

DAILY PILOT

From The Sports Desk

Bruins party in Newport Beach



From left, Jason Bell (NFL cornerback), Bernard Berrian (NFL wide receiver), Danny Farmer (former UCLA wide receiver), Barry Saywitz (UCLA alumni and event host), David Carter (NFL defensive lineman) and Matt Barnes (NBA player) at the UCLA O.C. Dinner Celebration. (Courtesy of Stephan Arias)

By Steve Virgen

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There were many reasons why UCLA fans gathered in Newport Beach Saturday night. They came together for a party, to drink and dance, and to raise money for the Wooden Athletic Fund at the luxurious home of Barry Saywitz, a UCLA alumnus.

Tom Reineke, also an alumnus, had another reason to show up. He wanted to take pictures with former UCLA athletes and current Bruin coaches Ben Howland and Rick Neuheisel.

Reineke smiled during and after posing for a photo with Matt Barnes, the tattooed hoopster who'd much rather had been playing in the playoffs if the Lakers could've gotten there. But he was OK with pleasing UCLA fans.

"That was for my 9-year-old son," Reineke said with pride. "He's a big NBA fan. His room is filled with those Fatheads, everyone from Steve Nash to [Andre] Iguodala."

Reineke had to tell me another reason why the UCLA fans gathered in Orange County.

"This is for the athletic department," he said. "Title IX took away a lot of scholarships. This type of function helps the department to privately fund those programs."

Thanks for the education, Tom.

The funds raised were definitely noteworthy: approximately \$100,000 was raised, \$30,000 more than last year. There were about 400 guests in attendance, 100 more than last year when it was at Saywitz's home.

"We had a good time last year and it's going to be even better this year," Saywitz said early in the evening when guests were having their first rounds poured at the open bar. "This is the fifth year [of the UCLA O.C. Dinner Celebration]. Prior to having it here this was at a hotel and it made it hard to raise money. This is more of a festive event here and I think people enjoy it more."

Saywitz said it was important to have a UCLA event in Orange County because more support is needed for the Bruins in this county. I guess it was so important to him that he said it was OK for the Daily Pilot Sports Editor to come, even if he's a Fresno State alum.

I had a feeling I stuck out with my notebook in hand. Some of the guests realized I didn't belong. One of them asked me to leave my seat at a dinner table because I was done eating. The man wanted to sit next to a guy who's a big-time UCLA supporter from Beverly Hills. They didn't want to give me their names.

But that's OK, I got up and moved. There were others who were fine with a reporter on site.

Cade McNown, the former great UCLA quarterback, was cool.

"I'm just here like everyone else," said McNown, 34, now working in financial services.

I asked him if he was at the event to dance when Flashback Heart Attack started to belt out hits from the 80s.

"You're going to dance with me?" he asked me, jokingly, I hope.

We had a good laugh.

It's not like I didn't know anyone at the event, and besides I was there to meet people. People like the members of [Flashback Heart Attack](#) are good people. They said they love playing events like the one in Newport Beach because early in the evening it may seem the rich folk are stuffy, but later in the night they party like everyone else.

They were right. Flashback Heart Attack, who are at The Harp Friday night, played at the event last year. They were so good, they were asked back. And, once again Neuheisel got on stage to play guitar and sing with them.

It looked like everyone was having a good time, even a couple of Bulldogs. Bernard Berrian, also of Fresno State, was in attendance. It's not as if he's busy since the NFL is amid a lockout and he doesn't need to be with the Minnesota Vikings anytime soon. But don't ask me why he was there.

There were more friendly faces in attendance. I saw Terry Smith, whose daughter Madie Smith (Corona del Mar High) plays volleyball at UCLA. John Ursini of Newport Rib Co. and Patrick Senske, a Corona del Mar High parent and Daily Pilot Cup coach, were also there, as was Eric Lohman, who played golf at UCLA and is the director of golf at Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine.

Yes, the big names were there, too. In addition to McNown, Barnes, Howland and Neuheisel, Rafer Johnson, Jamaal Wilkes, Tyus Edney, Terry Donahue and Sinjin Smith were there among others.

"I love Orange County," Howland said. "We have the Ware twins [David and Travis] coming in and they are from Orange County [Huntington Beach] ... There is support here not only in terms for supporters but in terms of recruiting."

Saywitz said he wasn't sure if he'll continue to be the host of the event. He just wanted to enjoy the 2011 edition. He noticed the former UCLA athletes who were at the event last year came back again, because they had such a good time.

Ann Meyers Drysdale, the former UCLA basketball star, wanted to make sure she was there. She lives in Huntington Beach, so it's convenient, but she said she also enjoys being around people who love UCLA.

"This [event] is like a fraternity or sorority," said Meyers Drysdale, president and general manager of the Phoenix Mercury of the WNBA. "You just want to keep all the Bruins together. We all love where we went to school and we want to celebrate with everyone. It's like going to church."

It wasn't really church, but you get the picture.