

BY EMILY LERNER • BRUIN BLUE WRITER

*Professional sports enthusiast, college sports fanatic, Bruin Football office manager, successful actor, producer, and director—believe it or not, all of these roles are attributed to one person. UCLA alum Jolie Oliver has been working in UCLA Football for the past 26 years, 23 as Assistant to the Head Coach. One would imagine that running a smooth office operation for a high-visibility college sports team would be more than anyone could handle. To the contrary, not only*

*does Jolie have the office management in hand, but she has found a way to forge enough time for a second career in the entertainment world. While it may be difficult to see any connection that one career might have with the other, these two worlds seem to have a symbiotic relationship within her life. Bruin Blue spoke to Jolie about how she manages working at UCLA Athletics with her acting career, what each has taught her about life, and how the two intertwine.*



**BRUIN BLUE:** The first question I have is which came first to you; wanting to work in UCLA Football, or wanting to act?

**JOLIE OLIVER:** I grew up in San Francisco and went to Columbus Elementary School where we did a Columbus Day play every year. I played Queen Isabella and I decided, 'this is for me—this whole star thing is for me!' So I made up my mind when I was in third grade that I wanted to be an actor. That's all I wanted to do, to the chagrin of my mother. She hated the idea.

**BB:** So you grew up wanting to become an actor. How did you get from there to working in the UCLA Athletics Department?

**JO:** I went to UCLA because the theater program was so good. Right when I graduated, I thought, 'OK, I graduated in theater and I'm going to be an actress.' I honestly thought the world would open

up its arms to me and there I'd be, waiting.

As a student, I had worked at the Medical Center library, so when I graduated I told them I'd only be working three-quarters time because I was going to be an actress. Then I had some of the worst experiences imaginable; walking into places to hand in my resume and having people throw them away before I even left the office—right in front of me. I really had no clue. So I kept increasing my hours at the library until I was full-time. Then the position in Athletics opened up.

**BB:** Did this seem like the opportunity of a lifetime to you?

**JO:** Actually, I always wanted to work in basketball—I have no idea why—so I was always looking for something to open up there. But then I saw the position open in football and thought, 'I guess I could go into football, then if something opens up in basketball I could just go over there.'

**BB:** When was that? Did you start as the Head Coach's Assistant right away?

**JO:** That was in 1983. I started working for the offensive side, not the head coach, working for (former Offensive Coordinator) Homer Smith. My baptism into football was with Homer, and it really was baptism by fire because he was as prolific a person as anyone I've ever met—in all capacities. But what I did learn from him was that he always kept in touch with people, no matter how much he was doing or how busy he was. He always made the time to keep in touch.

Homer was doing more than anyone I'd ever met in my life to that point—he was writing books that were being published, he was creating a playbook, back in the day when there were no computers, so he was diagramming, creating plays, putting the book together. When I first came, I would type whatever the play was and I would physically cut out Homer's diagrams and paste them in, and you had to tape it so that no lines would show, because it had to be perfect. But whenever there was a break, he would be writing personal notes to people he knew throughout the country—former players, even current players.

**BB:** What would he write to a current player?

**JO:** He would write about something he saw on the field the day before; he would either compliment the player or tell him to remember something, or something like 'tell your dad I said such-and-such.' It made me realize back then: what excuse do any of us have

for not staying in touch with people? I learned it's very possible to stay in touch. And he was brilliant. He loved to talk about any subject and wanted to know people for who they were, not just what they did at work—he wanted to know their interests.

**BB:** How long did you work for Coach Smith before you began working for the Head Coach?

**JO:** I worked for Homer two and a half or three years. In 1986 I started working for (former Head Coach) Terry Donahue. Then I was thrown into another fire. Until I started working for Rick (Neuheisel), Terry was the person who knew more people than anyone I'd ever met. So when you know all these people, there's always activity, there's always someone who needs something.

**BB:** Was there a favorite time period for you in Athletics? Was there any event or events that really stand out in your mind? Any favorite moments over the past 26 years?

**JO:** I feel like I made the most friends with that initial group of people I first met in the 1980s. The players and coaches were closer to my age so I felt like those guys were more like me and my generation with respect to values. But they also happened to be a great group of people. Terry always said he wanted to recruit character, not characters. I think it actually worked because he was such a good judge of character.

As for favorite moments, I keep going back to those first years I was here. It was a magical period of time. We were going to Rose Bowls, everybody was working in the (J.D. Morgan Center) building where there were no closed doors—it was all cubicles—so you knew everybody who came into the building. One example I'll never forget is when Kareem (Abdul-Jabbar) walked into the building and within 30 seconds everybody knew he was in the building. Everybody knew because you could see it or someone whispered it. I loved those years. I loved the (1995 Men's Basketball) Championship in Seattle—that's still as high up there as any bowl game. And the Cotton Bowl in Troy (Aikman's) senior year. There was some amazing magic about that. We were in Dallas—the city that was going to pick him in the NFL Draft—and everything was about that.

**BB:** What have you learned from working in Athletics that's less sports-related and more about life that came as a surprise?

**JO:** I would never have imagined the teachers by example I had—mainly Homer and Terry. It was really, truly a blessing to have worked for those two and to have been a part of their work ethic and see how they live their lives and treat people. The lesson of how to treat people, no matter how busy you are, is probably the most valuable lesson I learned. That, and one other thing Terry taught me: that 'interruptions are the job.' He said not to look at something as an interruption, because it's not—that's the job!

**BB:** I know that you came to UCLA for the theater program. But then you ended up in Athletics. When did you decide to return to theater?

**JO:** I needed to get back to what I had always wanted to do with my life, and Terry agreed. So the way I got back in was by doing stand-up (comedy.) I figured I could do that at night and wouldn't have to take time off work. So I took classes and started doing stand-up. Then, after a while, I realized it was acting that I really loved. But I didn't start studying acting professionally at an acting school until Edgardo Acosta passed away.

**BB:** Edgardo Acosta was one of our department's most generous donors—he and his wife Francesca are the ones for whom our Acosta Center is named. How did his passing get you to acting school?

**JO:** I knew Edgardo through the football program—he was such a huge fan—and when he passed away, he left me the perfect amount of money that this school required to enter. So it was a UCLA Athletics connection that allowed me to start acting. Then once I got to the Beverly Hills Playhouse I started understanding what it takes to make this a career.



**BB:** The Beverly Hills Playhouse is the acting school you still attend. How exactly has it helped you to understand what it takes to make this a career?

**JO:** One of my teachers told me that you must create a concept for yourself. It's like getting anywhere—if you're in New York and want to get to Los Angeles, you map out how to go, otherwise you'll end up in Mexico or Canada. It's the same with a career. You know where you want to end, where you are now, so you have to ask, 'what does it take for me to get there?' What steps do I need to take to get there?' The Playhouse has been extremely instrumental in teaching its student how to create the ideal career. It's all-encompassing—that's why it's such a valuable place.

**BB:** I know you've been involved in movies in acting, directing, and producing capacities. Can you tell us a bit about the movies, for instance?

**JO:** I was in a short called "Couple Trouble." That was fun, but I didn't direct or produce—I just acted in that one. In "Metamorphosis" I played a businesswoman—I produced and acted in that. But I produced and directed "Rewind" and didn't act in that one either.

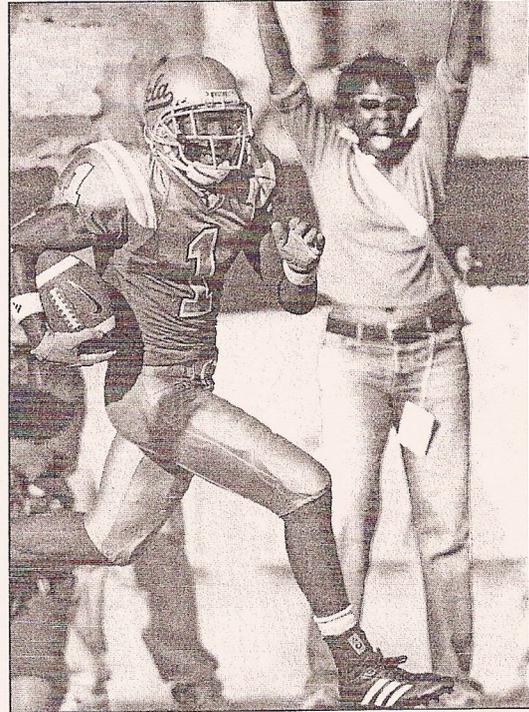
**BB:** How do you compare the three? Did you find that you liked them all equally, or did you like doing one over the others?

**JO:** It's tough in Hollywood—there's not a lot of roles out there for my type, particularly when you get older. So accepting that, an opportunity

presented itself to direct a movie. I had never really thought about directing because everything is your responsibility from beginning to end. But I've truly fallen in love with directing! I'm very proud of "Rewind" but it isn't quite finished. It's a Twilight Zone type of story, so they're finalizing the visual effects now. I will definitely be directing more in the future. The production part—raising the money to make the film—isn't as much fun, but I've found that I'm capable through the relationships I've made, the majority of which I made through my years at UCLA Athletics.

**BB:** I understand that you were also one of the leads in a play. Tell us about that experience.

**JO:** It was a pet project that just ended its run. A friend of mine showed me this play called "The Old Settler" which takes place in 1943 Harlem and seemed like a great vehicle for us. We had to present it to the Playhouse's production company then find a director. I did a lot of research about what was going on in history then. It was so much fun to develop the character; I had to ask myself, 'how do you create a person who fusses about everything and is never happy with anything?' Luckily, she was also very funny.



This page, clockwise from top left: Jolie Oliver performs her stand-up comedy routine; Oliver with former Bruins Roman Phifer (l), James Washington and Jerry Robinson; Oliver cheers for the Bruins at a recent game.