

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

Mark Talbott Heads to Stanford

By Mark Goldenson and Maisy Samuelson

The Stanford squash program has always had lofty goals.

Three years ago, the program made shirts that boldly proclaimed, "Stanford Squash: building a dynasty from the ground up."

The slogan may have seemed grandiose for a student-run club, but now the grandiose is looking realistic at Stanford. The program officially announced in late August that Mark Talbott, former coach of the national champion Yale Lady Bulldogs and widely considered the greatest squash player in American history, will become the new director of Stanford Squash.

At first glance, Stanford, a club team founded only a handful of years ago, seems like a strange destination for a coach of Talbott's stature. He was the No. 1 ranked hardball squash player for 13 consecutive years from 1983 to 1995. He won more than 200 professional titles and 70 percent of the tournaments he entered and is a three-time Olympic Athlete of the Year. After his playing career, Talbott was National Director of Junior Development and twice served as coach of the World Junior teams. He led the Yale women's program for six years and last season earned the school its first national championship in over a decade.

Compare that to Stanford's humble beginnings. In 1998, sophomore Mark Goldenson was playing on the campus courts and trying not to slip. The squash facility consisted of four American-sized courts with a leaky roof, waterlogged floors and head-sized holes in the walls. "It was a lawsuit waiting to happen," says Goldenson.

Despite the courts, Goldenson recognized an unmet demand for squash on campus. "I saw there were a lot of avid players, but no team, no lessons, no coaches, and worst, no organization," he says. "I thought, this is

Stanford, we could have a top-flight program."

In 1998, Goldenson started the program as a club sport (a step below varsity). He recruited tennis players, runners—anyone who would listen—to try squash. Two enthusiastic players, Jason Miller and Mike Greenfield, joined him to form a core of dedicated founders.

The initial results were not pretty. The Cardinal (the color, not the bird) ended its inaugural season ranked 36th out of 37 teams after beating a Bard squad that was missing two players.

Undeterred, the founders focused on the next step: renovating Stanford's shoddy squash facility. The Stanford Athletics Department had neglected the courts for years and considered tearing them down to build a parking lot. Miller and Goldenson launched a petition and garnered more than 400 signatures to prove demand for squash. After a year of lobbying, the program convinced the Athletic Department to build two international courts and repair three American courts. "The courts were the key. Once people could actually play, demand soared," says Miller.

With coaching from local pro Richard Elliott and volunteer Zan Feild, the Stanford men rose in 2001 from 33rd to 25th and earned the College Squash Association's Barnaby Trophy as the nation's most improved

team. The success of the men's team (now ranked 18th) prompted the program to create a women's team in 2001, which Greenfield coached as a volunteer for two years after graduating.

Though the program's rise has been impressive, the Cardinal has never been a threat to top teams like Trinity College or Yale. Last winter, Talbott brought his Yale women to California to play the Stanford men in a historic battle of the sexes. The Yale women handily defeated the Stanford men in a 9-0 sweep.



Mark Talbott stands proud on his new turf: Stanford!