



thinkorswim®  
Member FINRA | SIPC | NFA

Highly Rated by Barron's, Three Years Running.\*

TRY IT NOW

\* Barron's '06, '07, '08.

Hello Visitor Register Sign-In

Jobs | Cars.com | Real Estate | Rentals | Foreclosures | More Classifieds

LAT Home | Print Edition | All Sections

# Los Angeles Times | Sports



Lakers Dodgers Angels USC UCLA Clippers High Schools NHL NFL MLB NBA

You are here: LAT Home > Sports



### Sports

- » Scores & Stats
- » Columnists
- » Morning Briefing
- » Letters
- » Sports A-Z

### Home Teams

- » Angels
- » Dodgers
- » Lakers
- » Clippers
- » Sparks
- » UCLA
- » USC
- » Kings
- » Ducks
- » Galaxy
- » Chivas USA

### Sections

- » Olympics
- » Outdoors
- » Action Sports
- » Baseball
- » Pro Basketball
- » Pro Football
- » Golf
- » NCAA Basketball
- » NCAA Football
- » High Schools
- » Hockey
- » Auto Racing
- » Boxing / MMA
- » Horse Racing
- » Soccer
- » Tennis

### Blogs

- » Fabulous Forum
- » Lakers Blog
- » Dodgers Blog
- » UCLA Blog
- » USC Blog
- » Varsity Times
- » Outposts

### News/Opinion

- California | Local
- National
- World
- Business
- Sports
- Washington



JERRY CROWE:

## Backfield didn't work out for Russell White, but baccalaureate did



Dave Getzschman / For The Times

Russell White works in his office at a shelter for runaways in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco.

**The former Crespi High and California running back works as a residential coordinator at a shelter for runaways in San Francisco's famous Haight-Ashbury district.**

Jerry Crowe  
March 9, 2009

From San Francisco -- Many pegged Russell White for a dummy.

They assumed that, academically, the great running back from Encino Crespi High wouldn't cut it at California.

Even White had his doubts when he arrived on the Berkeley campus in 1989 after one of the most celebrated careers in Southland high school football history.

"When I came home for Christmas break my first semester, I didn't want to go back," he says. "I thought I might have bit off more than I could chew, but I sat down with my mom and she basically said, 'You ain't coming home. That's not an option.'"

So White, unable to play football as a freshman because he was an academic nonqualifier, stuck around for 3 1/2 more years, proving his detractors wrong by earning a degree in social welfare.

White, 38, is putting his education to work these days as a residential coordinator at Huckleberry House, a shelter for runaways in San Francisco's famous Haight-Ashbury district.

"He's been a tremendous asset," program director Katie Reisinger says. "He has a great way of interacting with the kids, a natural ability, and great energy. We're very fortunate."

That's what then-Cal coach Bruce Snyder thought when he landed the nephew of former USC tailback Charles White. In three seasons at Crespi, White set state

Email | Print | Text | Single Page | RSS

ADVERTISEMENT



AT&T High Speed Internet

Includes access to the nation's largest Wi-Fi network.

\$19.95 /mo

LEARN MORE

at&t

### Recent Columns:

1. Backfield didn't work out for Russell White, but baccalaureate did  
March 9, 2009
2. Yeah, but what Dodgers fan wants to go to New York or Boston?  
March 8, 2009
3. The Dodgers just got a lot more interesting  
March 5, 2009
4. In time of great change, Sidney Wicks helped UCLA stay the same  
March 3, 2009
5. Kobe Bryant goes to the school of all-time scorers  
February 27, 2009

>> More Jerry Crowe

Most Viewed Most E-mailed

1. 'American Idol' needs to open the closet door
2. Madoff's lawyer says client will plead guilty
3. Lakers' Trevor Ariza will not be suspended by NBA
4. Lakers' Trevor Ariza apologizes for injuring Rudy Fernandez
5. Obama's fear-mongering
6. Dow jumps 5.8% on Citigroup profit news
7. Despite Lakers' record, Tex Winter is concerned
8. Andruw Jones regrets failing the Dodgers
9. FBI investigates firebombing of UCLA researcher's car
10. RV maker Fleetwood files for bankruptcy

Science  
Environment  
Opinion

Arts/Entertainment

Entertainment  
The Guide  
Company Town  
Arts & Culture  
Calendar  
The Envelope  
TV Listings  
Movie Showtimes

Living

Travel  
Health  
Autos  
Home & Garden  
Food  
Image  
Books  
Living Green  
Magazine

Data Desk  
Video  
Photography  
Obituaries  
Crosswords/Sudoku  
Your Scene

Blogs  
Columnists  
Print Edition  
Readers Rep  
Corrections  
All Sections

Buy, Sell & More

Jobs  
Cars  
Real Estate  
Foreclosure Sale  
Rentals  
Personals  
Local Values  
Coupons  
Newspaper Ads

Place an Ad

In the Newspaper  
Online

Settings/Services

Sign In  
Register  
E-Mail Newsletters  
RSS Feeds  
Help  
Contact Us  
L.A. Times Archives  
Reprint Requests  
Work for Us

Home Delivery

Customer Support  
Subscribe

records for rushing (5,998 yards), touchdowns (94) and scoring (568 points).

"Back then, I said he was the best high school running back to ever play the game," says Westlake Village Oaks Christian High Coach Bill Redell, White's coach at Crespi. "Obviously, I haven't seen every high school running back that ever played, but I personally have never seen anybody better."

Recruited by hundreds of colleges, White ultimately chose Cal over USC because he didn't want to play in the shadow of his uncle's Heisman Trophy-winning legacy. Also, Cal offered him an unconditional scholarship regardless of how he scored on a standardized aptitude test, while USC did not.

He remains Cal's all-time rushing leader with 3,367 yards. An All-American as a junior, when he helped the Bears to a 10-2 record, he was projected as a first-round NFL draft pick.

Staying in school for his senior year enabled him to graduate but a mediocre season under a new coach, Keith Gilbertson, probably cost him about \$1 million. In 1993, the Los Angeles Rams drafted him in the third round after taking Jerome Bettis in the first.

White turned out to be an NFL bust, carrying the ball two times for 10 yards in his only season, but has no regrets.

Though he ran for nearly 9,500 combined yards in his high school, college and NFL careers, he notes proudly that participating in commencement ceremonies and receiving his college degree "was the best five yards I ever walked."

A good 40 pounds heavier than when he last played, he lives in Hayward with wife Aminah and their three young children.

Since giving up on the NFL in 1996 -- he played one season for the London Monarchs of the World League of American Football and spent time in camps with the Green Bay Packers and San Francisco 49ers -- White has struggled to find a career that suits him.

A frustrating stint as a probation officer led to high school coaching jobs in Palm Springs and Flagstaff, Ariz., but the winter cold in Flagstaff drove him back to the Bay Area.

College coaching was a goal, but now he's not sure.

"This is what I went to school to do, as far as dealing with kids and difficult sets of circumstances," he says of his work at Huckleberry House. "I've often thought of opening my own nonprofit -- I'm interested in group homes -- so I'm learning firsthand. The options are out there for something other than football."

Family comes first.

Single Page | 1 | 2 | Next »

Save/Share

Home of the Week

A G.W. Smith classic in Montecito enters the 21st century. [Photos](#)

Legacy of '30s San Francisco

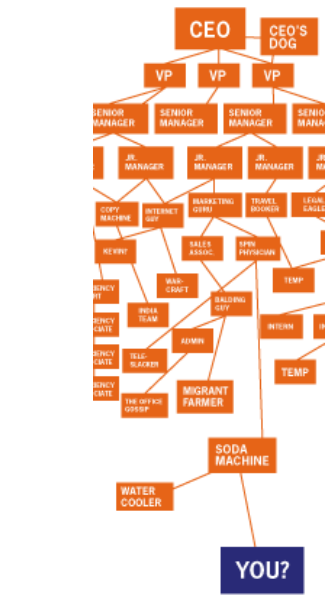
From the Depression emerged a legacy of beauty, suggesting solace can be found in hard times. [Video](#)

Barbie as a style icon

As Barbie turns 50, we take a look at some of her noteworthy looks. [Photos](#)

Top 10 comfort films

Need a laugh right now? A cry? Comfort films are there to fill the emotional need of the moment. [Photos](#)



2,000,000 NEW JOBS POSTED ON CAREERBUILDER.COM

**START BUILDING**  
careerbuilder.com

Sports Headlines

- 1. Lakers have been bow led over in Rose Garden
- 2. Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw and James McDonald are throw n together by fate
- 3. Fallen stars shuffle the NCAA deck
- 4. In hockey, they're alw ays ready to rumble
- 5. Backfield didn't w ork out for Russell White, but baccalaureate did

Mapping L.A.  
This is your chance to help us define the neighborhoods of Los Angeles. [Interactive map](#)

Search an address:

• [Why is The Times doing this?](#)

Mexico's drug war

Tourists weigh Mexico drug violence [Photos](#) | [Read more about Mexico Under Siege](#)



Hello Visitor Register Sign-In

Jobs | Cars.com | Real Estate | Rentals | Foreclosures | More Classifieds

LAT Home | Print Edition | All Sections

# Los Angeles Times | Sports



Lakers Dodgers Angels USC UCLA Clippers High Schools NHL NFL MLB NBA

You are here: LAT Home > Sports



**JERRY CROWE:**  
Backfield didn't work out for Russell White, but baccalaureate did  
March 9 2009

Email | Print | Text | Single Page | RSS

ADVERTISEMENT

**Southern California Foreclosed Home Auction**

Saturday Mar 7

Click Here To See Our Homes

## Sports

Single Page « Back | 1 | 2

- » Scores & Stats
- » Columnists
- » Morning Briefing
- » Letters
- » Sports A-Z

## Home Teams

- » Angels
- » Dodgers
- » Lakers
- » Clippers
- » Sparks
- » UCLA
- » USC
- » Kings
- » Ducks
- » Galaxy
- » Chivas USA

## Sections

- » Olympics
- » Outdoors
- » Action Sports
- » Baseball
- » Pro Basketball
- » Pro Football
- » Golf
- » NCAA Basketball
- » NCAA Football
- » High Schools
- » Hockey
- » Auto Racing
- » Boxing / MMA
- » Horse Racing
- » Soccer
- » Tennis

"From when my [7-year-old] daughter was born, football became less and this became more," he says of his home life across the San Francisco Bay. "It's so important to be present in your kids' lives and not be this person that just comes and goes."

White's father, Roosevelt, never played a large role in his life, he says. He was closer to his uncle, whose problems with substance abuse during his NFL career left an indelible impression, fueling a resolve to not repeat his uncle's mistakes.

He considers it "a blessing" that Snyder took a chance on him when other schools backed away.

"I had to challenge myself to prove I wasn't what other people might have thought I was going to be," says White, who was diagnosed with a learning disorder after leaving Crespi. "I knew football would come to an end at some point, and I had a role model for what could happen, which was my uncle."

"I definitely saw his career go from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows, and I knew that wasn't what I wanted."

At Cal, White met his wife and silenced his doubters.

To his surprise, his football career crested there too. His failure to make it big in the NFL embittered him for a time, White acknowledges, but eventually he put it behind him.

"I was angry and frustrated," he says, "but then you think of all the people who never got a chance to take a handoff from Brett Favre, or catch a pass from Steve Young, or block Reggie White, or have a conversation with Jerry Rice."

"At the time, you're just doing it, but later in life you realize, 'That was pretty special.'"

You realize too that a college degree is its own reward.

[jerome.crowe@latimes.com](mailto:jerome.crowe@latimes.com)

## Recent Columns:

1. Backfield didn't work out for Russell White, but baccalaureate did  
March 9, 2009
2. Yeah, but what Dodgers fan wants to go to New York or Boston?  
March 8, 2009
3. The Dodgers just got a lot more interesting  
March 5, 2009
4. In time of great change, Sidney Wicks helped UCLA stay the same  
March 3, 2009
5. Kobe Bryant goes to the school of all-time scorers  
February 27, 2009

>> More Jerry Crowe

Most Viewed Most E-mailed