

UCI Aces Test On Rams Camp

SPORTS: Team's training
camp was school's showcase

■ By CHRIS CASACCHIA

University of California-Irvine is still buzzing in the aftermath of the **Los Angeles Rams** holding their first training camp in Southern California in 22 years.

The serene campus, which hosted the team for a month, appears to have made a good first



Izzi: HBO's 'Hard Knocks' was 'major driver in awareness and publicity for our program'

impression with fans, players and surrounding businesses, which benefited from the short influx of spending by millionaire players and the financial muscle of an NFL franchise.

It highlighted UCI's athletic facilities and came just before the institution got a different sort boost last week, when it moved up to No. 9 on **U.S. News & World Report's** annual

ranking of public universities nationwide (see related item in Addendum, page 20).

Both ends of the equation count with UCI Athletic Director **Mike Izzi**.

"Hosting the Rams training camp was a unique opportunity for us to showcase what UCI can do academically and athletically," Izzi told the Business Journal. "The overall exposure for UCI has been incredible."

➡ UCI 8



Rampage: mascot gets ready to amp up crowd at training camp game at UCI

UCI

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All the hubbub came off with nary a complaint reported from any perspective. The players took up residence on campus from July 30 to Aug. 25, and their drills drew some 53,500 fans from around Southern California, according to figures gathered by **The Brand Amp**. The Newport Beach-based agency handled public relations and marketing for UCI's athletic department during the Rams' stay, an effort that included producing videos on the school's YouTube site to highlight the attendance and other benefits that stemmed from the visit.

The agency tracked more than 650 written and broadcast news stories that mentioned UCI, according to data gathered by Chicago-based media analytics providers **News Exposure** and **CisionPoint**.

Hard Knock Life

The Rams, who left Los Angeles for St. Louis in 1994, got more exposure as the featured franchise on this season's edition of HBO's hit series "Hard Knocks," which follows a team, its players, coaches and other employees throughout training camp. The 1,475-acre UCI campus was the backdrop in many scenes, with players bowling at the student union, interacting with student workers, and riding motorized carts and Segways through manicured thoroughfares on the way to practice, meeting rooms and cafeterias.

The weekly show, which ran through the training camp, mentioned UCI more than 20 times, accumulating more than 33.5 million media impressions, according to Brand Amp.

That's translates into nearly \$3 million in advertising value.

"It was our goal—to create that exposure on a national level—and HBO's 'Hard Knocks' was certainly a major driver in awareness and publicity for our program," Izzi said.

Fringe Benefits

Branding and marketing exposure weren't the only benefits. The university also underwent a \$1.2 million renovation to house the Rams, which included a \$250,000 athletic field and 91 new, solid wood lockers.

The Rams will hold summer training camp at UCI for at least the next two years under a three-year, \$10 million lease that carries an additional two-year option (see related OC Insider item, page 3).

It was an OC homecoming for the franchise, which played at Anaheim Stadium from 1980 to 1994—and held training camp at UCI the last three years—before then-owner **Georgia Frontiere** moved the team to St. Louis, where the "Greatest Show on Turf" won Super Bowl XXXIV in 2000 with a high-powered offense led by **Kurt Warner**, **Marshall Faulk** and **Isaac Bruce**.

The deal to bring them back to OC for summer drills will run until their new stadium and training facilities in Inglewood are completed, with an opening expected in 2019.

"As we returned to Southern California after 22 years, UCI provided a perfect home for our training camp this summer," said Rams spokesperson **Joanna Hunter**. "Our team had a great experience on campus thanks in part to the hard work of their staff and welcoming environment they helped create. We look forward to returning to Irvine for the next two training camps."

UCI appears to have carved out a nice niche for professional practices as the **Los Angeles Clippers** recently started their second consecutive training camp at the home of the Anteaters in what promises to be a pivotal year for the franchise. Clippers coach **Doc Rivers'** son, **Spencer**, is a member of the UCI basketball team. ■



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