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News from Merced College

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MERCED COLLEGE HIRES NEW BLUE DEVIL HEAD FOOTBALL COACH

Mark Kaanapu, head coach for the Menlo College Oaks Football Team since 2001, is the new head coach of the Merced College Blue Devils, becoming only the fourth head coach in Blue Devil history. Kaanapu takes over the helm from head coach Tony Lewis, who retired in January after a three-decade long coaching career with the Blue Devils.



Mark Kaanapu

“After a careful and thorough national search, we are very excited that Coach Kaanapu has decided to lead the Merced College Blue Devil football program,” said Merced College President, Dr. Benjamin T. Duran. “The pool of candidates was very strong and we are most fortunate to have landed a coach of Mark’s stature and commitment to young people.”

Kaanapu joined the Menlo College football staff in 1996, spending his first three seasons as an assistant. He was the offensive line coach and recruiting coordinator during the 1996 season before being promoted to assistant head coach in 1997. He has been responsible for all aspects of budgeting, fundraising, staff development, recruitment, and facilities planning.

From 1998 to 2000, he coached at the high school level and was an assistant coach with the Arena Football League's San Jose Sabercats in 2000, helping the team secure the Western Division title and a playoff berth. Kaanapu has also taught at the community college level, having served as an assistant football coach at West Valley Community College in Saratoga.

In 2003, the Menlo College Oaks' offense ranked 9th nationally in Division III in both yards per game and points per game. The team's turnover margin was 11th in the nation. Under his guidance, the Oak's have produced six All-Americans, including Denver Broncos tight end Nate Jackson.

While playing as an offensive lineman at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon, Kaanapu was selected as a Second Team All-American by the College Football News in 1989, Kaanapu graduated from Pacific University with a bachelor's degree in political science. He later earned a master's in science degree in sports management.

Kaanapu is a charter member of the Polynesian Coaches Association and is a volunteer for the San Mateo County agency responsible for the prevention of domestic violence. He has also served on the board of directors of the Northwest Intercollegiate Football Officials Association (NIFOA).

"Mark has a first-rate football mind and is a galvanizing personality," said Blue Devil Athletics Director Steve Cassady. "We'll move forward with this one."

He is described as being committed to excellence on the field and in the classroom. According to NIFOA Commissioner Mike Burton, Kaanapu has a positive attitude and is "one of the most professional coaches in our conference. Dale Hockstra, Menlo College's Dean of Academic Affairs, says that Kaanapu is "completely committed to the academic success of his players."

That would make him a good fit for the Blue Devils, whose coaches have always stressed the importance of maintaining good grades in the classroom and individual achievement on the field.

"We look forward to many years of Coach Kaanapu's leadership on the field and in the community," Dr. Duran said.

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