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September 17, 2016 | 79° | Check Traffic

Sports

Pacific of Oregon brings an island flavor back to Hawaii

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Posted September 17, 2016

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Attached is one of Trey against Dubuque last week. Courtesy Pacific University Athletics

Pacific University provides a taste of home for the close to 400 Hawaii students on the Forest Grove, Ore., campus.

Rice and spam are staples in the cafeterias, which also offer plate lunch specials and "Bento Fridays," and the school's Hawaii club is preparing for its 57th annual luau in the spring.

"They really take care of the Hawaii kids," said Trey Kodama, a senior linebacker with the Boxers football team. "It's a home away from home for a lot of us from the islands."

Still, there's nothing quite like coming home.

Pacific's third "home" game of the season brings 16 local high school products on the Boxers roster back to the state for the first NCAA Division III game held in Hawaii.

The Boxers (0-2) face Occidental (0-1) today at 5 p.m. at Kamehameha's Kunuiakea Stadium in a contest with strong Hawaii ties on both sidelines.

The Pacific roster features a local presence exceeded in college football only by the University of Hawaii, and the coaching staff includes former record-setting Pacific and Pac-Five quarterback P.J. Minaya and former Punahou lineman Nick Schilla.

Occidental's visit marks the return of former Kahuku coach Doug Semones, now in his fourth season leading the Tigers. Darnell Arceneaux, the former Saint Louis quarterback and head coach, is in his third season on the staff and first as offensive coordinator. The Tigers have two Hawaii players on the roster.

"Eighteen years of my life and coaching career has been coaching in Hawaii," Semones said. "I've coached a lot of football in Hawaii, been in a lot of big games and had a lot of great experiences, so I'm hoping this will be a great experience, too."

Pacific coach Keith Buckley envisioned holding a game in Hawaii shortly after being hired in 2009 to revive a football program dormant since 1991. Given the school's Hawaii ties, which date back to the 1950s, local players helped form the foundation for the rebuilding project.

"When I was going through the interview process and researching Pacific University, the Hawaii relationship kind of really showed through in so many aspects," Buckley said. "So it wasn't really a decision that I had to make. It was just this is something Pacific does. ... So it was a natural fit for us to spend time there and really build our football program around Hawaii and California."

After going 4-23 in Buckley's first three years, the Boxers are 19-12 since and tied for the 2014 Northwest Conference title in a 6-3 season.

They dropped their first two games this season by a total of six points. Saint Louis graduate Kamana Pimental enters today's game as Pacific's leading rusher (242 yards, one touchdown) and second-leading receiver (six catches, 85 yards). Cornerback Max Look (Iolani) leads the team with three passes broken up and scored on a 56-yard punt return last week in a 28-24 loss to Dubuque.

Kodama, part of Kamehameha's class of 2012, was a first-team All-NWC pick last year and delayed graduation by a semester to play as a fifth-year season and return to the

Kapalama campus one more time.

"It's definitely going to bring back a lot of memories," he said. "I'm going to take a few minutes before the game to reflect on that and really be grateful for all the opportunity Kamehameha Schools and the football program provided to get me to this point."

Occidental senior defensive back Chaz Shizumura (Punahou) had five tackles and broke up a pass in the Tigers' 49-42 loss to Puget Sound last week.

Along with giving the Hawaii players a chance to play at home, Semones said the game presents an opportunity to expose Division III football to the local community.

"I think that's what's exciting. I don't really think people understand what Division III football is and how good football it is," Semones said. "People think Division III football is like this club football program — it's not. We get some really good players and the programs are really good and our conference is tough, and so is Pacific's.

"The biggest difference is there aren't scholarships, so kids are paying to play. ... That's why I have so much respect for our guys, because they're playing because they love it."