

Yahoo! Sports:

Bucket List Destination for college hoops fans: John Wooden's Den inside the UCLA Athletic Hall of Fame

By: Jeremy Curtis

It was just another day in Westwood.

The campus at UCLA flowed as usual with the weekend looming.

A smattering of students walked to and fro in the Wooden Center and the UCLA Store.

Friday afternoon. An unusually crisp and rainy Friday in Westwood.

In another 24 hours, the UCLA Bruins toppled No. 10 Arizona, 71-49, moving into a tie for first place in the Pac-10. The drubbing was during a tribute day for iconic coach John R. Wooden.

Fittingly, Wooden's great-grandson, Tyler Trapani, scored the game's final basket. He is a UCLA walk-on who had never scored in a college game.

It was my first-ever game inside famed Pauley Pavilion, which will never look the same after upcoming renovations will temporarily close its doors.

Wooden won 149 of 151 games inside Pauley. He passed away last June and had a memorial service inside the very arena.

So, I set out Friday to get a little UCLA culture running through my veins.

Being a sports aficionado, I am certainly not naïve to the unrivaled accomplishments stockpiled by the Bruins of yesteryear.

Though I live in LA now, I transplanted from the east. Actually, I graduated West Virginia University.

My lone UCLA sporting event was a road game where the men's basketball team took on WVU, in Morgantown, back in 2007. The Mountaineers upset the No. 2 Bruins that day, but UCLA went on to the Final Four.

Fast forward to Friday.

I braved the elements, as many Angelenos wouldn't otherwise, and headed for the UCLA Athletic Hall of Fame, inside the J.D. Morgan Center.

To recap a fraction of the lofty accolades showcased in the Hall would take at least three of these articles. Befuddling and downright unbelievable describe the amount of winning boasted inside the vibrant museum.

It really is something.

Shrines pay tribute to countless student athletes who have starred in the gold and blue at UCLA.

Wooden. Lew Alcindor (later Kareem Abdul-Jabbar). Jackie Robinson. Arthur Ashe. Troy Aikman. Jackie Joyner-Kersey. Bill Walton. The list goes on and on.

One enormous championship trophy case dwarfs a human being. They've even got one simple trophy – which gets its own private case – that celebrates the fact that UCLA was the first school to win 100 NCAA championships.

There's an authentic Olympic torch from the 1932 Summer Olympics.

There's a mini theater where visitors can dial up highlight videos of the present and the past.

Two separate displays showcase dozens of Bruins who went on to play in the NBA and NFL.

Countless programs, news clippings and pieces of history celebrate a true tradition of champions.

But what's most impressive, if not inspiring, is a newer addition to the Hall back in October.

UCLA titled it: The Den.

It's an exact replica of Wooden's den in his modest Encino condominium. It was in such a den he spent his twilight years after retiring from UCLA in 1975.

The den sounds simple enough, but no. It's eclectic, unlikely and perfectly reflexive of the one-of-a-kind coach.

Photos, books, movies, basketballs, an antique desk, a small tube TV and a cheap-looking AM/FM stereo are among the items that reveal different parts of Wooden. His late wife, Nell, is credited with decorating the diminutive den.

He had letters from the White House. From President Nixon himself, who was in office at the same time Wooden's UCLA teams rattled off an unprecedented number of national championships.

Ten in 12 years to be exact.

Adolph Rupp (Kentucky) and Mike Kzyzewski (Duke) are the closest. They've each got four.

Oh, and Wooden had four undefeated seasons. Bob Knight (Indiana) had one.

Innumerable worn out record books, 664 wins and nine months after his passing, for a moment at least, it feels like the Wizard of Westwood is sitting right there beside you explaining his life wisdom and Pyramid of Success.

His humble belongings hardly reflect an owner of Wooden's status, especially in a town that fancies materialism and money.

That irony perfectly exemplified Wooden, who was about faith, family and friends.

And hard work. And winning.

Basketball enthusiasts benefit from generous contributions of Wooden's family, who made the display possible.

UCLA's Hall of Fame – along with The Den – should be on the bucket list of all college hoops fans.