

YAHOO! SPORTS

Power couple

By **Josh Peter, Yahoo! Sports**

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Dana and David Pump.

(David Crane, Special to Yahoo! Sports)

The entrepreneurial history of college basketball's most ubiquitous and controversial pair of men – the Pump Brothers – traces back to when they were boys running a lemonade stand. You know the sort, manned by neighborhood kids with those sweet, doe-eyed faces.

“They stiffed everybody,” said their mother, Carole. “They were charging a dollar and everybody else charged a nickel.”

With that, Dana and David Pump, identical twins, laughed at the memory like the 7-year-old lemonade salesmen they were rather than the 41-year-old, self-described “connectors” they are.

They never played college basketball and don't have college degrees but are widely considered power brokers in the sport. They assisted in the hiring of Tennessee's Bruce Pearl, consulted with about 20 other schools during coaching searches and steered many assistants to jobs with coaches they know. This week in San Antonio, they'll be looking to expand their empire.

At the site of the Final Four, the Pumps will work the back channels as only they do. Sidling up to athletic directors who need head coaches, schmoozing with coaches who might make good candidates and helping friends who have helped them. They'll also fuel speculation over just how influential they are – at least among those who haven't already decided.

Tom Ford, who was athletic director at the University of Houston in the 1980s during

the days of Hakeem Olajuwon, Clyde Drexler and Phi Slamma Jamma, said of the Pumps, "They're the best, and probably the two most powerful guys in college basketball."

Ford, who used to work for the National Association of Basketball Coaches, recalled going to a safe deposit box where he kept the NABC's Final Four tickets, spotting Dana Pump and thinking, "Dana has better tickets."

Asked for more evidence of their brothers' power, Ford replied, "He can pick up the phone and get Bob Knight."

A few minutes earlier, Dana Pump had done just that. Seated in a booth at a diner in southern California, he grabbed his ever-present Blackberry off of the Formica table and said he had to talk to Knight, the legendary coach who has recently taken a job as a TV analyst with ESPN.

Knight has attended the Pumps' annual coaching retreats and charity functions. A picture of the brothers and the hall-of-fame coach hangs on the wall of Dana Pump's office.

"Coach Knight, are you in charge of the working media?" Dana Pump blurted into the phone.

He grinned.

"You're a consultant?" Dana Pump said. "Ha, ha."

Then Dana Pump went over details of a memorabilia deal he's putting together for Knight and mentioned that former Boston Celtics great John Havlicek, Knight's close friend and former college teammate at Ohio State, already had signed.

"I've got another job for you," Dana Pump said, the Blackberry pressed against his ear. "Coaching searches. We'll do three searches and you'll make more than (ESPN) pays you."

At a moment's notice, the Pumps can call Oscar Robertson, Jerry West and a host of the country's top college coaches. They also have home numbers for Shaquille O'Neal and Bill Russell, and Dana Pump can prove it by dialing them and activating speaker phone.

"You're going to love this one," he said, then looked slightly miffed when he got Russell's answering machine.

But not everyone is sold on the Pumps and their influence.

Referring to the Pumps as "the Pimps," Max Shapiro, former director of a summer basketball camp that competed with the twins' camp, said he suspected the brothers were "selling players." The Pumps flatly deny taking kickbacks and said they'd never encourage players to attend a certain school because doing so would jeopardize their network of relationships with coaches.

"It'd be bad for business," Dana Pump said.

Pro or con, good or bad, the Pump's presence is undeniable. And long before they

made their first pilgrimage to the Final Four in 1987, their opportunistic career had taken flight.

RAPID RISE

Growing up in southern California, they sold flowers and candy at marked-up prices, but they were in their teens when they pulled off what David Pump called “one of the great hustles.”

The brothers used to ride their bicycles to area police stations, which gave out Los Angeles Dodgers baseball cards to children. Every time the shift at one of the stations changed, the Pumps were back. New cops. Same redheaded twins. More baseball cards.

This went on for months.

“They sold those cards to some man in Alabama for \$12,000,” their mother said with a chuckle.

With the same drive but less skill, they played sports year-round. Their athletic careers peaked as 5-foot-10 forwards at Bel-Air Prep in West Hollywood. Their academic careers had more or less leveled off, too. Though they took classes at a junior college and Cal State-Northridge, they never graduated. They were too involved with AAU basketball and running summer camps, which they started when they were the same age as some of the campers – 16.



Vaccaro

In 1990, after NBC learned about the 23-year-old twins who ran a burgeoning summer basketball camp for inner-city kids, the Pumps appeared on “The Today Show.” But they’d already been discovered by someone much more influential – Sonny Vaccaro.

Considered the Godfather of summer basketball, Vaccaro met the Pumps when they were in high school and saw his future consiglieres. He admired their enthusiasm and gumption. They admired his connections and savvy. Everywhere Vaccaro went, so went the twins – all the way to the top.

When Vaccaro left adidas as the director of grassroots basketball for Reebok in 2003, the twins stayed. Adidas handed them six-figure contracts and essentially put the brothers in charge of the division Vaccaro had run.

They help oversee the distribution of hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment and apparel. They sponsor a summer tournament which attracts dozens of the top high school players in the country. They host an annual retreat and charity dinners that draw a who’s-who list of Division I coaches and scores of sports celebrities such as Magic Johnson, Elgin Baylor and Joe Montana.



Harrick

Jim Harrick, the former UCLA coach who led the Bruins to the 1995 national title but fell out of college coaching after scandals in Westwood and at Georgia, attends the functions. He also happens to coach the Pumps' elite summer travel team, which this year includes two signees with UCLA, two signees with North Carolina and Denzel Washington's son, Malcolm.

As far as Harrick's baggage is concerned, well, the twins rarely shy away from controversy.

Over the years, they've obtained Final Four and NCAA tournament tickets from an assortment of coaches and athletic administrators and funneled them to their longtime friend, Barry Rudin, owner of Barry's Tickets Service in southern California. The Pumps call the enterprise "corporate hospitality." Others, including NCAA officials who frowned upon the practice, call it scalping.

Though their involvement in tickets produced a steady source of income, the brothers also made hundreds of thousands of dollars a year with touring exhibition teams. Colleges paid up to \$25,000 to play the Pumps' teams, but the NCAA ended the practice in 2004 when member institutions voted to bar colleges from playing non-collegiate teams in exhibitions.

Pointing out that the NCAA now sells thousands of tickets at a profit to a company called RazorGator, a self-satisfied smile crept across Dana Pump's face.

"We were ahead of the curve," he said.

Staying there might not be as easy.

WORKING BOTH ENDS

"Making relationships work," reads their business cards, and the Pumps have leveraged those relationships for the good of others and their own good, too.

They drive Mercedes Benzes, live in million-dollar homes and enjoy a lifestyle far more lavish than the one they knew growing up. Their father, Harold, owned a wrecking and scrap company, All Truck Parts, and their mother was a homemaker.

David Pump is married and has an 18-year-old stepdaughter. He stays behind the scenes. Dana Pump is a proud bachelor, but they're both self-professed mama's boys. Occasionally, they refer to their mother as "The Boss," but they have become authorities in their own right.

Dana Pump entered his lavish pad sequestered in a gated community in Northridge. He walked directly to his office, where the walls are lined with photos of the twins posing with luminaries such as John Wooden, Bob Knight and Ronald Reagan. Yes, former president Ronald Reagan.



Reagan

A former assistant basketball coach at USC had given Pumps sideline passes to a football game. Reagan was scheduled to attend, and so the assistant instructed the twins to be discreet. Less than 10 minutes later, the coach turned around and saw the twins posing with Reagan.

“There’s the picture,” Dana Pump said.

He grinned mischievously. Then he went to work, which is to say he worked the phones, his Blackberry and a landline simultaneously.

After talking to Oscar Robertson about a memorabilia deal, he called Bill Bayno, the former UNLV coach and an assistant coach with the NBA’s Portland Trail Blazers. Bayno had expressed interest in an opening at Loyola Marymount. Pump assisted Loyola Marymount in 2005 with a search that led to the hiring of Rodney Tention, who resigned under pressure March 12.

Though Tention failed to make it through his third season at Loyola Marymount, Dana Pump had been talking to school officials about the search for yet another coach. He was pushing Bayno for the job.

“I’m going to tell them they’ve got to move,” Dana Pump said. “The more and more they wait, the more Paul Allen gets you.”

Allen is the owner of the Portland Trail Blazers and presumably wants to keep Bayno on the coaching staff.

“I’ll call you back, Bubula,” Dana Pump said, a Yiddish word he uses for close friends like Bayno, who the Pumps have known for more than 20 years.

Less than 10 minutes after talking to Bayno about filling the Loyola Marymount job, he greeted the guy who just lost the job. Tention and his wife, Rebecca, had arrived at the house.

They sat at the kitchen table, with the pool visible through a sliding glass door. The coach and his wife looked concerned, and Dana Pump listened as Tention grumbled about being forced out of the job.

Talk turned to potential job prospects, and suddenly Dana Pump grew animated.

He suggested Tention call Lute Olson at Arizona and “tell Big O you want to come home.” Tention had previously worked as an assistant under Olson at the school. He suggested Tention fly to Utah and ask about potential job openings. He suggested Tention call as many schools as he could, to be proactive, to seize every opportunity, to consider every option, and then Dana Pump paused.

“You don’t kiss ass like I do,” he said. “I kiss everybody for a job.”

Tention and his wife grinned. A few minutes later, they stood up to leave and Dana

wished them good luck and told them to stay in touch as he ushered them out the front door. He returned to his office and just before 5 p.m., the phone rang. He looked at the incoming number.



Howland

“Coach Howland,” Dana Pump said with pride.

It was UCLA’s Ben Howland, another longtime friend of the Pumps. Howland occasionally slept on the Pumps’ couch when he was an assistant at the University of California-Santa Barbara. On this day, Howland was still smarting over a close call against Texas A&M in the second round of the NCAA tournament and concerned about the team’s Sweet 16 matchup against Western Kentucky. He asked Dana Pump to join him on a walk.

The Pumps were concerned, too, but it had nothing to do with the NCAA tournament. It had to do with their next high-stakes business venture.

CRACKING CONSULTING

In March 2005, the University of Tennessee announced it had hired a firm headed by former NCAA executive director Cedric Dempsey to assist the school with its search for a new basketball coach. But it was the Pumps who had started the company, ChampSearch, and they gladly welcomed aboard a former critic who could bring them credibility.

Before stepping down as executive director of the NCAA in 2002, Dempsey had chastised the Pumps for reselling Final Four tickets. He attempted to curb the practice of scalping tickets that were given to coaches, athletic directors and other school officials, but frequently ended up in the hands of the Pumps. Yet three years later, Dempsey was working with the twins on a consulting deal worth \$25,000.

“Pretty good one, huh?” Dana Pump said.

When his association with the Pumps became public, Dempsey told the *Los Angeles Times* he simply was doing a favor for John Kasser, a former athletic director at the University of California-Berkeley who was working with the twins. Dempsey also said he agreed to participate only after the Pumps assured him they were no longer reselling Final Four tickets.



Bruce Pearl led the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to the Sweet 16 in 2005.

(AP Photo/Amy Sancetta)

While Dempsey squirmed, the Pumps scrambled. They made covert contact with job candidates and helped compile a list of coaches that included the name of a personal friend and their favorite – Bruce Pearl.

At the time, Pearl was the head coach at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and was leading his team to the Sweet 16. The Pumps said they had known him for more than 20 years and recommended him for the job. When ChampSearch had finished its work, Tennessee hired Pearl.

“They did not bring Bruce Pearl to the table, but they validate our selection of him,” said Mike Hamilton, athletic director at Tennessee, who praised ChampSearch’s role in the process.

“If you know anything about Dana at all, you know that he has tremendous contacts in college basketball. And maybe this is an overstatement, but my sense is that he probably has the cell, home and work numbers for every college basketball coach out there.”

As consultants on coaching searches, the Pumps other successes include the hiring of Billy Grier, who led the University of San Diego to an upset over Connecticut in the first round of the NCAA tournament this year, and the hiring of Reggie Theus, who in his second year at New Mexico State led the school to its first NCAA appearance since 1999.

But with Pearl having led Tennessee to the Sweet 16 in back-to-back seasons, the Pumps have their calling card.

In early January, Dana Pump called Oregon State athletic director Bob de Carolis, trumpeted the brothers’ success with Pearl’s hiring and discussed how ChampSearch could assist the school. Sure, Oregon State still had a head coach at the time, but why wait?

Hearing rumors that the school intended to fire Jay John, Dana Pump said, the twins wanted to get a jump on other search firms. Dana Pump also called Oregon State athletic officials Jan. 20, the day the school fired John. He kept calling, too, until he met with de Carolis and the athletic director’s right-hand man, Todd Stansbury, Jan. 28 at an Embassy Suites hotel in Portland, Ore.

The day after Dana Pump made his presentation, he got a call from Stansbury.

Oregon State was going with another firm.

Dana Pump was livid.

“We’re going to beat those sons of bitches at their own game,” he remembers thinking, and then he made his next move.

He called McKinley Boston, the athletic director at New Mexico State who in early 2005 granted the Pumps their first consulting job with a coaching search, and outlined the plan.

In anticipation of their annual retreat and charity event, the Pumps invited every Division I college coach and athletic director in the country. Now they’d go after

another set of influential figures: college and university presidents.

On a recent afternoon, Dana Pump picked up samples of the glossy brochures he'd send to more than 5,000 people across the country. Under color photos of Jerry West and Oscar Robertson, the keynote speakers for the retreat this year, was a list of distinguished figures scheduled to attend.

It included Charles Young, chancellor emeritus at UCLA, and the presidents of New Mexico State, Kentucky State and Cal State-Northridge. Those four will participate in a roundtable discussion addressing issues in college sports, according to Dana Pump, who said he intends to enlist the help of Dempsey, the former NCAA executive director who assisted with the coaching search for Tennessee.

The Pumps are convinced that highly regarded firms such as Parker Executive Search and Eastman & Beaudine are beating them out for jobs simply because those firms have hired university presidents and athletic directors who later choose firms to consult on coaching searches.

Oregon State retained Parker Executive Search, which assisted with the hiring of Myles Brand, the current NCAA executive director, and other prominent figures in the world of college sports. What especially infuriated Dana Pump is Oregon State reportedly gave Parker Executive Search \$75,000 even though he said the twins offered to consult for \$10,000.

De Carolis, athletic director at Oregon State, declined to comment. But Dana Pump couldn't resist.

"Oregon State is the 14th best job in the Pac-10," he railed.

About a week later, the University of California fired its basketball coach, Ben Braun, and announced it had retained Eastman & Beaumine to help with its search for a new coach.

"Cal is the 12th best job in the Pac-10," Dana Pump squawked.

The brothers feel they deserved both of those consulting jobs, but they're focused on the new strategy. If they can attract college and university presidents to their retreat, if they can expose them to the seminars and celebrity-studded charity dinner, the brothers think they can cultivate the relationships necessary to secure consulting contracts.

"We're going to beat them fair and square," Dana Pump said.

Not everyone is rooting for them.

SUPPORTERS AND DETRACTORS



The Pump Brothers stand in front of wing at Northridge Hospital Medical Center named in honor of their father Harold and mother Carole.

(David Crane, Special to Yahoo! Sports)

Dozens of coaches and athletic directors speak highly of the Pumps, but no one praises the brothers as heartily as the brothers themselves. Wary of being depicted as rogues, connected to shady enterprises involving sneaker companies, summer basketball, ticket scalping and influence peddling, they invited a reporter to meet them at Northridge Hospital Medical Center.

Their charitable foundation has given \$2.5 million to the hospital in memory of their father, who died of cancer, and in honor of their mother. Vaccaro, who groomed the Pumps, said he supported and helped form the idea for the foundation.

"I'm responsible for the Pumpers," Vaccaro said during a recent interview. "I'm guilty of giving them birth."

The twins credit Vaccaro as much as their own work ethic for their remarkable rise. That, the Pumps say, is why they're hurt by what has transpired with their longtime mentor.

Once among their biggest fans, Vaccaro has joined the critics. He said the Pumps' annual charity golf tournament, with its \$400 entry fee, and \$400-a-plate dinner is unseemly in part because it's held in conjunction with the two-day retreats. The retreats are where the Pumps cement business relationships, according to Vaccaro.

"When I told them at the grave of their father, 'Do something and give back to the community in your father's name,' no one would have ever thought that's what it would become," he said. "... The charity in the truest form is a good thing. But using it to benefit your business enterprises is, in my opinion, not the right thing to do."

Angrily, the Pumps reject the criticism. They said the charity function is a genuine tribute to their father and that they never would retaliate against anyone who does not attend.

SELLING SAN ANTONIO

This week, the Pumps move to what has become their personal Mecca – the Final Four. When they attended the event for the first time in 1987, the Pumps stood by the entrance and the elevator, trying to meet as many coaches as possible. Over the years, coaches said, they remember seeing the twins working the room like politicians and looking for tickets presumably to resell.

Now when they're working the crowd at the headquarter hotel, they'll be attracting a

crowd, too.

“Love them or hate them, everybody has their infatuation with the Pumps for a variety of reasons,” said T.J. Otzelberger, who left a job as an assistant coach at Chipola (Fla.) Junior College in 2005 to work with the Pumps in hopes it would lead him to the Division I ranks.

After coaching the Pumps' elite team in 2006, Otzelberger was hired as an assistant coach at Iowa State.

“Now when jobs open, I've got 50 coaches calling me and asking, ‘What did the Pumps say?’” Otzelberger said. “People just think, ‘OK, the coaches have coaching searches and T.J. has a relationship with the Pumps ...’”

While four teams will take the court dreaming about cutting down the nets, two brothers will be in the corridors trying to cut the next big deal.

“When the Pumps arrive, they are the show,” Vaccaro said. “They are the must-see. They are off and running, and it's 24 hours a day.

“There's not a hand they won't shake.”