Welcome to the fourth season of The Dirt From the Den! As many of you know, we strive to provide you, the students, with the information needed to know our opponent and get inside their heads. In addition, you’ll find the words to our school’s songs and a list of UCLA traditions to give you the true Bruin experience. It’s going to be an exciting year for UCLA Athletics, and you the fans are a vital part of the Bruins’ success. The home field advantage created by the students of “The Den” has been praised by the media, opposing fans and players, and by our Bruins. This is our Den and no one comes in here and pushes us around!

Who’s Entering OUR Den?
Scouting Report: Utah Utes

Today UCLA (0-0, 0-0) starts their 2006 season in non-conference against Utah (0-0).

When UCLA has the ball: With last year’s playmakers Drew Olson, Maurice Drew, and Marcedes Lewis all gone, the Bruins have a void to fill on offense. They enter the season with plenty of promise, but largely untested. Much of UCLA’s success will depend on what sort of form 23-year-old sophomore QB Ben Olson (#7) regains from high school, where he was regarded as the best prep player in the nation, after having thrown just 4 passes in 4 years due to time off for a Mormon mission. RB Chris Markey (#28) will join Olson in the starting backfield and looks to fill the spot left by Drew. And look for Olson to find plenty of support from a talented group of receivers, which includes Junior Taylor (#8), Marcus Everett (#9), and Joe Cowan (#26).

When Utah has the ball: Utah runs a spread offense that will give QB Brett Ratliff (#15) plenty of options to throw and hand to, including RB Darryl Poston (#10) and WRs Brian Hernandez (#16) and Marquis Wilson (#2). The big question when Utah has the ball will be what kind of defense UCLA will put on the field. Last year’s defense, plagued by injuries and plain bad play, ranked last in the conference, so there is plenty of room for improvement. Still departing seniors Spencer Havner and Justin London leave gaps for a talented, but inexperienced LB corps to fill. Look for FS Dennis Keyes (#11) to lead the Bruin defense, and for a much healthier defensive line, led by Brigham Harwell (#93) to defend better against the run.

Special Teams: Again, Maurice Drew leaves a void in special teams. Chris Markey has big shoes to fill left by the best PR in the nation from last year. However, in addition to reliable K Justin Medlock (#7), the Bruins add prep phenom K/P Kai Forbath (#15) to the mix, whom ESPN.com rated as the best kicker in the country as a high school senior.

Coaches: First, let’s give credit to Karl Dorrell for a fine 10-2 season last year. However, most of Dorrell’s assistants leveraged their success for other coaching opportunities. Perhaps the biggest story this year will be how the team adjusts to new offensive coordinator Jim Svoboda, who looks to continue the offensive success attained by Tom Cable, and new defensive coordinator DeWayne Walker, who looks to bring a new attitude to a revamped defense.

The Line
UCLA by 4.0

The Bruins’ march to a national championship (or better yet, a victory over USC) begins today with the University of Utah Utes (hereby referred to as the UUU, or U³, or just ‘ooo’ if you prefer). The UUU are coached by Utah native Kyle Whittingham. Coach is affectionately referred to as ‘Whit,’ as in “I care not a Whit that my players are criminals.” WR Fano Tagovailoa (#17) was arrested in March and charged with burglary and domestic assault in an incident involving a former female roommate, but Whit, in a downright trojanesque move, promptly reinstated Fano after a short suspension. Apparently lawbreaking is old hat for these Utahans, but we can hardly blame former Ute Paris Warren, who was really making an effort to be responsible when he stole a box of condoms from a local convenience store before a game with Texas A&M.

Coach ‘Whit’ prefers a wide open spread offense. We hope that QB Brett Ratliff, nicknamed ‘Ratty,’ can adjust to so many receivers on the field at the same time. We think he’ll be okay, given Utah’s soft spot for multiple options for one man. In addition to his contributions on the football field, Whit is also doing his part for his ‘student’-athletes in the classroom. That’s right, Whit is also a professor. What class you ask? Why, Athletics 1200: Varsity Football, of course. The UUU are so strapped for units that their university gives them credit to play sports. While acknowledging that the practice may be strange, Utah Athletic Director Chris Hill said “I don’t care. Our athletes need the credit to graduate.” We at the Dirt don’t fault the Utes for bringing student and athlete together like never before, but we want to know if we can enroll in Athletics 1220: Crimson Line Dance Team. So it seems Utah has stumbled upon a strategy for winning football we all might recognize – lax coach and delinquent players who don’t have to go to class. Wonder if Whit is friends with Pete Carroll?

CHEER LIKE CHAMPIONS!  Beat the Utes!
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