



Jamal Johnson, Maliik Love and Chris Eversley celebrate after winning the Big West Conference Championship.

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JORDAN MURPH

# Making HISTORY

## Cal Poly Student Athletes Bring Home Championships

BY LARRY PEÑA

It was a year of historic firsts for Cal Poly's Mustang Athletics program. In March the men's basketball team made its first ever foray into the NCAA Division I tournament, and in May the baseball team hosted its first NCAA regional series capping a 47-win season.

Across the program, six teams — men's basketball, men's and women's cross country, women's soccer, men's tennis and baseball — won conference championships. And the athletic program overall earned its best score ever in the race for the Big West Conference Commissioner's Cup — an award that aggregates success across all sports.

For Cal Poly Athletics Director Don Oberhelman, the banner year is the result of a long trend toward excellence in Mustang Athletics — especially for the baseball team, which spent much of the season at the top of national ranking polls. "If you look at our record from year to year, if you follow the team closely, you shouldn't be surprised at how well we did," he says.

"We're not a flash in the pan," he adds. "We want to build slowly and stay there."

Baseball coach Larry Lee agrees that it has been a long and steady road. "We've been very competitive over the last several years and created a great culture within the program of hard work and great team chemistry," he says. "We've put ourselves in the upper tier of the Big West Conference, and it finally culminated in winning the Big West."

For basketball coach Joe Callero, this year's striking success is more closely tied to a few big changes this season. "We started off the year with a conscious decision to raise the bar, so we set up a tough preseason, playing in the biggest arenas against the biggest-name teams we could find," he said. That grueling preseason included some of the nation's top college teams, such as Arizona, Stanford and UCLA. "That got us to a point where we knew we could compete on a national level."



Callero also credits a strategic partnership with professors and students in Food Science & Nutrition — a program aimed at developing strategies to maximize players' long-term energy and improve recovery. "Having a healthy and energized and positive team is often underappreciated, because sometimes a big game can come down to one possession," he says.

Oberhelman sees momentum building all throughout the athletic program and is looking forward to similar success in the near future — especially for the women's teams. "Women's basketball will be a consistent competitor, and I think it's about to be a big year for volleyball," he says.

The softball team is another one to watch, he says. "In 2013 we had an 18-38 record," he says. "This past year we flipped the field to 38-18 and only lost the conference championship by a single game."

"At this rate, Mustang teams are very close to winning eight and nine championships in a year," he says.

Despite encouraging statistics and historic seasons, perhaps the biggest successes this year has been in terms of national stature and campus spirit. "We've always been known for our academic excellence and our Learn by Doing philosophy," says Cal Poly President Jeffrey D. Armstrong. "This is the year our Mustangs teams staked their claim on the national stage as well. Students, alumni and sports fans across the country know that we're here, and that we're here to win."

Mustangs pitcher Reed Reilly throws against Sacramento State in the NCAA Division I Regional Tournament.