

## Cal Poly Volleyball Opens 2021 Season Friday Against No. 13 Louisville, Arizona State

SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. — 629 days. That's how long it will have been since the Cal Poly volleyball team last played a match when it opens its 2021 season this Friday against No. 13 Louisville and Arizona State at the Sun Devil Volleyball Classic in Tempe, Ariz.

The Mustangs will begin their journey of the 2021 season Friday against the No. 13 Cardinals at 10 a.m. followed by a match against the host Sun Devils later that same day at 7 p.m.

Cal Poly will then wrap up the Sun Devil Volleyball Classic on Saturday at 12 p.m. against Texas A&M Corpus Christi.

Live stat links will be available for all three matches this weekend. The Mustangs' match against Arizona State will be available for fans to watch via a live stream on Pac-12.com. Links for all these can be found on the volleyball schedule page.

Cal Poly, which did not play in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has won the Big West title two of the last three seasons and has made the NCAA Tournament three consecutive years. The Mustangs also still hold the longest home winning streak in the country at 32 straight matches, which dates back to November of 2016. In 2019, the Mustangs finished with a record of 21-9 and second in the Big West at 13-3 in head coach Caroline Walters' first season as full-time head coach. They won their first round NCAA Tournament match against Georgia before falling to eventual national champion Stanford in the second round.

As a team in 2019, Cal Poly ranked seventh in the nation and first in the Big West in service aces per set with 1.85 (110 total). They were also third in the conference in blocks per set at 2.10 as well as third in the opponent hitting percentage at .192.

The Mustangs return eight players from its 2019 roster while welcoming 13 newcomers to the team. Returning for the Mustangs include setter Avalon DeNecochea and middle blocker Meredith Phillips, both of whom were First Team All-Big West selections in 2019. DeNecochea, who currently ranks eighth in program history for career assists with 2,032, averaged 9.48 assists per set, 1.62 digs per set, .62 blocks per set, and .29 aces per set in 2019. Phillips averaged 1.80 kills per set and led the team in blocks at .90 per set in 2019.

Other returners for Cal Poly include redshirt senior outside hitter Jamie Stivers, outside hitter Nicole Cavote, as well as liberos/defensive specialists Lea Ungar and Taylor Rose. Stivers played in the first 10 matches of the season, averaging 2.00 kills per set before suffering a season-ending knee injury during a match against Colorado State. Cavote played in 27 sets in 2019, averaging 1.37 kills per set. Ungar played in all 110 sets in 2019 as a defensive specialist, averaging 2.12 digs per set and was even received a Big West Defensive Player of the Week honor once during the season. Rose appeared in 78 sets in 2019 as a defensive specialist, averaging 1.49 digs per set.

Meanwhile a key player from 2019, Maia Dvoracek, who was an AVCA Third-Team All-American and First Team All-Big West selection will miss the 2021 season due to a knee injury she suffered in the spring.

The 13 newcomers to the team this season include three transfers, three redshirt freshmen who were around the team in 2020, and seven true freshmen. Among those transfers are redshirt freshman outside hitter Tommi Stockham who transferred after one season at Indiana. In her lone season with the Hoosiers in 2020, Stockham played in all 18 matches and led the team in kills with 206. She had 12 matches in which she notched double-digit kill numbers, including a season-high 26 against Iowa and was named Big Ten Freshman of the Week following the two-match series against the Hawkeyes. She was also second on the team in digs with 146 and had seven double-doubles on the season.

Another transfer the Mustangs added is junior outside hitter Kristina Jordan, who came to Cal Poly after two seasons at West Virginia. With the Mountaineers, she played in 57 matches and averaged 2.20 kills per set and .67 blocks per set. As a sophomore in 2019, she averaged 2.94 kills per set, which ranked second on the team, and 1.03 digs per set. She had a team-high 19 kills in a match against No. 1 ranked Baylor on Nov. 26 and had a career-high 30 kills in a five-set match against San Diego State. As a freshman in 2018, she led West Virginia and ranked 10th in the Big 12 in service aces with 24 and finished second on the team in blocks and fifth in kills.

The other transfer Cal Poly added is redshirt sophomore libero/defensive specialist Chen Abramovich from the University of Nebraska. Originally from Kfar Saba, Israel, Abramovich spent two years with the Cornhuskers. As a freshman in 2018, she appeared in one match against Wake Forest before redshirting the 2019 season. During her time there she was named to the Nebraska Scholar-Athlete Honor Roll in the fall of 2018 and the spring of 2019.

Following this weekend's matches, Cal Poly will play its first home match of the season on Wednesday, September 1 at 7 p.m. at Mott Athletics Center. The Mustangs will have a total of 12 home matches this season.

**Scouting The Opponents:** Cal Poly is 1-0 all-time against Louisville with the match coming in 2006. The Cardinals were 15-3 in 2020, winning the ACC Championship and made it to the third round of the NCAA Tournament.

The Mustangs are 2-3 all-time against Arizona State with the last match happening back in 2013. The Sun Devils finished with a 6-14 record in 2020.

Cal Poly has never faced Texas A&M Corpus Christi before. The Islanders, who were picked to win the Southland Conference title in the preseason coaches poll, were 14-5 in 2020 and made the NCAA Tournament after winning the conference title.

**Cal Poly In the Polls:** In the Big West Preseason Coaches Poll, the Mustangs were picked to finish second in the conference. Cal Poly received a total of 111 points and four of the 11

first place votes. They finished just behind defending conference champion Hawai'i, who received 117 points and the other seven first place votes.

Meanwhile in the AVCA Preseason Top 25 Poll, Cal Poly was in the 'others receiving votes' category after getting four votes.

**Tough Non-Conference Schedule:** Cal Poly will put itself to the test this season with its non-conference schedule. The Mustangs have a total of 11 non-conference matches with five of those against teams who are ranked in the AVCA Preseason Top 25.

Those teams are Louisville, Utah, San Diego, Washington, and Pepperdine.

**Home Cookin':** Cal Poly has won 32 consecutive home matches, the longest active home winning streak in Division I volleyball. The Mustangs have gone undefeated at Mott Athletics Center the last three seasons and have not lost a home match since October 28, 2016.

In 2019, the Mustangs had the second-highest average home attendance amongst Division I schools in California, trailing only Stanford.

**Strong In Conference:** Since 2017, the Mustangs are 44-4 in Big West matches. That includes a perfect 16-0 record in 2017, a 15-1 record in 2018, and a 13-3 record in 2019.

Cal Poly won the Big West Conference title in 2017 and 2018 and have won the conference title a total of five times.