The AVCA History Commission was formed as a subgroup to the AVCA Diversity Development Team on December 1, 2020. The History Commission’s purpose is to recognize, amplify, and celebrate the rich and diverse history of the sport of volleyball. The first phase of the Commission’s work will explore the contributions of Black Americans to the sport of volleyball. Phase 1 is timed to coincide with the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the American Volleyball Coaches Association.

PHASE 1 | VOL. 1.10

DAIN BLANTON
Born in Laguna Beach, California, Dain Blanton attended Laguna Beach High School and was named the 1990 Orange County Player of the Year, MVP of the Pacific Coast League, and earned All-American honors at the Junior Olympics. In addition to his stellar play as a volleyball athlete, Blanton was an All-State basketball player for Laguna Beach leading them to the California Interscholastic Federation state basketball final game in 1990.

Dain accepted a volleyball scholarship to attend Pepperdine University after high school. While at Pepperdine, he would earn honorable mention All-America and claim the 1992 Men’s National Volleyball Championship at Worthen Arena on the campus of Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. The Waves swept the Stanford Cardinal and finished the season 24-4 coached by the legendary Marv Dunphy.

After graduating from Pepperdine with a teaching credential in Physical Education and degree in Public Relations, Dain would embark on a career as a professional beach volleyball player becoming the first African-American to win a major title when he won the Hermosa Beach Grand Slam in 1997. On September 26, 2000, Blanton and his partner Eric Fonoimoana would secure the men’s beach volleyball gold medal at the Sydney Olympic Games taking down one of the world’s best beach pairs in Brazilians Ze Marco de Melo and Ricardo Santos. Blanton immediately cemented his legacy as one of the best men’s beach volleyball players in history. Blanton would return to the Olympics with new partner Jeff Nygaard in 2004 in Athens, becoming the first two-time U.S. male beach volleyball Olympian.

Dain would turn his focus to sports broadcasting in 2007. He would cover not only volleyball and beach volleyball; he covered high school and college football and basketball and even the NBA and Major League Baseball while working for ABC, NBC, ESPN, Fox Sports Net, and the Universal Sports Network.

From 2015-2018, Dain served as a volunteer assistant for the USC beach program under Coach Anna Collier. The program would win the 2015 AVCA national beach championship and the 2016 & 2017 NCAA championships during his time as a volunteer. In 2019, Dain was elevated to head coach of the beach program upon the retirement of Anna Collier. Dain’s first season as head coach was halted due to concerns with COVID-19 and USC Beach ended the season with a 6-5 record.

USC Beach Volleyball entered Coach Blanton’s second season and the 2021 campaign as the preseason #4 ranked program in the AVCA poll. With two first place votes there was optimism this team was poised to make it to Gulf Shores, and they did not disappoint, starting the season 13-0. The Women of Troy were off to a great start before a two-match losing streak in early April to Florida State and LSU. No need to panic, as the team quickly rallied to close the regular season on a 10-match winning streak heading into the PAC-12 Championships. A loss to crosstown rival UCLA sent the Trojans from the Winner’s Bracket to the Contender’s Bracket where they beat Stanford 3-0 setting up a Championship Duel with you know who, UCLA. Meeting for the fifth time, the Brusins took down USC 3-2 to claim the PAC-12 Championship. Coming off the loss, USC would head to Gulf Shores, Alabama and the NCAA Collegiate Beach Volleyball Championships as the #2 overall seed on a collision course with #1 overall seed UCLA. Coach Blanton, assistant coaches Gustavo Rocha and Laurel Weaver, and the talented Trojans were up to the task as they swept through the Winner’s Bracket taking down Cal Poly, Florida State, and a feisty Loyola Marymount program setting up a Mother’s Day championship showdown with (say it again) UCLA. The veteran #3 pair of Haley Hallgren and Hailey Harward got the win and the first point while the #5 twin-sister combo of Audrey and Nicole Nourse lost a tight second set 26-24 to give a point to the Bruins. Dominant #1s Tina Graudina and Megan Kraft earned their eighth straight win to put USC up 2-1 with Courts 2 and 4 playing for the trophy. #4 pair led by team leader Joy Dennis and her partner Delaynie Maple were embroiled in a tight three-setter while #2s Julia Scoles and All-American Sammy Slater would not be denied. An ace serve capped off a 26-24, 21-15 dual clinching win.

SET! MATCH! CHAMPIONSHIP! AND ANOTHER MARK IN VOLLEYBALL “HIS-STORY” FOR COACH DAIN BLANTON…and USC Beach Volleyball!
DAIN BLANTON

“HIS-STYLE!”

Thanks to USC Athletics and the NCAA for contributing to this article.
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