

Shaw putting his own stamp on No. 4 Stanford

By Associated Press

STANFORD, Calif. — It took more than a change in titles for Stanford players to accept David Shaw's promotion after he replaced Jim Harbaugh.

Shortly after Shaw opened his first spring practice, the former offensive coordinator noticed some defensive players were not quite as comfortable with him yet, a few maybe even unsure of his abilities.

"Just to show that I'm not the offensive coordinator who's sitting in the coach's office, I made sure that when an offensive lineman stepped out of line, I grabbed him and made sure he pulled back," Shaw said. "If somebody cheap-shotted Shayne Skov, I came to the linebacker's defense, just so they could truly see that I'm everybody's coach."

If a coach's success is measured by wins and losses, then so far Shaw is perfect.

No. 4 Stanford (8-0, 6-0 Pac-12) is undefeated and Shaw is making a run to become only the third rookie head coach to win a national title. While questions about his coaching skills might not be completely answered for years, how Shaw would handle his ascension is no longer in question.

Inheriting a program with Heisman Trophy favorite Andrew Luck and enough talent to claim championships came with immediate pressure. Succeeding a charismatic coach like Harbaugh, now with the San Francisco 49ers, presented another set of challenges altogether.

Shaw has seamlessly overcome them all.

"I think David is very good at developing relationships," Stanford athletic director Bob Bowsby said. "Relationships with the players, relationships with the staff, relationships with the support personnel. I think he has gone above the process of being a head coach.

"Obviously he didn't inherit a cupboard that was bare," Bowsby said. "But he has done a great job with the transition."

As he heads to Oregon State on Saturday before next week's season-defining game against No. 6 Oregon, Shaw has Stanford riding the nation's longest winning streak at 16 games and chasing not just a Pac-12 title but also a BCS championship.

Shaw has emerged from the shadow of the man who rebuilt Stanford and is doing things even Harbaugh never did on The Farm — such as starting 8-0 — while putting his own stamp on the program.

Shaw does not sleep in his office or work 20-hour days. He avoids scheduling early morning meetings so assistant coaches can have breakfast with their kids and take them to school.

Often times his wife, Kori, and their three children — Keegan, Carter and Gavin — are waiting after practice. On Tuesday nights, the coaches and their families meet for dinner in the athletic offices before late-night meetings.

"Jim started it. I would say I accentuated it even more, just because I'm a coach's kid too," said Shaw, whose father, Willie, had two stints as a Stanford assistant and also coached in the NFL. "I know the hours that we work. We can do both. We can do a great job coaching, a great job in the film room, a great job on the field and be able to see our kids. A friend used to tell me about balance.

"When I have balance," Shaw said. "I'm better at everything."

Few have even come close to what Shaw is trying to achieve.

In the 2001 season, Larry Coker led Miami to a BCS championship and became the first rookie coach to win a national title since Bennie Oosterbaan did it with Michigan in 1948. Coker, now at Texas-San Antonio, came into a situation similar to Shaw's.

He had been the offensive coordinator for six years under Butch Davis, who left for the NFL's Cleveland Browns after leading the Hurricanes to an 11-1 season and a victory over rival Florida in the Sugar Bowl. While tradition-rich Miami already owned four national titles, the pressure on Shaw at Stanford is not so different.

The Cardinal finished 12-1 last season, capped by an Orange Bowl victory over Virginia Tech, and returned a talent-rich team led by the NFL draft's likely No. 1 pick.

"If you lose one game, it would've been a bad year and you're a bad coach," Coker said. "It's hard not to pay attention to that. The biggest thing for me was earning the trust and respect from my players, and I think once that happened everything else became easier."

Shaw's credentials gave him instant credibility.

A former Stanford receiver, he understood his players' lives, such as safety Michael Thomas' need to leave practice early on Wednesday

nights to attend class or running back Tyler Gaffney's need to have part of the summer off to rest his body after baseball season.

All of 39 years old, Shaw has the ability to bond with players in ways even Harbaugh couldn't, understanding as he does the intricacies of a rigorous academics university that practically raised him: as a coach's son, student, player, assistant coach and husband — he even proposed to Kori outside of Stanford's Memorial Church.

And the players have responded to Shaw's ways.

The first thing Luck did after a 56-48 triple-overtime victory at Southern California last Saturday night was seek out Shaw, wrapping him up in a bear hug and thanking him for a job well done because, the quarterback said, "it was probably his first big win as a head coach." After recovering the game-ending fumble in the end zone, linebacker A.J. Tarpley gave Shaw the game ball.

Team captains also presented the coach a game ball in the locker room after the season opener against San Jose State out of respect.

"If you have a fantastic team with fantastic athletes but with somebody that athletes don't want to play for, everything will go downhill," defensive tackle Terrence Stephens said. "But you come in and bring somebody who knows what to say, how to say it and when to say it and what to do, then you have a successful team. The athletes have to want to play for somebody and their coach has to want to coach the athletes to make a successful team.

"We love to play for Coach Shaw, and he loves to coach us."

Shaw has been one of the most intriguing first-year coaches in the country.

Not only because of the team he inherited, but because of the fascination with his predecessor. Harbaugh turned a 1-11 program into a college football heavyweight in only four years, his exuberance matched only by his competitiveness.

Shaw's demeanor is a stark contrast. He's as even-keeled as a coach comes, rarely showing emotion. Nobody will catch him getting into post-game arguments with coaches or head-butting players' helmets as Harbaugh did.

"He's quieter. But when he says something, people listen," Thomas said.

The old coach has been careful not to come by as much since Shaw and Harbaugh last met in the Stanford football office during the NFL lockout. Whether it's because Shaw asked him to keep his distance or because Harbaugh doesn't want to overshadow the new coach's success remains a mystery. Both insist they're on good terms.

Harbaugh even sent Shaw a text message after Stanford's thrilling victory over the Trojans congratulating him on an "inspiring performance" and "keeping the competition going with USC."

"They're definitely doing a great job keeping the teams they have played off balance and making it look easy," Harbaugh said. "And it's not easy."

Shaw takes a deep breath when asked if his new job is more taxing on his time.

There are constant speaking engagements, alumni meetings, media interviews, recruiting trips, calls to players, parents and professors. Not to mention added responsibilities coaching defense and special teams, too.

Shaw's goal is the same one Bowsby expressed to him during the interview process. Both want to "take the peaks and valleys out of Stanford football," as Bowsby puts it, and part of that is establishing continuity in the head coach's office.

Shaw insists now, as he did when he was hired in January, that Stanford is his "dream job" and the "first and only head coaching job" he wants. He understands credit will never come his way this season, not with Luck headlining a roster stacked with NFL talent, and that's perfectly fine by Shaw.

The way he sees it, if his name is never mentioned for a more high-profile job, that's just one less distraction.

"It does nothing for me. I don't get excited about it. I don't go, 'Ooooh, that's kind of cool,'" Shaw said. "I don't care. I don't need anyone to give me any credit for what I'm doing. I don't need my name to be bounced around for anything. I couldn't care less. I want to dig my heels in here and hopefully they'll drag me away from this place and force me into retirement at some point."