

UCLA Bruins



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UCLA Bruins

Get to know the spirited brown bear cheering on the University of California Los Angeles.



If you had gone to a UCLA game in the early years of the school, you might have been a little afraid to see the team mascot walking your way. That's because the first "bruin" mascots weren't people in costumes—they were live bears!

Not Your Average Teddy Bear

In the 1950s, UCLA (which stands for the University of California Los Angeles) adopted a Himalayan brown bear cub called "Little Joe Bruin." Little Joe was flown from India to California, and became a regular part of home football games. A few years later, a female cub named Josephine joined the campus as well.

DID YOU KNOW?

Bears are a symbol of the state of California. The state's most famous bear, the California grizzly, appears in the center of the state flag.

When they grow up, Himalayan brown bears can weigh up to 900 pounds—so eventually, Little Joe wasn't so little anymore! He and Josephine both retired from mascot duty. Joe was given to a circus, and Josephine went to live at the San Diego Zoo. In the 1960s, UCLA decided to stop

keeping actual bears, and to use people dressed up as Joe Bruin and Josie Bruin instead.

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The bronze statue known as The Bruin stands guards on the UCLA campus.

The Big Bronze Bruin

Joe and Josie aren't the biggest bears at UCLA. In the center of campus, a snarling bronze statue called The Bruin stands 6 feet high and 10 feet long, and weighs more than two tons—as much as a pickup truck. It's a tradition for every new student to snap a picture with The Bruin statue, either posed next to it or riding on top!

In a 2009 prank, students from the University of Southern California, UCLA's main rival, spray-painted The Bruin red and yellow (the USC colors) a few days before a big game between the schools. UCLA wasn't laughing—it cost more than \$20,000 to repair the statue. Now, UCLA students guard the bear around the clock during the week before the USC game.

UCLA basketball teams are as fearsome as their school symbol. The men's team has won 11 national titles—more than any other team. And in the past seven years, the women's team has made it all the way to the Sweet Sixteen three times and the Elite Eight once. UCLA's most famous player, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, held the NBA all-time scoring record for more than 38 years—until LeBron James surpassed it in February 2023.

FUN FACT

The first student to wear the Joe Bruin suit often fell on their face, because their glasses fogged up inside the costume head! The crowd didn't care—they thought it was just a funny part of the act.