

'Giants' leave their mark

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Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and John Wooden sat at the end of a star-studded assembly line Saturday.

Abdul-Jabbar was signing his new book, "On the Shoulders of Giants: My Journey Through the Harlem Renaissance" at UCLA's BookZone, and so was Wooden.

The book-signing was a well-oiled machine, just like the three championships the dynamic duo won together from 1967-69 at UCLA.

Their athletic accomplishments are unparalleled.

But on this day, they were celebrating history. Wooden, a former English teacher, and Abdul-Jabbar, a UCLA history graduate, were promoting a book about the Harlem Renaissance. People will gain insight into what Abdul-Jabbar experienced while growing up in NewYork.

It has been decades since Wooden and Abdul-Jabbar have coached and played, respectively, but the two can still put on quite a show.

Abdul-Jabbar wore a casual outfit - navy-blue UCLA polo shirt and jeans - while Wooden looked dapper, as usual, in a navy-blue suit with his customary bolo tie.

As the two sat and signed, cell phones and cameras clicked behind a roped-off area in front of the table. Fans lined the stairs in the middle of the bookstore. Security was everywhere. The autograph line started in the bookstore and worked its way outside, winding around the J.D.Morgan Center.

Abdul-Jabbar and Wooden didn't have much time to chat, but when they do, it's special.

"We've always had things to talk about, and it usually has nothing to do with basketball," Abdul-Jabbar said. "My father passed away about a year and a half ago, and (Wooden) is from his generation, so it's nice to have him here. I share his grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

Most of the time, Abdul-Jabbar had his head down as he signed book after book. He would say "thanks" and "you're welcome" often.

Abdul-Jabbar, a three-time NCAA Most Valuable Player and NBA MVP for the Lakers, has kept to himself, but fans still can't get enough of him.

Twenty minutes into the book-signing, patrons outside were informed that if they hadn't already purchased a book, they were out of luck. All 500copies had been sold.

Erkki Corpuz, an Anderson School graduate student, was the first in line. He

arrived at 9a.m. for the 1p.m. signing.

And that was after he slept outside Pauley Pavilion overnight, to ensure he'd have a seat in the student section for Saturday's UCLA game against Stanford.

He had yet to read much of the book because he had schoolwork to do. But he was interested in it. He became an Abdul-Jabbar fan through his family.

"I've never met Kareem, but my dad moved to this country in the mid-'70s, and we became Lakers fans," Corpuz said. "I've read "Giant Steps" (another book by Abdul-Jabbar) and did about five book reports on it."

Ruthee Goldkorn had read 59 pages during her nearly four-hour wait. She insisted she would finish the book by the end of the day.

"One of the first things he says in the book is that if he wasn't a basketball player, he would've been a history teacher," Goldkorn said. "This is important. African history is American history."

Abdul-Jabbar seems to withstand time. It's hard to believe, but perhaps the best collegiate basketball player ever will celebrate his 60th birthday in April.

"I'm just happy to be here," Abdul-Jabbar said. "When you're young, you never think about what the end of your life is going to be like."

Wooden, 96, signed his name under Abdul-Jabbar's and exchanged pleasantries with folks. Wooden always has thought of himself as a teacher, so he's most proud of Abdul-Jabbar at events like these.

"There's always a reason behind each book, which pleases me," said Wooden, who has written many. "He was a student-athlete, a student first. I don't think he ever missed a class without a (legitimate) reason."

Then Wooden and Abdul-Jabbar sat next to each other at Pauley Pavilion.

If there's a sporting event at Pauley, Wooden is almost always there. But this was the first game of the season for Abdul-Jabbar. He had many reasons to be in Westwood, one of which was that UCLA was honoring the 1967 NCAA championship team.

When Abdul-Jabbar was introduced at halftime, he raised the index finger on each hand as he was showered with applause.

"He was really unselfish," said former teammate Mike Warren, a longtime UCLA season-ticket holder. "Had he been a different type of player, that would've made things difficult. Being a team player made it much easier. He could've averaged 60 points a game if he wanted to."