

# Sherman is more than 2 highlights

By Bob Keisser, Long Beach Press-Telegram

The most insignificant thing one could say about the football and college career of Richard Sherman is to break it down to two plays.

USC fans may argue this. As Trojan football lore indicates, no one player did as much to shatter the Trojans' veneer of invincibility than the former Dominguez High standout and current Stanford senior.

As a sophomore in 2007, Sherman was the Cardinal receiver who jumped out of a quartet of Trojans to make a 20-yard catch on a fourth-and-20 situation late in the fourth quarter. The catch kept a drive alive that ended in a touchdown and Stanford's 24-23 upset of USC, ending the Trojans' school record for home wins (35) and arguably the biggest upset in college football history.

Stanford, 1-11 in 2006, came in a 41-point underdog.

As a junior in 2009, it was Sherman who returned a Matt Barkley interception 43 yards for a score to put the final touches on a 55-21 Stanford win, the most points ever scored on a USC team, much less the golden one that was Pete Carroll's.

Ask Sherman which means more and he sort of shrugs it off.

"Coach (Jim Harbaugh) always tells us to keep moving forward to the next moment and highlight," he said.

Sherman's career has been a succession of highlights, but perhaps nothing shines brighter than the scope of what the Cardinal senior, who will end his college career Jan. 3 in the Orange Bowl against Virginia Tech, has accomplished as a high school and college student-athlete.

Sherman was a multisport athlete who grew up in Bellflower but made his way to Dominguez because his parents believed it was a better fit for the family. Regardless of the stereotypes about the neighborhood in Compton, Sherman's family knew Dominguez had a smaller campus, a college prep program and Willie Donerson's football ideals emphasized a very close family attitude and personal discipline.

Richard Sherman wanted to be a sprinter in track but the coaches steered him toward the hurdles and jumps, where he earned CIF honors.

He was a key receiver in football but his best position was always cornerback.

By the time he was helping the Dons to a CIF title in 2005, his list of interested colleges had grown from Mississippi State and UNLV to most Pac-10 schools.

He chose Stanford because of the academics and post-football opportunities - even though it meant taking extra courses before his freshman season so he could prove he could handle the collegiate workload.

"The thing I told Richard at the time was that there wasn't anything he couldn't achieve," Donerson said. "He had already proved that to us in the class room. It doesn't matter what reputation someone or a school has, it's what one does with the opportunities they're presented."

Sherman led Stanford in receptions (34) as a true freshman on a 1-11 Stanford team coached by Walt Harris. Jim Harbaugh replaced Harris in 2007 and immediately put in a work ethic philosophy that challenged any concept that Stanford was inferior to anyone else on the field.

"It didn't matter what we had done or who we were playing, it only mattered that we believed in each other," Sherman said of the transition.

The win over USC was a warning shot to the rest of college football. USC played with a sense of entitlement that Sherman and other Cardinals ripped from their mouthpieces.

"The thing is, I don't think there was anyone on the team who didn't think we could win that game," the 6-foot-3, 190-pound Sherman said.

A knee injury led to a medical redshirt season in 2008. He returned in 2009 and, despite 81 career receptions, asked Harbaugh if he could move to defensive back. He thought it was his better position, would give him a greater chance at a pro career, and provide depth to what was then the thinnest unit on the team.

"I'll be honest, I wasn't all that confident it would work out well," Harbaugh said. "It's not that easy of a transition. But to his credit, he

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worked hard and earned the job, made us a more athletic and tougher team in the secondary, and turned himself into a real team leader."

"I thought I would play cornerback when I got here," Sherman said. "What those years did was teach me about tendencies of receivers, how they release, the demeanor at the line. In high school, we played mostly bump, so I had a lot to learn."

He started 12 games in 2009 and had two picks, including the return against Barkley as Stanford went 8-5. This season, he leads the secondary in most categories - four interceptions, nine break-ups, 13 defended passes - and is a big part of the Cardinals' 11-1 season and No. 4 national ranking that got them the BCS Orange Bowl bid.

The only loss this season was to Oregon, which will play for the national title.

"We're just disciplined work-hard guys," Sherman said of his defensive teammates. "My first year, people said we were slow as a unit, and even if we had a good game, it wasn't enough. So (2010) was all about showing what we were capable of doing as a unit."

As a person, Sherman already has shown that. He earned his degree in communications last spring and has spent his senior season working on a secondary degree and master's program.

Richard Sherman didn't merely have a football career at Stanford with a highlight or two. He created his own epic, something worth about 1,000 parchment pages, covered by leather binding all around and a fine craftsman's lock and key to protect the saga.

To USC, he'll always be the guy who made two plays. At Dominguez, he'll always be the guy made a career.