

Shane Davis: From Star Player to Head Coach

Davis has taken the Ramblers to new heights since taking over in 2003

By Joe Flaherty

Walking through the doors of his office is like walking through Loyola volleyball history. Men's Volleyball head coach Shane Davis, 34, has spent nearly half his life with the Ramblers, and it shows.

On one wall, a gameplan for an upcoming match is scrawled across a white board. On another, a photo from one of his proudest moments as a coach: fans mobbing the court at Alumni Stadium following Loyola's victory over No. 1 Penn State in 2009.

"I'm sure we violated plenty of fire codes that day," Davis said with a smile.

Various volleyballs and trophies line the shelves, some of them mementos of a playing career with the Ramblers from 1999 to 2003.

Davis' school record of 5,337 assists still stands today. As a setter, he was named First-Team All-MIVA three times and Loyola's 2003 Male Athlete of the Year.

On his table lies a photo with his wife, Andrea, and daughter, Sydney. Davis was married at Loyola's Madonna della Strada Chapel.

With numerous ties to the Loyola community and a track record nearly as long as the volleyball program's existence, you could assume Davis had dreamt of a career in volleyball since his youth.

But another corner in his office is filled with autographed footballs, revealing the Iowa-native's first sports love: the gridiron.

"I played tight end and defensive end. I got offers from colleges and got recruited," Davis said. "But it was one of those senior year deals where I wanted to try something that I hadn't really gone all-in on. So I started [focusing on] volleyball."

Davis had played club volleyball since eighth grade and was motivated by the challenge of earning a college scholarship in another sport. Ramblers head coach Gordon Mayforth traveled to the small town of Denver, Iowa to recruit Davis... during a football game. By May of his senior year, the dominos started to fall that would send him to Loyola.

"This kid Justin Schnor... everybody knew he was a stud," Davis said. "He decided Loyola first. Then Dan Haas, who I played club with, got recruited here. It was either Loyola or USC for us."

Both Davis and Haas would follow Schnor to Rogers Park.

“I just felt comfortable and really wanted,” Davis said. “Gordon did such a great job of making you feel he wanted you and had a plan for you.”

Mayforth’s plan for Davis was for him to red shirt in 1999 and start by 2001. But Davis took the reigns a season earlier, winning MIVA Freshman of the Year honors in 2000.

The Ramblers would fall to Lewis in the first round of the MIVA Tournament that year. After losing the MIVA Championship each of the following two seasons, Davis led the Ramblers to a rematch with Lewis for the MIVA Championship in 2003.

“Schnor and Haas and I, we were all four-year starters and we rode the whole thing through,” Davis said. “That was our year. And they took that away from us.”

Lewis swept Loyola in the MIVA Championship and later won the NCAA Championship, only to vacate those titles due to the use of ineligible players. Left with a bitter taste in his mouth, Davis moved away from the indoor courts.

“I didn’t want to coach. I thought ‘I don’t want to play any more indoor, I’m done,’” Davis said. “I started playing beach volleyball. But Gordon always said you’ll be a coach some day... I said, ‘okay Gordon, whatever you think.’ But he was right.”

With Mayforth moving on to coach a pro team in 2002, the three-year captain became a de-facto assistant coach as a senior under interim coach Tim O’Brien.

“O’Brien said, ‘this is your team, you’ve been setting for four years. I want as much feedback from you as possible,’” Davis said.

With the coaching position vacant at season’s end, Davis felt it was his responsibility to keep the program moving forward.

“I told them I’d only take the position for a year,” Davis said.

A decade later, Davis is still pushing the Ramblers to new heights.

The three-time MIVA Coach of the Year has led the team to its first-ever No. 1 national ranking, one season after the team’s first appearance in the Final Four. Davis calls Loyola ‘The Pepperdine of the Midwest’; that rise to elite status stems from a simple yet demanding philosophy.

“You’ve got to win,” Davis said. “Whether that’s on the court or off, you’ve got to win. You’ve got to do whatever you can to be the best.”

He’s proud of his group’s ability to meet that standard, and can see some players who may follow in his footsteps.

“Peter Jasaitis,” Davis said of the red-shirt senior. “We already call him Coach Pete.”

No matter what their futures hold, Davis is confident his players will succeed. It's the same quiet confidence he had when he took the job that Loyola would one day play for a national championship.

The Ramblers have a chance of making that dream a reality. At 12-1 overall, the team is on track return to the Final Four, which will be hosted at Gentile Arena from May 1st-3rd. All-session passes are now available on loyolaramblers.com for \$35.