

But in Silicon Valley, growth is the key metric of success. After building the program from scratch to respectable, the program's leaders believe Stanford now has the potential to be a powerhouse. "With a dedicated group of students and young alumni, a top-notch coach in Mark, an amazing new facility, a supportive athletic administration, world class academics, and California quality of life—Stanford squash is in a position to take off," says current men's team captain Chris Fesenmaier.

Talbott also saw a glimpse of Stanford's potential during his team's trip west. "Stanford is the best university on the west coast to build a national powerhouse and training center," says Talbott. "Stanford has all the resources, runs a first class athletic program, and shares my vision for the program."

Despite tremendous success at Yale, Talbott was looking for a new challenge and a change in environment for his family. "I thoroughly enjoyed my six years at Yale," says Talbott. "Winning the National Championship was one of the most thrilling experiences I have ever had in squash. The Yale team is, top to bottom, perhaps the best team in the history of intercollegiate women's squash. I will truly miss working with them, but I feel this is the right move for my family and I am excited to help build the Stanford program."

Building Stanford into a program that can compete with the one he left at Yale will be no easy task for Talbott. As a club sport, squash receives no special consideration in the admissions office. The women's team does have a chance at varsity status to help Stanford achieve Title IX compliance, but at least in his first year, the former world champion will be training walk-ons, some of whom have never picked up a squash racquet.

If history is any indication, that may not be a problem. Former Stanford men's team captain Rich Sherwood had never played squash before arriving as a freshman and was originally cut during try-outs, only to be

called back when another player quit. A determined retriever with an unorthodox swing, Sherwood defeated players with twice his experience last season to enter the nation's top 50 and earn the prestigious Skillman award, given to the most outstanding sportsman in men's collegiate squash.

Talbott can also count on another asset: a new facility. Stanford Athletics is building seven international courts in a recreational complex to be completed in the spring of 2005.

Talbott's vision doesn't stop at collegiate success. He hopes to raise a multi-million-dollar endowment and finance community outreach programs similar to SquashBusters, a successful program for inner-city children in Boston.

"I am thrilled to be coached by Mark," says women's team captain Maisy Samuelson. "But I am even more excited about his commitment to expanding squash on the west coast. That has always been our broader goal."

The program already extends far beyond collegiate competition. Players hold weekly lessons, teach several classes, run two annual tournaments, organize squash camps for local juniors, and maintain a website (www.stanfordsquash.com).

"My dream is to build a squash program second to none, and I believe Stanford is the most exciting place to do it," says Talbott. "There is a lot of support and groundwork in place and I think everyone in the west shares my enthusiasm and desire. It will be fun to see how far this program goes."

It's a vision that even the entrepreneurial founders admit is hard to believe.

"Not in my wildest dreams could I have envisioned that we'd be here, in 2004, with a world champion leading our program," says Miller. "I think Stanford Squash is a testament to what hard work from otherwise 'unqualified' people can become. To think that students with little to no business background or squash background have built a program that Mark Talbott is willing to take over is exhilarating."