



2019 BIG WEST MEN'S VOLLEYBALL

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Coaches Tab Long Beach State To Repeat As Men's Volleyball Champion

IRVINE, Calif. – Reigning Big West and NCAA men's volleyball champion Long Beach State is the favorite to win a second straight conference title, according to the annual coaches preseason poll released Friday.

The Beach, which recently garnered the No. 1 preseason ranking in the American Volleyball Coaches Association poll, was a unanimous choice to win the 2019 Big West championship with all six first-place votes and 36 points. Hawai'i, the third-ranked team in the AVCA poll, finished in second place with 28 points. UC Irvine, ranked No. 4 by the AVCA, finished third with 26 points. UC Santa Barbara (16 points), CSUN (11) and UC San Diego (9) rounded out the poll.

Long Beach State consummated the inaugural season of Big West men's volleyball in 2018 with the program's second national title – and first in 27 years. The Beach concluded the campaign 28-1 with five All-Americans in the starting lineup. All five are back this season, led by 2018 TeamSnap/AVCA National Player of the Year **JOSH TUANIGA**. Tuaniga, a senior setter, joined outside hitter **TJ DeFALCO** and opposite **KYLE ENSING** on the 2018 AVCA All-American First Team. The trio played a prominent role in LBSU running the nation's top-rated offense with a .375 hitting percentage. Senior middle blocker **NICK AMADO** (second team) and sophomore middle blocker **SIMON ANDERSON** (honorable mention) also claimed All-American accolades from the AVCA. **ALAN KNIPE**, the 2018 USMC/AVCA Division I-II National Coach of the Year, has all the weapons at his disposal as he attempts to lead the Beach to another title. Coincidentally, the 2019 Final Four will be held at LBSU's Walter Pyramid.

1.	Long Beach State (6)	36
2.	Hawai'i	28
3.	UC Irvine	26
4.	UC Santa Barbara	16
5.	CSUN	11
6.	UC San Diego	9
() First-place votes		

Hawai'i will be the host of the 2019 Big West Tournament. The 'Bows have unfinished business after finishing the 2018 season 19-8, No. 5 in the final AVCA poll and as a Big West Tournament finalist, but missed out on an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament. UH returns a quartet of AVCA All-Americans, including first-teamer senior outside hitter **STIJN van TILBURG**, senior setter **JOE WORSLEY** (second team), junior right side hitter **RADO PARAPUNOV** (honorable mention) and junior middle blocker **PATRICK GASMAN** (honorable mention). The team's preseason national ranking is the highest for the program since opening at No. 3 in 2005.

UC Irvine also brings back four All-Americans from last year's 21-10 club which made the program's seventh NCAA Tournament appearance and finished No. 6 in the final 2018 AVCA rankings. Junior middle blocker **SCOTT STADICK** earned second team AVCA All-American honors after finishing No. 2 in the nation in blocks per set (1.32) and No. 3 in hitting percentage (.422). Fellow frontline teammate, senior right side hitter **KARL APFELBACH**, also garnered second team recognition from the AVCA. A pair of Anteater outside hitters claimed honorable mention distinction in senior **AARON KOUBI** and sophomore **JOEL SCHNEIDMILLER**. UCI did not suffer a sweep in any loss last season, and went 12-0 in three set matches.

UC Santa Barbara (No. 10) and CSUN (No. 11) also were ranked in the AVCA preseason poll. The Gauchos return All-Big West First Team selection senior **COREY CHAVERS**. The Matadors bring back an all-conference first team standout in senior **DIMITAR KALCHEV**.

UC San Diego returns outside hitter **WYATT HARRISON**, who was named to the league's all-freshman team. The Tritons will play in upgraded RIMAC Arena, which received new seating, a VIP skybox, a 50-foot wide video board, new LED scorer's tables, and a video production facility.

The 2019 season gets underway on Thursday, January 3.