

Hawaiian Punch

Senior Brad Lawson looks to end stellar Stanford career with another title

By John Reid, Palo Alto Daily News

WHEN SENIOR Brad Lawson leaves Stanford, he will leave his soulful Hawaiian fingerprints all over the men's volleyball program. The twotime first-team All-America outside hitter has one more home match, at least. The Cardinal (20-6) hosts Pepperdine (14-14) in the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation playoff opener Saturday at 7 p.m. Stanford, the No. 2 seed, has to win the MPSF tournament to guarantee a spot in the Final Four, to be held at the Galen Center in Los Angeles May 3 and 5.

The 6-foot-7 Lawson, who has a vertical leap of 31 inches, needs 15 kills to tie the Stanford career record in the rally-scoring era.

Lawson, with 1,766 kills, trails Evan Romero, who registered 1,781 kills from 2007 to 2010. Lawson has 126 serving aces in his career, a school record in the rally-scoring era, which began in 2001.

"Brad is big and he's physical," Stanford volleyball coach John Kosty said. "He has all the necessary skills of a volleyball player. He can pass. He can play defense. He can serve. Best of all, is his temperament. He's cool-headed, smart and intellectual on the court."

After the Cardinal swept UCLA on senior night Saturday at Maples Pavilion, Lawson let his human side show in a speech he gave after the match. Parents, boosters, coaches and players were there to hear the sensitive Lawson, who is known to wear his emotions on his sleeve.

"I cried," Lawson said. "It was emotional. It was hard.

I can't believe this is coming to an end. At the same time, we had just beaten UCLA.

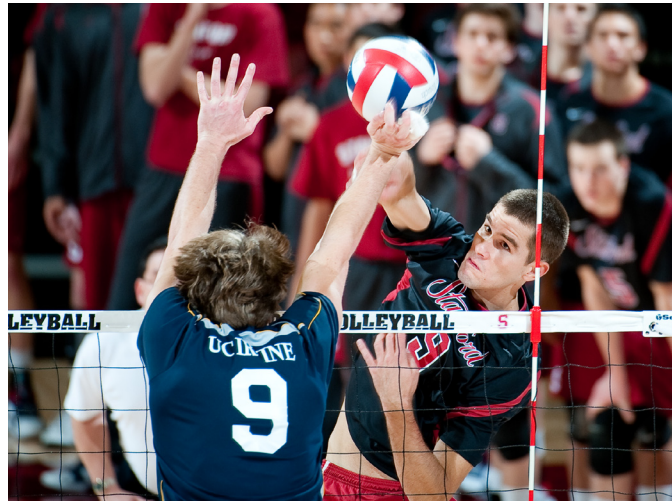
We had played our best volleyball of the season."

Should the Cardinal get past the Waves, it would, in all likelihood, have to play the MPSF semifinals and final at USC, the No. 1 tourney seed. Should the Tro-

jans be upset by No. 8 Cal-State Northridge Saturday and Stanford wins, the Cardinal would host MPSF's version of the final four, starting April 26.

"If we play the way we did against UCLA, we have as great chance of winning it as anyone," Lawson said.

"We had 14 blocks against UCLA in three sets. If we can sustain that, it rounds out our serving and passing game. We've been practicing hard. The focus, the commitment, the energy everyone is bringing. The freshmen and sophomores realize this is the year that something special can happen, again."



Something special

Something special happened Lawson's sophomore season when the Cardinal garnered the 2010 NCAA title, stunning powerhouse Penn State in three sets at Maples Pavilion. Lawson was on fire, with 24 kills in 28 swings, finishing with an off-the-charts hitting percentage of .821. Lawson, the MPSF Player of the Year as a sophomore, was the NCAA

tournament co-MVP in 2010, along with teammate Kawika Shoji.

The championship, the school's first since 1997, was a fairy tale come true.

Longtime assistant coach Al Rodrigues passed away a few weeks before the title match after a lengthy bout with stomach cancer. In 2007, the Cardinal went 3-25 in Kosty's first year.

Rodrigues often used that as a rallying cry, telling the players that they would go "from worst to first." In 2010, when Rodrigues was fighting cancer, he told his players that they would be ranked No. 1 at some point in the season.

"I think of the word 'destiny' when I think of 2010," Lawson said. "Al Rodrigues passed away just weeks after we handed him the rankings with us listed

as No. 1 in the nation. Then we went on to win it for him. In all of volleyball, there has never been a story line quite like it.”

Musical upbringing

Lawson was born and raised in Hawaii. He was part of an Hawaiian pipeline of players who arrived at Stanford in recent years who have helped raise the level of play. “Hawaii is a great place to grow up,” Lawson said.

“Coming to the mainland, you notice the differences.

Hawaii is about family, friendship and aloha. It’s accepting people for who they are.”

Lawson’s parents, Bill and Laurie, are accomplished guitarists. Bill, a star soccer goalkeeper at Trinity College in Connecticut, has created and led bands. It is no coincidence that music is in Brad’s blood. He plays keyboard and sings in a Hawaiian reggae band called “Trufflo.”

“My goal this summer is to do some recording with my band,” Lawson said. “We once played the Five-O Bar and Lounge in the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center. All the tourists stopped by and danced.”

Fans of Stanford athletics have perhaps seen Lawson’s creative version of the school’s alma mater shown on the Jumbo-Tron at Maples Pavilion.

Lawson is shown in split images that dubs in his own harmony. He has also sung the national anthem before women’s volleyball matches and basketball games.

“My favorite music is Hawaiian reggae because I grew up with it,” Lawson said. “I love soul music, I love pop. I love jazz. I started getting into jazz lately. I like hip-hop and all the new stuff.”

Iolani star

Lawson starred at Iolani High, winning a state title his senior season. Lawson had 28 kills in three sets to beat Punahoe and current Stanford teammate Erik Shoji in the state title match. “The volleyball in Hawaii is spectacular,” Lawson said. “You learn the entire game and are coached by the best.

It’s the state sport, unofficially. Football, basketball and volleyball are the three big sports in Hawaii.”

Lawson had offers from a lot of West Coast schools. Penn State also was interested. Lawson, though, wanted to stay in California, taking official visits to USC, Pepperdine, UC Irvine and Stanford. It was on his recruiting trip at Stanford that he crossed

paths with Cody Wiesen, a water polo player. The two played music together.

“He was playing guitar and harmonica at the same time,” Lawson said. “I was singing. There was just something about it. I met a music professor who was more than happy to show me around his office and talk to me. He treated me like I was already part of the Stanford family.”

Lawson, a science, technology and society major, has plans on playing pro volleyball in either Italy, Spain or Germany after his days at Stanford. He’s a legitimate hopeful to land a spot on the 2016 U.S. Olympic Team.

“Lawson is one of the best,” UC Santa Barbara coach Rick McLaughlin said.

“He’s going to go well beyond college. He should be on the Olympic Team in 2016.”

“It’s a dream of mine,” Lawson said. “It’s something I’ve definitely thought about. I’ll see where professional volleyball takes me.

I’m interested in pursuing recording and producing after volleyball. I’ll go back to a music production school in LA or something.” Lawson is on a first-name basis with opposite Clay Stanley, a Hawaii native.

Stanley was MVP of the 2008 Beijing Games after leading Team USA to gold for the first time in 20 years.

“I was best friends with Stanley’s half-brother growing up,” Lawson said.

“Clay Stanley is a hero of mine. He was the best player in the world a few years ago.”

One of Lawson’s favorite films is the 2010 independent release, “Happythankyoumoreplease.”

“It’s about true happiness in life,” Lawson said.

The title could also stand for how fans of the Stanford men’s volleyball program feel about Lawson’s significant contributions.

And he’s not ready to say aloha, yet.

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