

UCLA coach makes most of opportunity

By Hannah Gordon
Daily Bruin

LOS ANGELES (U-WIRE) — The clock is moving. Seconds silently slip away as the digital numbers change seamlessly on the big board overlooking the Rose Bowl. It is November but in seasonless Pasadena, the air is only cool, crisp. The breeze clears the sky for a soft view of the lavender mountains in the sunset. The kind of weather football was made for.

But while the mountains stand oblivious to time, the clock is still moving. UCLA offensive coordinator Kelly Skipper has decisions to make.

0:43 is ticking away on 4th-and-5. 0:02. The kicker takes the field.

A collective breath as the ball flies. Wide and short.

Exhale.

The disbelief remains even as the silence disintegrates. The whole bowl seems to growl like an upset stomach as the fans file out.

Can Skipper hear it up there in the box?

The board stares back indifferently.

0:00.

Oregon 21, UCLA 20.

Tomorrow his team will be skewered in the papers. Columnists will derail him and his colleagues for poor clock management. Monday morning quarterbacks will say they would have called the plays differently.

For a perfectionist like Skipper, this is hard to take.

Of course, had the 50-yarder flown through the uprights, this would be a different story.

"That's how small the margin of error is," Skipper says sitting in his office six months later. Knowing the margin of error both in the game and in a football career is slim.

"Pro football is so stereotyped," his father, Jim Skipper, running backs coach with the Carolina Panthers, said in reference to Kelly's size.

"You've got to fit certain dimensions and if you're not in that measurement, they don't want you," the elder Skipper says.

As the only African-American offensive coordinator in the Pac-10, Kelly Skipper does not exactly "fit the measurements" now either.

"You don't like to put a racial thing on it," his father says. "But there is also a reality. Race is al-

ways going to be a politically touchy issue."

With the departure of Tyrone Willingham for Notre Dame, there are currently no African-American head coaches in the Pac-10 and only three among the 117 Division I football programs. So while head coaches are always under scrutiny, the margin of error for African-American coaches is as small as the Oregon game.

Despite the type of scrutiny that follows games like the one against Oregon, Skipper wants to be a head coach.

"I didn't look at it that way," he laughs. "But as you bring it up there is (a hierarchy). I was very grateful to coach (Bob) Toledo for giving me this opportunity. He had faith in me and that's all I needed — an opportunity."

Cabot

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attitude in check and his mouth shut, he may be considered one of baseball's greats — up there with Ty Cobb and Ted Williams. But baseball fans look for a combination of incredible talent (which Henderson has), a little flair and personality (which he loves to show) and a friendly disposition (which the combined efforts of Cal Ripken and all the Lady Byngs in NHL history could not teach him).

Although in the end Rickey will be headed to the Hall of Fame, don't expect the streets of Cooperstown to be flooded with Rickey fans who have stuck with him every day through his 23-year career.

E-mail sports reporter Chris Cabot at chriscabot@dailyemerald.com.

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