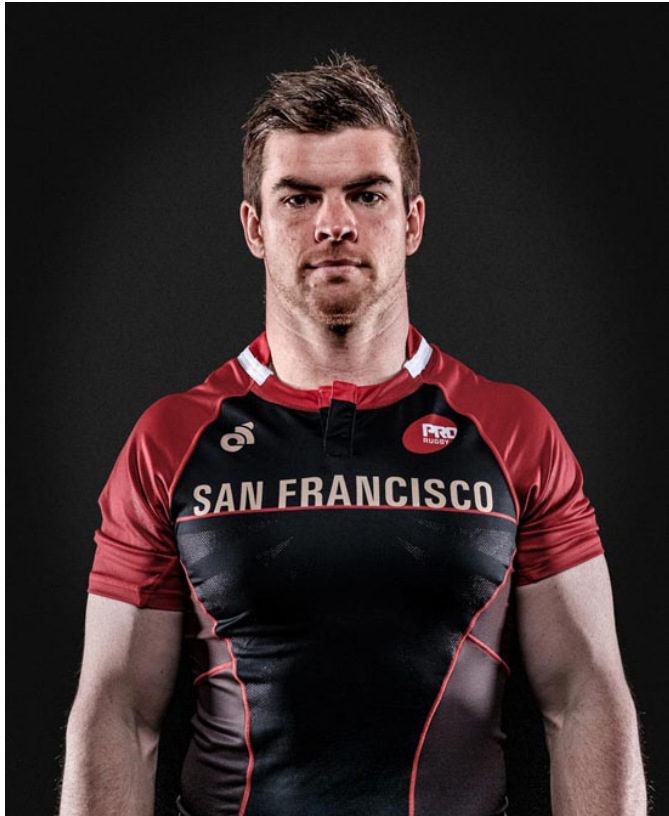


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Former St. Mary's Standout Splits Time Between Law School and Professional Rugby

By Karl Buscheck



Mike Haley Photo provided

A law student by day and a rugby pro by night, Lafayette native Mike Haley is plenty familiar with the raised eyebrows and looks of surprise.

"I do get a lot of interesting reactions," explained Haley, who is set to enter his second year at the University of San Francisco Law School in the fall and who is in the midst of his first season with the San Francisco Rush. "It's definitely a bit unique for sure. It's definitely been an experience trying to juggle both, but it's been manageable."

An All-American at Saint Mary's College, Haley, who is now 26, picked up rugby during his days at De La Salle high school.

"I just needed something to do, wanted something to do in the offseason for football - since it's kind of time consuming," said Haley, who played defensive end and tight end for the powerhouse Spartans. "So, I just wanted to mix it up."

The decision to branch out proved to be a hit. After playing center and wing for his high school club team, the Burton Valley and Stanley grad went on to compete for five seasons at Saint Mary's.

During his final campaign with the Gaels, Haley was not just a star but also a team leader for a squad that advanced all the way to the Division 1-A national title game.

"It was awesome," Haley said. "My fifth year I got the captaincy, but unfortunately, we lost in the national championship."

At the 2013 championships, the Gaels fell 16-14 to Life University at UNCG Soccer Stadium in Greensboro, NC.

"That was a cool experience in itself, to get the opportunity to lead a very well-known team in ... all the way to the national championship game," Haley said.

His inclusion on the All-America team not only marked one of the high points in Haley's career, but also entitled him to a spot on the national touring side.

"Getting the honor of being named an All-American is huge because as an American rugby player, that's what you work toward. You work toward getting collegiate All-American (honors)," Haley said. "In terms of college, that's the bench mark - getting collegiate All-American. So, I made that team and got to travel to New Zealand, which was an awesome opportunity."

Following the 2013 season, Haley's collegiate tenure drew to a close, but his rugby career kept

rolling on.

As he entered the professional work world and began preparing for the LSAT and law school, Haley joined the Olympic Club Rugby team. The Winged 'O ruggers play in the Pacific Rugby Premiership - the second-highest tier in the sport.

That stint with the Olympic Club led to Haley's current opportunity with the San Francisco Rush.

"The head coach (Paul Keeler) actually reached out to me and said that they were assembling the team," Haley said. "He told me they were hosting a combine and that he wanted me and a couple of my teammates from the Olympic Club and from (other)past (teams) to try out and give it a shot."

Haley aced the tryout and made the cut, landing a spot on the Rush's roster.

Along with the Sacramento Express, San Diego Breakers, Denver Stampede and Ohio Aviators, the Rush are one of five teams taking part in the inaugural season of the Professional Rugby Organization.

Due to Haley's academic commitments, Keeler has been flexible with the law student's demanding schedule.

"My coach for SF has been pretty understanding of my situation," Haley said. "When finals came around, he gave me the leniency in terms of being able to miss a couple of sessions here and there."

The Rush's first season, which will last about five months including the preseason slate, runs through the end of July. School and health permitting, Haley hopes it's the first of many he will take part in.

"I'd like to (play) as long as I can in terms of being able to balance with school and well as my body," Haley said with a chuckle. "I'll play as long as my body will let me or my schedule will let me. It definitely would be cool to see this opportunity out for as long as I could."

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[back](#)

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