NCAA Tournament since 1993, now have the brackets in their sights.

"We've exceeded my expectations," Gray-Lawson said. "I think we have a chance at a (Pac-10) championship if we can stay focused."

Not many people thought this would happen so soon. Not even Boyle, who assumed there would be more rebuilding to do in a program that endured 12 consecutive losing seasons, even as she inherited the best recruiting class in team history.

"They are surprising us," Boyle said. "They were all used to winning in high school. I think that's just part of who they are."

"Some of these kids are just gamers."

Cal is one of two Division I women's teams in the country — Mississippi State is the other — to start four freshman. But their talent, their confidence and their comfort playing together has made it work.

Hampton, considered one of the country's most promising young centers, averages 15.5 points a game. Along with Friday's announcement, she was suspended for the first two games of the season. When she's played, she's played very well, with three double-doubles and five 20-point games.

Gray-Lawson, the fearless, aggressive guard who splits time at both spots in the backcourt, is next at 13.1 points a game and has played more minutes than any player on the roster.

Walker, the lithe, athletic forward-center, is the team's leading rebounder (7.3 rpg), has three double-doubles in the last four games and leads the Pac-10 in blocked shots at 1.94. Morris, the point guard who has battled injury problems, is second in the conference in steals at 2.86 per game. Sneed, meanwhile, is finding her way off the bench, providing depth in the frontcourt.

"People didn't expect a bunch of freshman to do as well as we've done, especially with a new coach," Sneed said. "Coach talks to us a lot about small steps. But I think all the small steps we've taken are preparing us for something bigger."

There is no lack of ability or confidence among this group. But what's come easily has also gone easily of late.

After their big weekend sweep of USC and UCLA, a set of games that made Cal a hot topic of national women's basketball conversation, the Bears hit the road and promptly hit the skids at Oregon, losing 70-41.

Boyle said after the game that her team "gave up" in posting its lowest offensive total of the season.

Hampton sees a valuable lesson in that experience.

"I think it's probably something that needed to happen to us," Hampton said. "We need to be reminded that nothing is a given. I think in order to become a winner, you need to lose sometimes."

Away from the court, the freshmen five have become inseparable. They spent the summer forging their bonds and acclimating to one another on the court in the San Francisco Bay Area ProCity league.

All five, as well as injured sophomore Jessica Lawson (who was disciplined along with Hampton on Friday), live within shouting distance of one another in a complex of dorm suites on campus. How does one measure shouting distance? Literally.

"If we are not in each other's suites, we are always yelling out the windows into the courtyard at one another," said Walker, who lives with



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Lawson, directly below the unit Gray-Lawson and Hampton share with two other roommates. Morris and Sneed live two doors down from there.

They shop together, study together, eat Sunday dinner together at the Hamptons' home and drive together to practice every morning — their long bodies folded and crammed into Morris' Volkswagen Beetle.

"We're all we've got here," Hampton said. "We're maintaining a family."

### CAL, STANFORD TAKE TO THE ROAD ALL EVEN

*By Michelle Smith, San Francisco Chronicle*

*January 5, 2006*

If only Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer could bottle the confidence and balance her 16th-ranked Cardinal demonstrated in beating USC and UCLA so handily last weekend. Then she could pack it up and take it on the road to Oregon.

Cal coach Joanne Boyle can relate completely. What her Bears accomplished at home is also too good to be left behind now.

For the first time in a very long time, the Cardinal and the Bears will venture on a Pac-10 road trip neck-and-neck in the conference standings, both 3-1 behind Arizona State (12-1, 3-0), after impressive sweeps over the Southern California schools.

Cal is the hottest team in the conference after what might be a turning-point weekend for a long-struggling program. At 11-3, the Bears are off to their best start in 14 years. Boyle isn't ready to rest on her laurels just yet.

"Those were big wins for us, don't get me wrong," Boyle said. "But we've got to keep the kids focused. We talked after the UCLA win (Friday) that we needed to come down off the high and get ready for USC (Sunday). We need to do that again."

Boyle admitted that her young team — freshman center Devanei Hampton was named the Pac-10 Player of the Week — has achieved a level of play early in the season that has caught her by surprise.

"Some of these kids are just gamers," Boyle said. "They have found this chemistry between them and hopefully, we can keep it going."

The road, meanwhile, has not been particularly kind to Stanford this season. The Cardinal are 3-3 away from Maples and have lost their past two road games, against Washington and Boston College.

But those defeats seemed like ancient history after the Cardinal's impressive display against USC and then UCLA — a series that saw the team's top two players — center Brooke Smith and guard Candice Wiggins — re-establish themselves as one of the nation's best inside-outside combinations.

Wiggins scored 56 points in the two games, and Smith finished the weekend with 43 points and, perhaps more importantly, 25 rebounds. Smith's improved rebounding has proven key while the Cardinal has weathered the absence of junior post Kristen Newlin, who was the team's leading rebounder when she was sidelined with a stress reaction in her left thigh bone. Newlin has missed six games, but might be back on the floor in the next couple of weeks.

Stanford might get sophomore guard Cissy Pierce back in time for the Oregon trip. Pierce sprained her left ankle in the USC game and did not play against UCLA.

"I think how we want to play as a team is coming into focus," VanDerveer said. "They are starting to see things they didn't early."

The Cardinal will need all the help they can get in Saturday's game at one of the Pac-10's most hostile venues: Oregon's MacArthur Court. Stanford has lost five of its past seven games in Eugene, its last win in the 2002-03 season on a buzzer-beating shot by Nicole Powell.

"It seems like it's just that way on the road," VanDerveer said. "But we've had that kind of experience already at Minnesota and Texas Tech and Boston College. So we will be ready to play."

### 'THE PLACE I'M SUPPOSED TO BE'

*By Debbie Rosenfeld-Caparaz, Cal Sports Quarterly*

*Winter Issue 2005-06*

Joanne Boyle turned around prepared to see her attacker.

She had just finished her regular run on the Duke Golf Course and was drying her hair after a shower, preparing to return to work. Suddenly, she felt a stabbing feeling in the back of her head.

"I thought there was actually someone standing behind me with a knife because it felt like that," said Boyle, who was in her ninth season as a Duke assistant coach at the time. "Nobody was there. Then, I thought, 'Did you electrocute yourself with the hair dryer?'"

Boyle dropped the hair dryer and sat down, hoping her nerve endings would stop flickering like they were on fire. The sensation didn't pass, and she knew something was terribly wrong. Boyle had suffered an arteriovenous malformation in her brain, which is a one-time eruption of blood vessels that produces stroke-like symptoms.

The date was Nov. 28, 2001, and if it wasn't for the right combination of circumstances, luck and faith, it very well could have been the last day of Boyle's life. Instead, she credits that day with changing her life for the better.

Boyle left the locker room in search of help, but the usually crowded hallway was empty. On the bottom floor of a six-story building, she staggered down the long hallway, intent on taking the elevator to her fourth-floor office.

"I thought I was going to pass out any second," said Boyle, who was only 38 at the time. "The elevator is never there. It's always a five-to-seven-minute wait. I remember thinking I'm not going to make it to the elevator. Once I got close, I just said to myself, 'God, please just let the elevator door be there.' It was there. Right then, I had a little bit of a sense of peace."

Boyle made it to the office, and Gale Valley, another Duke assistant, called for an ambulance. By this point, the stroke really started to happen. Boyle's speech began to slur, she drooled, and the heaviness she felt in the locker room became 10 times greater.

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When the paramedics arrived, it was clear that her condition was brain related. It took awhile for Duke head coach Gail Goestenkers to grasp what was happening to her long-time aide.

"Gail looked at the guy and said, 'Maybe she's dehydrated,'" Boyle said. "I'm thinking in my head that I'm a little more than dehydrated." The ambulance whisked Boyle to the hospital, and events continued to fall into place that ultimately saved her life.

Assistant coaches are frequently on the road recruiting, so if Boyle had been in a car or on a plane, she likely wouldn't have made it. Drugs needed to be administered within 20 minutes to stop the bleeding in her brain, and she was only five minutes from Duke University Medical Center.

Boyle also secured a leading neurologist with the help of former Duke star Georgia Schweitzer, who had interned at the school's hospital during her final year as a player and did rotations with Dr. Henry Friedman, one of the top neurologists in the world.

When Schweitzer learned of Boyle's symptoms, she called Friedman, who had boarded a plane to go to a conference. Friedman quickly disembarked and met Boyle at the emergency room.

Friedman knew that Boyle had a brain bleed, but based on the positioning of the blood, several angiograms – x-rays of blood vessels – failed to show what kind of brain injury she had. The hope was over time the blood would reabsorb into her body and a proper diagnosis could be made.

So, the waiting began in ICU and then in a step-down room for a total of 13 days. Andrew Schuler, a former boyfriend of Boyle's, slept on a cot in the hospital and was instrumental in the recovery process.

In addition to her stroke symptoms, Boyle battled vertigo and threw up every hour during her hospital stay. She was sensitive to everything, especially light and noise.

On the 13th day, Henry Friedman and leading neurosurgeon Allan Friedman (no relation) told Boyle that they wanted to do one more angiogram before they put her into rehabilitation.

"That was my only bad day in the hospital because I thought I can't do anything for myself," Boyle said. "How am I supposed to go to rehab and function? Andrew isn't going to be there with me. That was the only day I thought I'm really going to be a vegetable living at my parents' house."

Awake during the angiogram, Boyle heard the techs exclaim, "There it is. Look!"

"Two things went through my head," Boyle said. "Oh my goodness, what does that mean? And thank goodness they found something."

Around midnight, with Schuler by her side, Boyle learned she had an AVM and that she needed immediate brain surgery. Allan Friedman told her she'd be fine because he had done about 100 of these procedures. Through it all, Boyle maintained her humor and replied, "You've only done 100. If you would have said, 1,000 ...."

"While Joanne was in the hospital, we were all pretty scared," Schuler said. "But we all managed to stay optimistic. Joanne has an amazingly strong faith. It really served her well through the ordeal."

Within 48 hours after the surgery, Boyle was appreciably better. Without extra blood in her head, the pressure on her nerve endings was alleviated. She was throwing up only once a day and could finally control some movements. In a day and a half, she could walk 20 feet with a walker. Fine motor skills, such as feeding herself, returned later.

True to the competitive nature that drove her as a player and coach at Duke, Boyle rehabbed at the hospital for two or three days determined to make a quick and full recovery. After that, she was sent home for further rehabilitation.

"I was rehabbing four-to-six hours a day," said Boyle. "The occupational therapist emailed me after I got out of the hospital and said how proud she was of me for fighting for my recovery. I didn't know it then, but I was fighting just to be normal again."

## Returning to Coach

After about a month away from work, Boyle knew that returning to her beloved Blue Devils would provide her needed emotional support. Goestenkers agreed to let her return for half days. At first, Boyle attended practices, but didn't play an active role and sat in the stands for a few games.

Boyle gradually built her stamina and was back to full strength by the end of February. The doctors even cleared her to travel with Duke to the 2002 NCAA Final Four in San Antonio, Texas.

"Everybody was a little surprised (at Boyle's quick return)," Goestenkers said. "We didn't expect her to be able to come back on the bench with us and go to the Final Four. She was a tremendous inspiration to us."

Even during her recovery, Boyle's life was brimming with excitement. Prior to Duke's Final Four appearance, she accepted her first collegiate head coach job at Richmond. She was fortunate to be far enough along in her rehabilitation that she could make a good impression at her interview.

"I was at Duke for nine years, and I could have been there the rest of my life," Boyle said. "It was a great place to be in terms of basketball, but there was something inside of me that kept saying, 'Don't be complacent. Challenge yourself. Put yourself out there.' My fear was that I could stay at Duke the rest of my life and never really find out the purpose of my life. I also thought what can be so hard about being a head coach if you can live through this? If you fail at basketball, big deal. You're alive."

## Richmond to Cal

Boyle arrived at Richmond looking to engineer a similar turnaround that she helped direct at Duke. The season before her arrival in 1993-94, Duke compiled a 12-15 record and finished last in the Atlantic Coast Conference. Two seasons into her stint with the Blue Devils, the team notched 20-plus wins for the first time in 10 years and advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Richmond, meanwhile, posted a 14-16 overall record in 2001-02 and hadn't enjoyed a postseason appearance since 1990-91. In the Spiders' first year under Boyle the following season, they recorded a 21-11 mark and advanced to the quarterfinals of the WNIT. The school then compiled a 23-10 record (WNIT semifinals) and followed that up with a 23-8 showing and the school's first NCAA Tournament selection in 14 years last season.

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Boyle and her staff, which included current Cal assistants Lindsay Gottlieb and Kim Hairston, had just signed the 12th-best recruiting class in the nation, but Boyle knew it was time to move on.

"The only thing we first thought of after three years was that we finally get to take a vacation," said Boyle, who owned a 67-29 mark at Richmond. "I was tired and just wanted to enjoy what we had. At the same time while I was saying that, inside of me, I was feeling complacent again in a different way."

After meeting with Cal Athletic Director Sandy Barbour at the 2005 NCAA Final Four in Indianapolis, Boyle was sold on becoming the Golden Bears' next head coach.

"My most valuable training ground was being at Duke when it was at the bottom and seeing it rise to the top and stay there," Boyle said. "Knowing we were able to do it and how we did it and having the vision in my head of how to do it, is the reason why I said that it can be done at Cal."

When Goestenkers learned of her former assistant's career move, she felt success was imminent at Cal.

"I thought they got a steal," Goestenkers said. "I thought it was a perfect fit for both Cal and Joanne. I know Joanne is going to be a shining star in our profession."

### Optimism Abounds in Berkeley

Boyle, who replaced Caren Horstmeyer in Berkeley, is looking to lead Cal to its first winning season and postseason berth since 1992-93.

Heading into the 2005-06 Pac-10 schedule, the Bears were 8-2 and riding a four-game winning streak, and the players are enjoying playing for their new leader.

"In practice, she is strict and serious, but she finds ways to make us loosen up," said freshman guard Alexis Gray-Lawson. "She's so much fun off the court. You can talk to her about anything. She loves you as a basketball player and adores you as a person."

Gottlieb, who is in her fourth season working with Boyle, recognizes why there has been a smooth transition under the new regime.

"Joanne has been able to set a standard of work ethic, intensity and drive that those kids see everyday on the court," Gottlieb said. "They know they can't give anything less than their head coach is giving."

Boyle mentions Goestenkers and Duke's men's basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski as her primary mentors. Clearly, Gottlieb is proud to be learning the profession under Boyle.

"When the time comes, and I'm fortunate to get a head coaching job, the greatest compliment will be when someone says, 'Wow, she worked for Joanne Boyle. You can tell,'" Gottlieb said.

### What's Next

After her medical struggles, Boyle tries to focus on her present happiness. In the next couple of years though, she hopes to adopt a child.

"I can't even begin to do that now," Boyle said. "I have 12 young women who are trying to build something special here at Cal. My time is needed with them, establishing a foundation for this program. When they are further along and more comfortable with us and the expectations being apart of this team, I'll then consider taking on the responsibility of being a mom."

When Boyle retires from coaching, she may opt to join the Peace Corps. After earning her bachelor's degree in economics at Duke in 1985, she received her master's degree in health policy and administration from North Carolina in 1989 and planned to go overseas to play basketball for a year and then enter the Peace Corps.

Instead, Boyle competed and coached in Luxembourg and Germany for three years and began her college coaching career at Duke when she returned to the United States.

"My whole thought process related to the Peace Corps was that there's something about making an impact on other people's lives," Boyle said. "It has to be about more than just being on this Earth and living for however many years I'm supposed to be here. What's more rewarding than hopefully being an instrumental part in someone's college experience? Believe me, I have probably learned more from them than they have learned from me, and that's made me a better coach."

Cal is fortunate to have Boyle as its coach, and the feeling is mutual.

"I really feel like this is the place I'm supposed to be," Boyle said. "In five or 10 years, if I feel the same way, I'll still be here, as long as Sandy Barbour wants me."

## ON A MISSION TO BE HER BEST: NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE SPURS CAL BASKETBALL COACH

*By Ron Kroichick, San Francisco Chronicle*

*December 18, 2005*

BERKELEY—The hallway in the building connected to Cameron Indoor Stadium stretches more than 50 yards, with a stone wall along one side. Joanne Boyle, flush with panic, wobbled down the hall, leaning on the wall for support.

There always were people there, an athlete coming through one door or a trainer going through another. On this day, at this harrowing moment, there was nobody.

Boyle, then an assistant coach at Duke — 38 years old, perfectly fit, training for a marathon — had just taken a shower and dried her hair after her daily run. The pain struck suddenly, like a knife had been plunged into the back of her head. Boyle turned around, but nobody was there. She wondered if she had electrocuted herself with the dryer.

Her head felt heavy and her body flickered, as if jolted with tiny bolts of electricity. She shuffled down the first-floor hallway, thinking she needed to reach the women's basketball office on the fourth floor.

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As Boyle neared the elevator, she realized she could not make it much farther. She could barely keep her head up. “I’m going down,” she remembers thinking. Then she began praying for the elevator door to open. The building stood six stories high and athletes constantly used the elevator, so it often required a long wait. Boyle pushed the button.

And the door opened.

Today, Boyle, the head coach of Cal’s women’s basketball team, shows no signs she had a hemorrhage in her brain four years ago. Nothing in her tall, lithe frame or lucid, rapid speech suggests she needed delicate surgery to make her functional again. Nothing in her restless, energetic manner indicates she spent 13 days at Duke Medical Center, occasionally wondering if she might die.

Boyle, 42, takes her freshman-laden 8-2 team to Seattle on Tuesday night to open Pacific-10 Conference play against Washington. It is another small step in Boyle’s remarkable recovery, another modest milestone in her effort to find coaching challenges wherever she can.

Before Nov. 28, 2001, Boyle had settled into a comfortable routine at Duke. She played for the Blue Devils in the 1980s and was entering her ninth season as an assistant for Gail Goestenkors. They had built Duke into a national contender, not quite on the level of the men’s team but not far behind. Boyle flirted with the idea of leaving to become a head coach — she interviewed for vacancies at East Carolina and St. Joseph’s — but her heart really wasn’t in it.

Growing up in Pittsburgh, Boyle was an accomplished all-around athlete, but she did not picture a future in coaching. She blossomed late as a basketball player, at Duke and then while playing overseas. Stints in Luxembourg and Germany revived her passion for hoops and convinced her coaching was a viable career.

Still, climbing the proverbial ladder did not consume her. She found a home at her alma mater, working for a good coach, Goestenkors, and a school committed to women’s basketball. Boyle sometimes wondered if she was really challenging herself, if she was becoming complacent, but those thoughts usually faded — until her head began to throb.

“The sickness forced me out the door to say, ‘If you can overcome this, the next challenge in your life cannot even compare,’ “ Boyle said recently in her office in Berkeley. “I was scared to death, but I knew I had to do it. It was the voice inside you saying, ‘What’s so bad if you fail?’ “

This voice emerged only after the chain of events launched by that frightening walk down the hallway. Boyle insisted her panic subsided when the elevator door opened, even if the pain did not.

“Honestly, this feeling of peace came over me at that point,” she said. “I thought, ‘I’m going to be OK.’ “

The thought was not evident to Gale Valley, another Duke assistant coach, when Boyle staggered out of the elevator and tried to yell, “Gale! Gale!” Valley, in her nearby office at the time, rushed toward the elevator when she heard Boyle calling her name.

Boyle complained “My head! My head!” as she leaned against a wall and slowly slid down. Valley helped her sit in a chair, where Boyle slouched over, shaking, and started vomiting. Bobby Sorrell, an administrative assistant for women’s basketball, called 911 and Joe Angus, Duke’s trainer.

As Angus checked Boyle’s vital signs during the short wait for an ambulance, Valley and Goestenkors did not know what to think. They initially suspected Boyle was dehydrated, because she usually didn’t eat or drink enough. But the slurred speech and difficulty controlling her limbs pointed to something more serious.

Georgia Schweitzer knew it was more than dehydration. Schweitzer, who previously played at Duke and was at her parents’ home in Ohio that day, received a call from Loren Rice, another former Blue Devils player, about an hour after Boyle slumped in the chair. Rice had heard about Boyle from someone in the basketball office, and she described the symptoms to Schweitzer.

This was a pivotal conversation, because it prompted Schweitzer, once a pre-med student, to page Dr. Henry Friedman, a professor of neuro-oncology at Duke with whom Schweitzer had worked as an undergraduate. Friedman, an avid basketball fan who closely followed the women’s team, agreed with Schweitzer — it sounded like Boyle had bleeding in her brain — and immediately called Dr. Allan Friedman (no relation), a renowned neuro-surgeon at Duke and also a basketball fan.

Allan Friedman was driving to the Raleigh-Durham airport, on his way to a conference. He turned around and went directly to the emergency room at Duke Medical Center, where he assumed control of Boyle’s care. Boyle called Schweitzer’s connection with Henry Friedman “huge,” because it allowed her to receive top-flight, personal treatment virtually from the moment she arrived at the hospital.

Boyle spent more than half her time on the road in those days, between games and recruiting, so she was lucky to be in Durham when the hemorrhage hit. “If I was on a plane or in a car recruiting, it was all over,” she said.

Roger and Joan Boyle, who live in nearby Raleigh, reached the hospital later that day and discovered Joanne could neither talk nor move. Joan called the sight of her daughter in that condition as being “like a knife went through you,” the same image Joanne used to describe the first moment of searing pain.

It was clear to doctors that Boyle had a hemorrhage in her cerebellum, the part of the brain that controls coordination. Allan Friedman suspected the cause of the bleeding, but he was not entirely sure.

“My first two days in intensive care,” Boyle said, “I thought, ‘If I go to sleep, will I wake up?’ “

Friedman sensed Boyle had arteriovenous malformation (AVM), a genetic condition marked by the absence of capillaries, the tiny blood vessels linking arteries and veins. About 300,000 Americans are believed to have AVMs of the brain or spinal cord, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Researchers estimate that 2 to 4 percent of all AVMs hemorrhage each year.

The bleeding prevented Friedman from getting a clear view of Boyle’s brain. He planned to let the swelling subside and then take another arteriogram, an X-ray image of the arteries, to make the correct diagnosis.

Until then, Boyle sat in her hospital bed and made little progress. She had vertigo, so her head was constantly spinning. Her body kept flickering. She continued to vomit, day after unpleasant day, often pleading, “Can I please just stop throwing up?”

Boyle could not walk for several days, and she needed help eating because she struggled to hold anything in her hands. Andrew Schuler, a Duke engineering professor whom Boyle was then dating, recalled it as a significant achievement the first time they got her in the shower.

She never lost consciousness, but Boyle could only mumble words.

“I knew everything going on,” she said. “People could hear me, but it was like a 4-year-old talking, very slow. It feels like your tongue is



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about 10 times bigger than what it is. You're trying to get words out and you just can't."

Said Goestenkers, who visited Boyle nearly every day: "It was just so scary. Here's a person so full of life, so vibrant and confident and independent — all of a sudden, you see her in this bed and she's none of those things."

Finally, on Dec. 8, or 10 days after Boyle entered the hospital, the doctors were ready to take the second arteriogram. Henry Friedman came to her room and proposed an aggressive rehabilitation program, starting the next day. Boyle took his words as a warning the arteriogram might not show something fixable.

Boyle had found comfort in her religious faith during those uncertain days, but she could not imagine diving into rehab in her condition. She had made such little progress in those 10 days, she wondered if Friedman was essentially telling her she was "going to be a vegetable, just living at my parents' house."

"Is this really going to be my life?" she thought, panicky again.

But the arteriogram, as Allan Friedman had hoped, revealed the AVM. Boyle quickly went into surgery, a 4-to-6 hour procedure in which Friedman removed the abnormal cluster of blood vessels. That not only eliminated any chance of another hemorrhage, it jump-started Boyle's recovery.

Two days after the surgery, for the first time since the ordeal began, she felt like she eventually would return to normal. Her speech, albeit far from perfect, abruptly improved. She made eye contact with visitors. Now she was ready for rehabilitation.

"It was unbelievable how much I got back in 48 hours," Boyle said.

Said Schuler: "Before, we were really running on faith. After the surgery, it gave us physical evidence that things were really going better."

Allan Friedman still was not confident Boyle would regain full coordination, but she tackled rehab like, well, a former Division I athlete. She soon began walking, with the help of a walker, and feeding herself, so the rehabilitation center sent her to live with her parents.

She stayed with them for about three weeks and continued rehab as an outpatient for six months, regularly making two visits per day. She started with fine motor-skills exercises, such as putting buttons on a string, and worked her way up. Three or four months after the surgery, she was walking and speaking normally.

Allan Friedman traced Boyle's rapid recovery to two things: The bleeding in her brain was limited and she showed tremendous motivation in rehabilitation.

"She could have been left with a permanent deficit," Friedman said. "We were fortunate."

Boyle resumed coaching at Duke early in 2002, first working half-days and slowly building up as she regained strength. Her doctors did not allow her to travel until mid-March, when Duke reached the Sweet 16. Then, as the Blue Devils made their way to the Final Four, Boyle's renewed ambition merged with her history in an elite program.

Richmond athletic director Jim Miller, after talking to Boyle's doctors about her condition, offered her the head-coaching job without a formal interview (they had dinner in Richmond and met briefly after an NCAA Tournament game). She quickly accepted, sensing Richmond was similar to Duke and a good fit.

Boyle promptly guided the Spiders to three consecutive 20-win seasons, including the school's first NCAA berth in 14 years. She was a hot commodity again, and Cal appealed to her as another fresh challenge, so she bolted in April.

Boyle spoke graciously of Miller and her time at Richmond, but she also made a point of saying she's excited about Cal's efforts to market women's basketball. The implication was that Richmond did not support her program the way she wanted.

Miller, asked if he was surprised when Boyle left, paused for several seconds and then said, "I'm going to answer this way: Nothing surprises me. ... I don't think she was looking to leave, it was just a position that came along at the right time."

Boyle liked the idea of coaching in the Pac-10, working for athletic director Sandy Barbour and living in a metropolitan area. She inherited a program dragging along 12 consecutive losing seasons, but previous coach Caren Horstmeyer also left behind an acclaimed freshman class.

Upon arriving in Berkeley, Boyle discovered many of her new players came from tough, diverse backgrounds, seldom the case at Duke and Richmond.

"That really appeals to me, because when you talk about having a purpose in your life: Is it winning basketball games?" Boyle said.

"Honestly, am I going to leave this earth saying, 'Oh, I won 200 games, great for me?' No, it's what you do on a daily basis to make an impact on somebody else's life."

Boyle finds herself thinking more about "her purpose in life" now. Her father, Roger, said the ordeal changed her daily interaction with people, making her less timid and more willing to say what she's thinking.

Four years after her life-altering experience, Boyle has a small metal plate inside her head — and a 4-to-5-inch incision from the top of her head to the base of her skull — but few other lingering effects. Her left hand sometimes twitches, her speech slurs slightly when she becomes extremely tired, and she no longer can play basketball.

But to Joanne Boyle, these annoyances do not detract from the big picture.

"It's hard to say, but I really am glad this happened to me," she said. "It changed my life, all for the good. ... It really made me re-evaluate who I wanted to be. I fail a lot, but I feel like I hold myself more accountable to what my purpose is."

Joanne Boyle

Steeltown roots: Grew up as self-described "tomboy" in Pittsburgh, where she starred in volleyball, basketball, track & field (as high jumper) and softball

On Tobacco Road: Part of Duke's first class to receive women's basketball scholarships; played for Blue Devils, 1981-85, and ended her career second on school's all-time list for points and assists

Unlikely combo: Graduated from Duke with economics degree, then earned master's in health policy and administration at rival North Carolina; never underestimate the lure of in-state tuition

Overseas stint: Played and coached professionally in Europe for three-plus years, in Luxembourg and Germany

Rise of a power: Spent nine years as assistant coach at Duke, helping head coach Gail Goestenkers build Blue Devils into national force; team won 20 games seven times and twice reached Final Four

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Scary time: Rushed to hospital on Nov. 28, 2001, later diagnosed to have bleeding in brain caused by arteriovenous malformation, a genetic problem with blood vessels; temporarily lost ability to talk and move; underwent brain surgery on Dec. 8 and regained function after several months of arduous rehabilitation

Onward and upward: Accepted job as Richmond head coach in April 2002, less than five months after surgery; guided Spiders to three consecutive 20-win seasons, capped by NCAA Tournament appearance in March 2005

Go west, young woman: Took job as Cal's head coach in April 2005, inheriting program with 12 consecutive losing seasons; has led Bears to 8-2 start against mostly soft nonconference schedule; opens Pac-10 play Tuesday night against Washington

### POOL'S CAREER NIGHT DROWNS SPARTANS

*By Stephen Chen, Daily Californian*

*December 9, 2005*

Cal women's basketball coach Joanne Boyle said she was nervous for two days leading up to last night's road game against San Jose State, and her team's lackadaisical pregame shootaround did not alleviate her uneasiness.

"I brought the team in the locker room before the game, we had a big talk," Boyle said. "I think they really responded and produced."

Boy, did they.

The Bears (7-2) hit six of their first seven shots to open up a 14-1 lead in the first half and coasted to a 78-57 victory last night at the Event Center in San Jose in what was arguably one of the team's most complete wins of the season.

Four of five Cal starters reached double figures as the Bears posted their highest scoring game of the season.

Boyle, who has stressed the importance of dominating the first five minutes of each half all season, saw her team respond in extreme fashion again in the second half. Cal posted the first ten points following the intermission to take a 46-27 lead.

"I think they really do know the importance of coming out strong," Boyle said. "But the growth of this team is to not have me go in there and say what I have to say in the future."

It was supposed to be a matchup of talented post players. The Bears freshmen duo of Devanei Hampton and Ashley Walker went against two All-WAC players, senior Lamisha Augustine and sophomore Amber Jackson, but three of the talented quartet got in foul trouble.

Instead, Cal received breakout performances from several of their guards-most notably by junior Sarah Pool.

Pool took the point position in place of freshman guard Jené Morris, who had a minor back injury, and scored a career-high 22 points. The junior was perfect in five attempts from three point range and made all seven of her free throws.

"She really stepped up," Boyle said. "She's playing a tough role, and I'm proud of her for responding to every role she's been given."

Freshman guard Alexis Gray-Lawson added 18 points.

The Spartans (2-4), who lost 76-64 to No. 6 Rutgers last week, couldn't find the basket all night long. The Cal defense, which has held opponents to 52.8 points a game, continued its dominance.

Nine Bears turnovers in the first half, however, prevented Cal from opening up an even bigger lead.

The Bears return to action tomorrow as they take on South Carolina State (3-2) at 2 p.m. at Haas Pavilion in their final game before starting the Pac-10 season.

### ONCE UNDERRATED, NOW STEALING THE SHOW

*By Jon Doss, Daily Californian*

*December 1, 2005*

The Cal women's basketball team trailed Division I-AA UC Davis by four with a little over seven minutes left in the first half when freshman standout Devanei Hampton fell to the floor.

All eyes were on the 6-foot-4 former McDonald's All-American center as she lay in pain on the parquet at Haas Pavilion.

The Bears fans, already uninspired by Cal's first half performance against the undersized Aggies, had suddenly found another setback to dwell on.

UC Davis' faithful crowd, which had made its way to Berkeley, was as raucous as ever when play began again minutes later, until Bears guard Jené Morris picked the Aggies Kimberly Smith for an uncontested fast-break layup.

The cheers couldn't quite overshadow the announcers voice on the microphone-"Reneé Morris!"

Wait-the PA didn't even know her name?

In just seven games, freshman Jené Morris has made a name for herself-well, almost-with defensive stints like that one. Her easily overlooked role as a defensive stopper is quite fitting, seeing as how, like defense, she may still be under-appreciated by the public.

Morris, a 5-foot-9 guard out of Urban High School in San Francisco was tabbed the No. 7 recruit on the NorCal Scouting Report upon entering Berkeley. Even with the accolades, she still couldn't get her fair share of attention. Four of the top six players above her, including Hampton, Alexis Gray-Lawson, Ashley Walker and Shantrell Sneed, had also committed to play for the Bears.

"To be honest, I didn't recruit those girls, so I didn't know a lot about them in general," says first year Cal coach Joanne Boyle. "I obviously knew about Alexis and Devanei because they were more on the national scene. Jené was playing more local and West Coast tournaments, and being on the East Coast we didn't get to see her a lot."

This may come as a shock to the local basketball enthusiasts who have witnessed Morris' success over the past years, as she almost single-handedly turned around the basketball program at Division V Urban High.

Morris took a team that had gone 0-36 in the prior two seasons and turned the squad into a Bay Area powerhouse that won three league

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championships, a North Coast Section championship and secured an appearance in the NorCal semifinals.

Her 23.2 points per game average as a senior was impressive, but because of her upbringing, she took more pride in being a stingy defender than a shoot-first guard.

"I guess I've noticed that not everyone can be a good defensive player-there are a lot of offensive players out there," says Morris. "Growing up, my coaches have always told us that defense wins games, so I was more for winning games than getting the most points on the scoreboard."

Morris burst onto the collegiate scene against Radford in the fourth game of the young season.

She didn't start, but had 12 points and nine steals-one short of the school record. Morris played 29 minutes, more than all but Renee Wright, Cal's lone senior.

"We could tell from her work ethic this summer that she was going to have an impact," says Wright. "We didn't know where or when, but we knew that she would be a great asset."

Since her near-record performance, Morris has complemented her defensive prowess with some offensive firepower.

She finished the contest against the Aggies with a game-high 18 points and four steals in another 29 minutes and tallied a two-day total of 31 points at the Caribbean Classic in Cancun, Mexico, during Thanksgiving weekend.

"I've played on AAU teams that have prided themselves on defense, so I knew my role on this team was to be a defensive player," says Morris. "But I didn't think that I could have such an effect on the offensive side."

Morris accredits her offensive output to the work she did on her three-point shooting over the summer. She said she felt that her long-range ability might be her niche in what is the No. 7-ranked recruiting class in the country.

"I've played with Devanei, Alexis and Ashley over the past couple of years through AAU, and I know their types of games," says Morris. "They're drivers and Devanei is a post player, so I figured they needed a three-point shooter in the recruiting class. I've worked a lot on my outside shot because I know they'll draw double-teams and have to kick it out."

The work has seemed to pay off thus far, as Morris is second on the team in both three-point percentage (34.8 percent) and points per game (12.5).

With each game she gains more recognition, but acknowledges that the pressure may increase.

Maybe flying under the radar wasn't so bad.

"There was more hype on (the rest of the class), so they were more of the focal points on the scouting reports for each team," says Morris.

"I just came as a surprise. I was coming off of the bench, so not many people took me seriously. That makes it easier."

Morris earned a starting spot after her performance against UC Davis and excelled in both games in Cancun. She probably won't be underrated much longer.

But if you ask Boyle, she's been respected all season.

"When I took this job, I felt like every coach in the country that knew her game came up to me and said, 'Your sleeper will be Jené Morris in that class.'"

Morris has certainly woken up, just as the public has to her talent.

## BASKETBALL JOANNE: LIFE OFF THE COURT FOR UC BERKELEY'S NEW WOMEN'S COACH

*By Sam Whiting, San Francisco Chronicle*

*October 2, 2005*

BERKELEY—Joanne Boyle's office at Haas Pavilion overlooks the pool. A skinny 6 feet, she'd get some attention on the deck. But Boyle, 41, has a gymnasium tan as the new head coach of the California Golden Bears women's basketball team.

—Were you always the tallest kid in class?

I had a big growth spurt in ninth grade. I grew 4 inches. I was really shy and gangly. The whole thing. Braces. Then I grew 2 inches in college.

—Where?

Duke. We were the first women's basketball class to get athletic scholarships, in 1981.

—What were your options after graduation?

There was no thought of a future in basketball. I worked for a company in Raleigh, in sales of home fixtures, bath fixtures. Miserable.

—What got you out of your misery?

What I really wanted to do was go into the Peace Corps. So I decided to go to graduate school.

—For the Peace Corps?

Health care was an interest of mine, so I did my master's in Health Policy and Hospital Administration.

—Did you make it to the Peace Corps?

No. It's still a goal of mine.

—What got you derailed?

I was dating a guy at Virginia. I would visit him and we'd play pickup games against the women's team. The assistant coach there, who'd seen me play at Duke, said "you need to go overseas and play." A month later he called and said, "I got you a job playing in Luxembourg." I took it.

—What happened to the guy in Virginia?

Broke up.

—What got you into coaching?

I would work out in the summertime at Duke. The coach said, "I want you on my staff." In three months I knew it was the calling for me. I stayed there nine years.

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—What made you leave Duke?

I had a brain aneurysm explode. I went down, had a stroke and had brain surgery, almost didn't make it. In rehab I thought, "if you can live through this, what is so hard about being a head coach?"

—Where did you go?

I went to Richmond three years ago as head coach.

—When did the Cal-dropout-turned-Counting-Crows singer weigh in?

On my (job) interview. I was joking with people that I'm the biggest Adam Duritz fan. They say, "You have a phone call," and I pick it up and it's Adam.

—Ever lived in California?

Never.

—Where do you live now?

The Elmwood.

—What's the best part of the job?

Being in practice with my kids. That is my sanctuary.

—What's the worst part?

The recruiting wars. I'm back in sales.

—Still single?

It just gives you more time to put into your work. It's not how I want to live my life.

—How do you meet people?

I don't have a social life.

—Still an athlete?

I can't play basketball anymore because of my stroke. But I'm a big runner and I lift.

—Swim?

I would drown in that pool.

—Suntan?

No, but I sit on my ledge and watch the water polo matches.

—You're religious, do you go to church?

I'm in the process of trying to find one. I've ventured to about four or five of them.

—Lead prayers before games?

I say a short prayer in a team huddle in terms of keeping players healthy. I'm not trying to convert them.

—What's your courtside demeanor?

Three technical fouls in three years. I don't throw chairs.

—Why do basketball coaches wear suits?

It's a strange profession.

## PLAYER Q&As ON CALBEARS.COM

Krista Foster – posted Feb. 25, 2006

### **What are the keys to beating Washington in the final regular-season game?**

"The biggest focus for us is rebounding because in the last meeting against them, they outrebounded us, and that really hurt us. Our focus is boxing out and knowing the scouting report, knowing their personnel. The coaches give us this huge scouting report, which is the key to winning. Our defense is going to be what helps us to win the game."

### **What will you miss most about senior Reneé Wright?**

"The things that I'll miss most about Reneé are her personality and her comforting way. If you ever need help, she's there for you. She's the backbone of our team. I don't think she gets a lot of recognition out of the starting five. She pulls the team together when things start to go bad. You see her on the court trying to get people together. She's positive and is always willing to work hard no matter what the circumstances are. I've known Reneé since high school. We've trained together since I was a freshman and ended up going to college together. She pushes me to be a better player."

### **How have you adjusted to your role of being the first or second player off the bench?**

"It was hard for me at first coming from high school where you play all of the time to playing sometimes five minutes or sometimes 18 minutes. I've learned to embrace that role and am thankful for the gift that I've been given by basketball. So many times I overlook the gift that I have, and I'm consumed with myself in terms of playing time. God has me on this team for a reason, whether it's playing 10 minutes, 20 minutes, whatever it is. I just try to be as positive as I can be on the bench and on the court. I just try to embrace that. I really admire Emmelie (Geraedts) and Keanna (Levy) who don't get to play at all. I think about that. I'm thankful because I'm able to play. Keanna and Emmelie come out to practice every day just like I do. They give everything they have every single day just like I do, but I get the opportunity to play. When I get the opportunities that I get, I just want to go in and play as hard as I can, knowing that I might not be here tomorrow. I just want to lead on a positive note whenever I'm in and be thankful for what I have."

### **What does it mean to you to be a member of the Cal team that ended 12 straight losing seasons?**

"Now that you say it, I think it's incredible that we've ended that streak. Since I'm a sophomore, I've only experienced one losing season. It feels so much better to be winning games than losing games, from this year to last year. Honestly, I hadn't thought about it. We just try to take



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things game to game.”

### **What’s the team’s approach regarding the chance to play in the postseason this year?**

“We definitely think about it. A few weeks ago with six or seven games left, Coach (Boyle) said, ‘Where do you want to be at the end of the season? Do you want to be sitting and watching (the NCAA Tournament) or playing? It was our motto, but there was a lot of stress on us because we were thinking about the future so much, wanting to get into the NCAA Tournament. That was our team goal. Now that it’s approaching really soon we all have it on our minds. We don’t talk about it too much. Like Coach says, we go game to game. I definitely feel like we want more to our season then to see it end at the Pac-10 Tournament or with one game, if we get into the NAAs. We want to do as well as we can. I definitely think it’s on our minds.”

Devanei Hampton – posted Dec. 30, 2005

### **How do you evaluate your performance so far this season?**

“I’m doing okay. I have a lot of things to work on, but I’m trying to be there for my team. I do what I can. Offense comes easier for me. I’m working on my defense. I want to make my defender work hard. That’s always a plus for me.”

### **What are you doing to improve on your free throw shooting?**

“It’s coming along. I have to make some before and after practice. It should come soon. Coach (Kim) Hairston helps me work on it more. I just need more repetition. I change my shot on free throws. I need to be consistent with the ones I make.”

### **How did your fall classes go?**

“I did well. I posted a B average. Before college, I wasn’t a big essay writer. But, my tutor taught me how to be a better writer. I spent a lot of time talking to my teachers. Coach (Lindsay) Gottlieb also schedules a lot of study halls. You had to get good grades.”

### **Has playing with your high school teammate, Alexis Gray-Lawson, lived up to your expectations?**

“It’s good. She isn’t going anywhere (smile). On the court, she knows how to give me the ball, and I know what she likes to do. There’s a lot of chemistry from all these years playing together.”

### **Has having Gray-Lawson at Cal helped make the transition to college easier for you?**

“She’s a good guard. I tell her that she’s my favorite point guard (smile). Her and Ivory Latta (North Carolina’s point guard) are my favorites. Lexi can do it all. She can dribble and shoot. She tries to be me. She can bang down there with post players. That’s what people don’t understand about her.”

### **Who are your role models?**

“My mom, my grandmother, my aunt and Pico (high school coach) have helped me a lot. Right now, the reason why I’m here at Cal is for my sisters so that they can have a better life and not live the life that I did.”

### **Is it important for you to be a role model to children where you grew up?**

“I tell kids to study and stay in school to make things easy on themselves. Then, they can go anywhere they want to go.”

### **Fans want to know if you have plans of not playing with the knee brace?**

“I just have to keep rehabbing and get more confidence in myself. If I play without it, I think I’m going to get hurt. I’m going to try this summer to play without it.”

### **What else are you interested in besides basketball?**

“Shopping for clothes. I just came from shopping yesterday.”

### **What did you get?**

“(Laughs). A whole bunch of clothes.”

### **What was your favorite Christmas present?**

“Lexi bought me some shoes, a jacket and some pants. My favorite colors are pink and purple. My mom got me some cute pink and purple pajamas.”

### **What did you get Lexi?**

“I bought her an outfit and some shirts.”

Alexis Gray-Lawson – posted Oct. 27, 2005

### **How have preparations for the start of the season gone for you?**

“It’s going pretty good. I’m just trying to stay focused with all of the hype going around Cal basketball.”

### **How well have you adjusted to college basketball?**

“At first it was a little hard, but after time, I got more adapted to the environment that I’m in. I’m doing a lot better.”

### **What strengths do you feel you bring to the team this year?**

“My biggest strength is leadership. I try to be a leader on and off the court. As far as abilities go, I can get to the hole. I can get past anybody. That’s probably one of the biggest things you need from a guard,”

### **Has junior point guard Sarah Pool been a big help to you?**

“Sarah and I have one of the most genuine relationships on the team. Most people are fighting for spots to get on the court. For us, it’s not about that. I understand that if she gets on the court before I do, it’s because she’s better than me in some aspects. Some of the weaknesses that I have she is great at. Her weaknesses I’m great at. We try to help each other at all times, definitely at practice.”

### **What are your impressions of Coach Boyle?**

“When I first met Coach Boyle, I didn’t know what to think. I thought she would be very strict, and we would be very fundamental. I’ve gotten a chance to know her and believe that she’s a very good coach. She helps us all to work on our strengths, instead of trying to limit us from doing certain things. Some coaches try to limit what you do. Coach Boyle wants you to be the best that you can be at whatever position she knows your strength is.”

# CALIFORNIA

## 2005-06 MEDIA CLIPPINGS

### **What else makes Coach Boyle stand out from other coaches you've had?**

"She's my first female coach. I've always had male coaches. I've always had a father figure. Now that my mother isn't around, Coach Boyle is always around to help me with things – relationship problems or school. You can always talk to her about anything. You can talk to any of the coaches about anything. That's a great thing about the coaching staff."

### **Is playing with your childhood friend, Devanei Hampton, lived up to your expectations so far?**

"As kids, I would have never thought that Devanei and I would be in the position we are right now. We argued so much when we were kids. Now that we've gotten older, we've become best friends and very close. Our families are very close. We decided that coming to school together would be the best thing for both of us, and it would be an easier adjustment to college. Everybody looks at us like we're sisters on the team. Devanei and I can count on each other for anything. When we first got here, if she got in trouble, I made sure that I got in trouble. When I got in trouble, she made sure she did. We're always together off the court."

### **How has the team responded to the news that Jessica Lawson would miss the season with an ACL injury?**

"We all realized when Jessica went down how important she was. Usually you look at players and you say that they're going to help your team, but you don't understand how they're really going to help your team until they're out. We see our weaknesses at this point. We realize all of our roles have gotten bigger."

### **It's less than a week until your first game in a Cal uniform. Tell me about the anticipation you're feeling.**

"I'm a little nervous. In high school when I was in the ninth grade, I remember throwing up before the first game because I was so nervous. I feel like I have the same edge. I actually did well in my first high school game. I'm hoping we can all come out and show the fans what we can do. We have five freshmen who are all local and who will have their own cheering section. It's going to be incredible."

### **What do you enjoy doing besides playing basketball?**

"I'm big on poetry. Shantrell (Sneed) and I are into poetry. I love hanging out with my teammates. One of the best things I can do is to be around my teammates because there's so much I learn from them each day. You have your best friends, and I have a cousin on the team, Jessica. We just found that out. Poetry is something you can always do. You go through so much as you get older. You want to write it down. For a lot of people that grow up in urban areas, it's like that."

Reneé Wright – posted Sept. 26, 2005

### **What is the mood of the team right now?**

"Very focused. Desire. I've never seen this much desire on the team in my three previous years being here. The team wants it, and everyone is starting to learn what it takes to be in the top five, top three or even No. 1 in the Pac-10. It all stems from coach (Joanne) Boyle and her assistant coaches. They have the right attitude and are breaking it down and are teaching us how to carry ourselves as a championship team."

### **What are the new basketball coaches like?**

"On the court, they're all very intense, but they're also understanding at the same time. Off the court, they seem like one of my teammates. Their personalities are exactly like us – carefree, funny, joking. They're a lot of fun. I'm enjoying them so much. It's amazing."

### **What are some of the new coaching staff's strengths?**

"Player-coach communication. If a player has a question, a coach is able to answer it and does a good job explaining why. Then, you just do it. If you don't get it right, the players and coaches are able to communicate back and forth. There's a discussion, instead of this is what you're told to do, do it regardless if you don't understand it. I love how they make a point to have an off the court relationship, as well. One thing that all of the coaches stress is that it's easier to tell a player on the court that they're doing something wrong or explain a drill to them if you have an off the court relationship. Then, a player doesn't think that coach is just getting on me again today. They've built that friendship off the court, so that when we get on the court, the trust is there."

### **What did you do over the summer?**

"I lived in the gym. It was really fun. I got to know all of the freshmen – Jené, Ashley, Devanei, Shantrell and Lexi. I even got to learn more about the upper-classmen. Playing Pro-Am with them this summer was a lot of fun. It helped me work on my leadership skills. That's going to be very important to the team this year. I really had fun playing basketball this summer. I had fun doing what I do. I wouldn't have asked for a different summer at all."

### **How do you see your role on the team as the only senior and as a captain with Sarah Pool and Krista Foster?**

"I feel that this year is very important that I am a leader, that I set an example. With a team of younger players, there tends to be ups and downs with everyone else. If I can try to be stable and set a great example, I feel that it will trickle down to the rest of the team. I'm concentrating on being a stable factor and being someone that my teammates can talk to and relate to."

### **What did you focus on in the off-season in terms of your game?**

"I focused on my moves off the dribble and getting that player instinct back. Reading the defense, going with the flow of the game, not trying to force anything."

### **How are the freshmen fitting in?**

"I'm really excited. The freshmen fit in so well with this team. Coach (Boyle) talks a lot about fit. If you fit where you are, you're going to be happy, and you'll be willing to work hard. As soon as the freshmen got here, they fit in really well. Our chemistry is amazing. I couldn't ask for any other team. For having five new freshmen and a whole new coaching staff, we're probably a lot further than some teams that have been together for years."

### **Being a senior, do you think a lot about life after Cal yet?**

"I'm a social welfare major, with an emphasis on child psychology. I just want to enjoy the year, but I know that I need to start looking at my future. Right now, I'm pulling out applications for nursing school. Even the military has crossed my mind because of the stability, and I love to travel. I grew up in the military. My dad was in the Air Force. That's the branch I would probably go into. My mom was also in the reserves. They both worked in hospitals while in the military. But, right now I'm really into figuring out what nursing school I want to go to and enjoying my last year to be a "kid." I'm excited to get into my adult life."