

SC MEN'S VOLLEYBALL ALUMS MUELLER AND STAWINSKI ELEVATE THEIR GAMES TO THE PROFESSIONAL LEVEL

The men's volleyball program at Springfield College has developed into one filled with a proud and rich winning tradition. No program has won more Molten Division III National Championships (four) than Springfield College. Two of the Pride's more decorated men's volleyball alums, **Brandon Mueller '05** and **Eduardo Stawinski '05**, can proudly say their teams boast two of those four national titles.

Mueller, who is originally from **Bartlett, Ill.**, and **Stawinski**, a native of **San Juan, Puerto Rico**, each burst onto the SC volleyball scene in 2002. Head Coach **Charlie Sullivan**, who is currently in his ninth season directing the Pride, had just won his first Molten Championship ('01) when the two came on board. With the help of newcomers Mueller and Stawinski, SC won two more consecutive titles in '02 and '03. In doing so, it was the first time a Division III men's volleyball program won three straight national championships.

Throughout their respective four-year careers, Mueller and Stawinski continued to rack up extremely impressive stats, each rewriting the Springfield College record books. In 363 career collegiate games, Mueller tallied 1,604 kills, 461 digs and 109 service aces. He ended his collegiate career ranked first all-time in kills and points (1,835.5). He also finished second in aces and third in kills per game (4.42).

A libero, Stawinski finished his four-year career ranked first all-time at SC in total digs. He finished with a remarkable 787 digs in 307 career games, good for a 2.56 dig-per-game average, which is also first all-time. In his sophomore season ('03), a year in which the Pride captured its third straight national championship, Stawinski totaled a career-best 243 digs, which is second all-time on SC's men's volleyball list for season records.

But putting records, statistics, and national championships aside, it is very clear that time spent on the SC campus under Coach Sullivan's tutelage gave Mueller and Stawinski the experience and foundation necessary to take their respective games to the next level. After the two graduated in the spring of '05, each went on to bigger things in the sport of volleyball as a result of their stay on the Springfield, Mass., campus.

Upon graduation, Stawinski immediately received a call from a team in the Puerto Rico Superior League called Caribes. Eduardo played in the 10-team league from the beginning of May until early August during the summer of '05, competing in 25 different matches which took place in front of over 5,000 spectators per match.

During that season, Stawinski's team went on to reach the best-of-seven finals in just his first year on the squad. Not only that, but all the matches were televised nationally in Puerto Rico, as Eduardo had the pleasure of competing against some of the top players in the world. On average, each match in the finals was played in front of over 12,000 fans.

Stawinski, commenting on his time spent playing in Puerto Rico, said, "The finals were probably my best experience playing-wise. Up until that best-of-seven series, I have never felt that type of pressure before in my life. I never thought playing in the finals would be so pressure-packed, but as soon as I walked from the locker room onto the stadium court, seeing those 12,000-plus people around you, with all eyes on the court, and the match being televised as well, it was definitely an extremely intense and nerve-wracking experience."

The Puerto Rico Superior League has been ranked among the top five best volleyball leagues in the world. With that ranking comes extreme pride and passion for the sport of volleyball in the area. One of the biggest things that stands out in Stawinski's mind when talking about volleyball in Puerto Rico is the passion that fans bring to the table every day. Fans would follow the team to every match, home and away, even showing up to watch practice, as Eduardo recalls practicing each day in front of at least 100 spectators.

Mueller has traveled down a different but equally impressive road since his SC volleyball days. Brandon competed with the Bring It Promotions Volleyball Tour this past summer, playing in different locations around Europe. The Tour stopped in Slovenia on the 15th of August for matches against teams from Austria, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic. After that, Brandon got sent to a tryout in Holland for a team called Omni World. After the tryout in Holland, Mueller was shipped off once again to a place called Bocholt in the northern part of Germany.

All the hard work and traveling throughout Europe paid off for Mueller in the long run, however, as he was signed to play professionally in Bocholt. “We practice four times a week and lift five times a week, usually playing only one match on the weekend,” commented Mueller, who has started every match thus far on the season. When asked about his transition to the overseas lifestyle, Brandon added, “Everyone on the team here speaks English, so our coach speaks English to everyone during practices and matches which has made the transition a lot easier. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to play volleyball at this type of level.”

When asked about how their time spent at Springfield College prepared them for playing at the next level, Stawinski and Mueller had very similar answers. “Springfield prepared me in many ways to play professional volleyball,” said Mueller. “For starters, the program itself has a great coaching staff that gave me the confidence and skills to be able to play at a high level. At SC, Coach Sullivan always seemed to recognize the little adjustments you needed to make your game that much better. Even more importantly than just recognizing those adjustments, coach was always willing to take the time to convey those adjustments to you.”

When asked about the same issue, Stawinski had this to say, “I learned about all of the different aspects of the game from Coach Sullivan. I learned so much from him during my college years. He taught me to see the game from different perspectives. From my libero position, coach trained me as a player, but also as a leader on the court. His methods of explaining the different aspects of the position were vital to my success, such

as when to be an emotional and energetic leader, and when to act in a more quiet and focused state.”

It is also well-known and documented throughout the SC campus that Coach Sullivan works hard each season to give his team an extremely tough and rewarding slate of competitors. On the weekend of February 9th, 2007, the Pride hosted the 20th annual Volleyball Hall of Fame-Morgan Classic, which featured Division I Ball State University and Rutgers-Newark, and Division II UCSD. The Morgan Classic has become the biggest event for volleyball on the East Coast, as SC is currently the only Division III school in the country to host a Division I volleyball tournament.

This is something that both of these athletes mentioned when talking about how the program at SC prepared them for volleyball after college. “At Springfield College you get the chance to play very good Division I programs and just a tough schedule all-around. In most cases we held our own against the D-I teams and even beat some of them, which gave me the confidence that I could play with anyone.”

The Springfield College experience as a whole is something that both of these athletes couldn't say enough about when asked. “Attending Springfield College was one of the best choices I have ever made,” commented Mueller. “Not only was the volleyball great, but also the people you meet at the college. From the fellow students to the teachers and coaches and also the staff members at the school, everyone is extremely friendly, and everyone is treated with the utmost respect. I have become a more well-rounded and confident person just by attending Springfield College.”

“At Springfield you build leadership, that is one of the biggest things I take away from my college experience,” said Stawinski. “You learn to be a leader by attending Springfield College, and this is something that has been vital to my experiences both on and off the court.”

This year, Eduardo Stawinski is back on the Springfield campus pursuing a master's degree, as he is also coaching on the women's volleyball staff under Head Coach **Joel Dearing**, who just finished his 18th season directing the Pride. Mueller continues to play professionally in Germany, and after a slow start to his team's season (1-4), Brandon's squad has picked it up as of late with two consecutive victories.

No matter what lies ahead for these bright young stars in regards to the sport of volleyball, it is safe to say that their time and experiences spent on the Springfield campus will always travel with them.