

Daily Breeze

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Obama raises hopes in South Bay

Some of the cheers at Mr. Pockets Sports Bar on Thursday weren't for a good baseball play, they were for Barack Obama's speech. The Beach Cities Democratic Club gathered at the Manhattan Beach bar to see history being made.

Bruce Hazelton/
Staff Photographer



By Sandy Mazza and Nguyen Huy Vu
Staff Writers

Hundreds of Barack Obama supporters gathered together in living rooms, bars and restaurants around the South Bay to watch his acceptance speech Thursday night, and were moved by the night's historic significance.

The first major-party U.S. presidential candidate of African-American descent, Obama spoke on the 45th anniversary of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech, an address that was given at a time when many blacks were prevented from voting.

"It's something I didn't think I'd see in my lifetime," said Mark Drabkin, a Redondo Beach resident who organized a watch party for the acceptance speech at Mr. Pockets Sports Bar in Manhattan Beach. "I think if he got elected it would be a major step forward in the enlightenment of this country as a whole."

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Drabkin, 55, an unemployed information technology worker, said he supports the Illinois senator because of his perspective on economic and other issues, not his race — something he worries many Americans will not look past.

"I'm just hoping that, in 2008, old-fashioned bigotry is not the reason he doesn't get elected," Drabkin said.

The traditional American mold of only Protestant white men having access to the path to the White House has been broken before.

■ When John F. Kennedy was elected president in 1960, he became the first Roman Catholic to ascend to the office.

■ In 1984, Geraldine Ferraro made history as the first woman nominated as vice president by a major political party.

■ And Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman became the first Jewish candidate for the U.S. vice presidency in 2000.

But this election season has been groundbreaking as the leading contenders for Democratic presidential ticket were a woman and an African-American man.

Pat Nave, 65, of San Pedro, said he believes Obama's nomination is the culmination of decades of civil rights activism in the country. He and his wife, Diana, met as political activists at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago.

"The world doesn't look like me and my wife anymore. It never did," Nave said. "For us to elect a Barack Obama is going to do more for us interna-

"The world doesn't look like me and my wife anymore. ... For us to elect someone with an African-American background is going to speak volumes."

— **PAT NAVE**, 65-year-old resident of San Pedro

tionally than anything else we can do — even more than electing a woman. For us to elect someone with an African-American background is going to speak volumes."

Robert Farrell of San Pedro, a former Los Angeles city councilman and founder of the National Democratic Municipal Officials Conference, said he believes Obama's race will take a backseat to his unusual political ascension.

"It's an extraordinary situation. This transforms the whole culture of national partisan politics. (Obama is) someone who is a new Democrat who, in a very short period of time, has taken over," Farrell said.

The country is more interested in the policies of politicians than their race, Farrell said, citing Louisiana's Republican Gov. Bobby Jindal, who became the first Indian-American governor in U.S. history when he was elected in 2007.

"I think this is a new era in American politics, and these

two candidates are reflecting a 21st century America — less about what they are than who they are," he said.

Even Republicans recognize the historic importance of Obama's nomination.

Former California Republican Party chairman Shawn Steel of Rolling Hills said Obama's nomination is hugely significant.

"It's one of the most wonderful things, at this point in American history, that this nation can nominate a black person as president," said Steel, who will head to Minnesota next week for the Republican National Convention. "You don't find that in most parts of the world. That is just a tribute to the American political experience."

Steel believes race will play only a small role in the upcoming presidential election. He said Democrats should be more concerned about reports of divisions between Obama and Clinton supporters.

Kareem Crayton, assistant professor of law and political science at USC, said Obama's nomination represents a shift in racial politics.

Instead of fracturing like in the past, different minority groups of Democrats built coalitions to help Obama overtake the entrenched favorite, New York Sen. Hillary Clinton, to become the Democratic presidential nominee.

"It was a once-in-a-generation moment," said Crayton, who has been in Denver since Tuesday to research superdelegates.

Heather Collier, a 36-year-old account manager from Redondo Beach who organized a watch party at her home for Obama's speech, said she has

been moved by the presidential contender but worries that many people will not see past his race.

"He's the first person who inspired me to want to get involved," Collier said. "A lot of progress has been made. But whenever there's major change, there's resistance behind it. It's going to take him winning and proving himself."

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