

## 2010 UCLA Men's Volleyball Outlook

There is plenty of motivation in Westwood for the 2010 edition of UCLA men's volleyball — much more than usual. Last season injuries, academic troubles, illness and bad luck created the perfect storm for some once-in-a-generation struggles. However, the nature of athletics is such that a new season creates a clean slate of opportunities. The Bruins are hungry after their one-year hibernation, and all signs point to a feast of success. They'll feature a retooled lineup, a rejuvenated attitude and a sense of urgency for the 2010 season.

As Head Coach Al Scates enters his 48<sup>th</sup> season, he has the luxury of a wealth of personnel experience. The 11 returning lettermen boast 261 starts and have played in 401 matches. These include last year's freshmen who earned starting positions and seniors who have started regularly at some point in their careers. Seven starters return, but some of them won't start in 2010 because a few of the returning lettermen have switched positions or healed. This will give the Bruins a deep, experienced bench, which proves its worth during a championship run.

Following are capsule summaries of the team, position by position.

### Setter

Three-year letterman **Kevin Ker** figures to play a major role in the offense this season. He can score points off his serve, distribute the ball to all areas of the court, play solid defense and run the offense efficiently. But he may not start.

Scates and his staff are converting to setter 6-8 sophomore **Kyle Caldwell**, an opposite last year. Caldwell's upside is tremendous. He's a huge force at the net, an aggressive attacker and a solid defender in the backcourt.

"Kyle Caldwell takes the ball very high and speeds up our offense," said Scates. "He can attack most passes and shut down the left side hitters very effectively.

"Kevin Ker played very well in Argentina," Scates continued. "He's got one of the best jump serves in the conference and with him in the lineup, we know what he can do."

The 6-2 Ker has started 39 matches in three seasons and boasts a career service ace average of 0.68. His knowledge of the league's defenses is an invaluable asset as a starter or backup off the bench.

Also battling for time are third-year 6-5 sophomore **Alex Scattareggia**, who started three matches last season, and second-year freshman **Scott Vegas**, who is 6-6.

"Scott Vegas is an emerging talent," said Scates. "He can set from pin to pin with little trouble; he made some dramatic improvements during his redshirt year. We are also comfortable with Alex Scattareggia. These two players will compete all season for playing time."

## Outside Hitter

The Bruins boast a legitimate All-America candidate in senior **Garrett Muagututia**, who ranks among UCLA's career leaders in several categories. He is a five-tool player who Scates feels is vital to the team's success.

"Garrett is the complete package," said Scates. "He provided excellent leadership in the fall and was virtually unstoppable in our preseason tournament. I expect him to be playing with the U.S. National Team after this season."

Muagututia, who will serve as team captain, enters the season with 13 career double-doubles, 49 double-digit kill performances and a career average of nearly 4.0 points per game.

Fourth-year junior **Dylan Bowermaster** was a pleasant and welcome surprise in the fall and earned himself a starting spot opposite Muagututia. His playing time has been limited because of injuries the past two seasons after he earned a letter as a true freshman in 2007. That season, he showed promise, playing in 17 matches and averaging nearly 2.0 points per game. If he stays healthy, he'll be a key player for the Bruins.

"Dylan brings a much-improved presence to the position," said Scates. "He's a solid player — he hits for a good average, has a great serve and blocks and passes well."

Two solid, all-around players will serve as backups to both players: redshirt freshman **Jack Mergenthaler** and third-year sophomore **Jeremy Casebeer**. As a prep senior at La Costa Canyon HS, Mergenthaler helped lead his high school team to a pair of CIF titles and three straight league championships. Casebeer, who redshirted last season, led his Santa Barbara HS team to a 35-4 record in 2007. As a freshman for the Bruins in 2008, he played in four matches, recording a career-high of five kills in his only start against Long Beach State.

## Quick Hitters

True sophomore **Thomas Amberg** has locked up one spot. As a freshman last season, Amberg started 24 matches and recorded a 1.33 blocks per game average, good enough to rank second all-time on the single season rally-scoring chart. He earned All-MPSF Honorable Mention honors before traveling to India last summer with the Jr. National Team and to Argentina with the Bruins in September.

Three other players will battle all season for the other spot: senior **Brett Perrine** and sophomores **Weston Dunlap** and **Nick Vogel**. Dunlap was sidelined all of last season and Vogel filled his spot with 20 starts. Now, the threesome may end up splitting time until one emerges more consistent. Dunlap made nine starts in 2008 and averaged nearly a block and two points per game. Perrine was moved to the outside last season, where he started six times and averaged 2.2 points per game. He moves back to his natural position in 2009. Vogel averaged nearly 3.0 points per set and led the team with a .403 attack percentage.

"These three players all have their strengths," said Scates, "and we'll use them accordingly."

“As a result of his experience this season with the U.S. Jr. National Team and in Argentina with our program,” Scates continued, “Amberg has improved his hitting arsenal. He’s also the best blocker on the team.”

### **Opposites**

Sophomore **Jack Polales** is the returning starter at this position with 20 starts and a team-leading 310 kills and 345.0 points. But the emergence of freshman **Jonathan Bridgeman** has forced the incumbent to improve other areas of his game.

“Jack’s defense has improved dramatically,” said Scates. “The competition has forced him to improve his blocking and digging.”

Bridgeman, a 6-7 true freshman, led Valley Union HS in Santa Ynez to three consecutive undefeated league seasons while earning All-CIF honors in 2009.

“Bridgeman makes very few hitting errors and has an outstanding jump serve,” said Scates. “He’s a good digger who won’t hesitate to dive on the floor for a ball.”

The 6-6 Polales recorded 17 double-digit kill matches for the Bruins a year ago and led the team in kills 11 times. He also hit better than .300 12 times and recorded nine matches with an attack percentage of .400 or better.

### **Liberos**

Last year’s penciled-in starter, **Tom Hastings**, was sidelined for the Winter Quarter and for all but the final seven matches of the Spring. Injuries to two backups and the inexperience of others left the Bruins starting true freshman **Jamey Ker**, who held his own. Ker will redshirt this season, and Hastings has returned intact to the lineup. Fourth-year junior **Teddy Goetz** will be the backup and senior **Cooper O’Connor** is listed at No.3.

“Hastings gives us a lot of perfect passes and he’s improved his range as well,” said the head coach. “His digging has gotten better, too. He had a great preseason.”

With nine career starts and 20 matches played, Hastings has the most experience at this position than any player in the program. He averaged 2.2 digs per game last season.

Goetz started three matches last season at libero and with more experience gained through fall training, he’s now considered a solid competitor for the job. He can also play at outside hitter, where he averaged nearly 2.0 points per game as a freshman in 2008.