

Baseball standout Lambert returns to field months after tough injury

By Dick Dornan
Special to The Malibu Times

April 26, 2013, was a tough day for Chase Lambert. Malibu High's hard-hitting shortstop and occasional pitcher heard a pop as he walked a batter against league foe Santa Rosa. "It didn't feel good," said Lambert. "I knew something wasn't right."

It was later determined that Lambert, the Frontier League's 2012-13 Most Valuable Player, suffered a slight tear of the ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) in his right elbow.

"When I found out what it was, I was so bummed, obviously," Lambert said. "But I had to accept it and move forward."

Lambert continued to play as a designated hitter through the next six games as the Sharks notched a school-record 24 wins and won their first league title since 2005. Surgery was performed on July 3 and the outlook on his upcoming senior season was questionable at best.

Fast forward nearly seven months, and the outlook has brightened considerably. On Saturday, Lambert made his way to home plate to face live pitching for the first time since Malibu was eliminated from the CIF playoffs in 2013.

Facing off against Kennedy High

School of Granada Hills in a winter league competition called the Valley Invitational Baseball League (VIBL), Lambert grounded out in his first at-bat but made strong contact with the ball. While insignificant in the win/loss column, Saturday's game felt significant in the big picture for both Lambert and the baseball program.

"I was nervous but excited at the same time. It was a great feeling to be able to play with my team again," Lambert said. "I've been itching trying to come back and being at every game. I've always wanted to get out there but I've had to take it slowly. I'm just focusing on getting my body back in shape and I feel like I'm on my way to where I was."

"Where he was" was pretty darn good. A year ago, Lambert hit a team-best .454 with 44 hits, 31 runs, 19 RBIs and 13 doubles en route to being named the MVP of the Frontier League and an All-CIF selection. On the mound, Lambert served as the team's closer, going 3-0 with a 0.79 era, eight saves, 50 strikeouts, eight walks and allowed only eight hits in 26 2/3 innings pitched.

Malibu coach Ari Jacobs has been closely monitoring his team's progress during the winter and fall in the VIBL, which features games on Saturdays



Malibu's Chase Lambert played in his first game last weekend since last season.

ranging from nine to 12 innings.

During the next six weeks, Jacobs will focus on finalizing his starting pitching rotation as well as establishing his position players. Having Lambert return to the lineup as a designated hit-

ter was a victory in itself for the team.

"It was great. That was another marker no matter how things went today. Chase is back," Jacobs said emphatically. "It's a slow recovery period for him but he's back getting some

at-bats. He's on the comeback trail which is very nice."

Lambert was recently cleared to hit in game action but not to play in the infield or pitch. He has begun to field ground balls in practice and hopes to play shortstop or second base by the time the season rolls around.

Lambert's patience has been tested throughout the duration of his rehabilitation and watching games from the dugout. His leadership and attitude has never wavered.

"Don't doubt yourself," he said. "Keep your head high and you got to push through everything. There's going to be adversity in your life and it's how you deal with it."

Having a healthy Lambert in the lineup means everything to the team. The Sharks will be the favorites to win league again this year.

Senior Ace Noah Simon, who threw three effective innings against Kennedy, said the team feels confident heading into the 2014 season. Seeing Lambert back on the field provided an extra boost.

"It's definitely exciting for the program," Simon said. "Seeing him go out there and make contact is big, especially with all the hard work he's been through. I'm happy to see him back in the lineup. It pumped me up big time."

Kalmbach's recovery fuels Pepperdine's resurgence to No. 1 in the country

By Dick Dornan
Special to The Malibu Times

If the Pepperdine men's volleyball team has any of the same character traits or resolve that Parker Kalmbach possesses, then the 2013-14 season could have the makings of something special.

Two years removed from suffering a career-threatening spinal injury, Kalmbach is playing the best volleyball of his young life for Pepperdine. Coincidentally, the Waves are 3-0 and ranked No. 1 in the country.

But a little more than two years ago, no one could have seen this day coming.

On Aug. 13, 2011, Kalmbach was competing in a tournament at Manhattan Beach when his future in volleyball was suddenly placed in



Parker Kalmbach

extreme doubt.

After following through on a powerful right-handed swing that drove the ball into the sand, Kalmbach felt a searing pain in his back that would ground him for more than a year from playing the sport he loved.

Two months after the injury and still suffering pain, Kalmbach was referred to board-certified spine surgeon Hooman Melamed, M.D., whose patients include some of the world's best athletes.

Melamed ran Kalmbach through a gamut of examinations including x-rays, MRI, CAT scan and blood tests. Results concluded that Kalmbach suffered a small fracture and a herniated disc in his lower back at the L5-S1 vertebrae.

Five months after the injury, Kalmbach underwent minimally inva-

sive spine surgery in December 2011 that involved making a small quarter-sized incision in his lower back.

Melamed carefully traversed microscopic tools around tissue and bone to the injured area, removing the damaged disc, bone fragments and clearing the area of any scar tissue build-up.

It was performed as an outpatient procedure and Kalmbach was able to stand up and go home the same day. Following three months of physical therapy and soft tissue work with a spine specialist that helped strengthen his lower back, Kalmbach was quickly on the road to recovery.

Kalmbach, 21, redshirted his sophomore year for Pepperdine and returned last season. As a middle blocker for the Waves in 2013, he averaged a team-high 1.23 blocks, which ranked fifth in the league and ninth in the NCAA. His efforts earned him honorable mention all-league honors for the Mountain Pacific Sports League (MPSF), the conference in which Pepperdine's volleyball team competes.

Two years after the injury, Kalmbach is stronger, faster and more athletic than he has ever been. As a freshman, he weighed 170 pounds. Since then, he has put on plenty of muscle mass to his 220-pound frame. His vertical jump has increased six inches in two seasons.

Kalmbach's return to the court has put a smile on the face of his surgeon.

"I am so happy for him. This is priceless," Melamed said proudly. "When I see a patient get back to this type of level, it's better than winning the lottery. I get goose bumps talking about it. It brings the ultimate happiness to me. There is nothing in the world that can replace these moments."

His coach is also impressed.

"He had a pretty serious back injury. I remember when he was a skinny little kid in my camp. Now he's one of the biggest, baddest guys in the jungle," Pepperdine coach Marv Dunphy said. "He's a big strong kid. He's taken his fitness, health, strength and volleyball really seriously. Where he is now is due to who he is. He wants to be a good player and all coaches want to coach guys like him."

Prior to this season, Kalmbach asked Dunphy to move him to opposite hitter so he could "produce more results" for the Waves. It hasn't taken long for the



Kalmbach spikes one of his 18 kills vs. UC Irvine recently.

results to show.

In Pepperdine's 26-28, 25-22, 25-22, 26-24 victory on the road at USC last week, Kalmbach recorded a triple-double with 11 kills, a career-high 13 digs and tied his all-time best with 10 blocks. It is just the fourth triple-double by any MPSF player since the 2007 season.

A week earlier in the season opener at Firestone Fieldhouse, Kalmbach produced a career-high 18 kills in a 25-21, 25-21, 23-25, 25-19 win against two-time defending NCAA champion, UC Irvine.

"I was really happy because I always wanted to play volleyball at Pepperdine," Kalmbach said. "Having surgery and having that injury probably was good for me because I found people who really showed me how to put myself in a better position for athletics. I can't thank Dr. Melamed enough and Marv Dunphy for being there for me."

What once was a frightening injury has paved the way for a blossoming star on the rise. Kalmbach's spirited recovery has coincided with Pepperdine's resurgence as a national power.

With Kalmbach playing at the top of his game, it's only fitting that the Waves are atop the national rankings for the first time since March 7, 2010.

Holding onto third



Malcolm Brooks drives in for a layup against Gonzaga.

The Pepperdine Waves' mens basketball team lost to Gonzaga, 70-53, and bounced back to defeat Portland, 76-64, last week to remain in third place in the West Coast Conference.

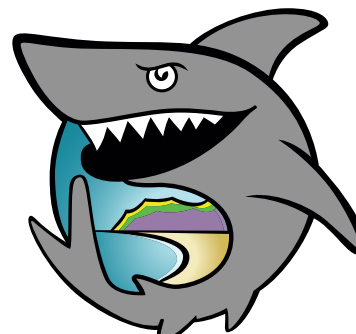
MHS upcoming games

- Thurs., Jan. 16
JV girls basketball vs. Carpinteria, at home, 5:30 p.m.
Varsity girls basketball vs. Carpinteria, at home, 7 p.m.
- Fri., Jan. 16
JV boys soccer vs. Oak Park, at home, 3:15 p.m.
FS boys basketball vs. Oak Park, at Oak Park, 4 p.m.
JV girls soccer vs. Oak Park, at Oak Park, 4:30 p.m.
Varsity boys soccer vs. Oak Park, at Oak Park, 5 p.m.
JV boys basketball vs. Oak Park, at Oak Park, 5:30 p.m.
Varsity girls soccer vs. Oak Park, at Oak Park, 6:15 p.m.
Varsity boys basketball vs. Oak Park, at Oak Park, 7 p.m.

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