

Sammy Lawanson

Defensive Coordinator / Safeties Coach

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Biography

Sammy Lawanson is in his first year as defensive coordinator and safeties coach at Cal Poly.

Lawanson brings over 25 years of coaching experience at the FBS, FCS, professional, and high school levels and returns for his second stint at Cal Poly. He started his coaching career as running backs coach of the Mustangs in 1999.

He most recently spent three years (2022-24) as the co-defensive coordinator/outside linebackers coach at Bowling Green. During Lawanson's first season as co-defensive coordinator in 2023, the Falcons led the nation in takeaways (28), and finished No. 4 in the nation with 17 interceptions, No. 7 with 11 fumbles recovered, No. 12 in passing yards allowed (179.8) and No. 31 in the nation with 33 sacks. The Falcons also were ranked No. 25 nationally in total defense (326.1) and had the nation's sixth-best improvement on defense in the nation at 93.5 yards per game compared to 2022. As the outside linebackers coach Lawanson oversaw third-team All-MAC linebacker Cashius Howell's monster season. Howell finished No. 1 in the MAC and No. 16 in the nation with 9.5 sacks.

During his first year at BGSU in 2022, Lawanson oversaw an outside linebackers unit that notched 11 sacks alone, which was more than one FBS squad had as a team (Colorado). Headlining the group was Demetrius Hardamon who notched six sacks, which ranked No. 8 in the MAC overall and No. 3 among linebackers.

Prior to Bowling Green, Lawanson spent two years at Northern Arizona. Under Lawanson at NAU, Anthony Sweeney earned second-team All-Big Sky honors after splitting time between nickelback and safety in NAU's five-game spring schedule during his first season with the Lumberjacks in 2020.

Before joining NAU, Lawanson spent the spring of 2020 coaching outside linebackers for the DC Defenders of the XFL after spending the previous fall as a defensive quality control coach at Fresno State.

From 2014 to 2018, Lawanson held two different positions at Sacramento State, first as the program's running backs coach for two seasons before being promoted to defensive coordinator. During his three-year tenure as the defensive coordinator for Sacramento State, Lawanson also coached the team's linebackers and safeties. Sacramento State led the FCS with 43 sacks in the 2017 season. Additionally, the Hornets ranked third in the nation in defensive touchdowns (5), fourth in third-down defense (26 percent) and fourth in tackles for loss (93). The program also led the Big Sky with 23 takeaways during the 2017 season. Sacramento State's all-time sacks leader George Obinna earned 14 of his school-record 33.5 sacks during his two full seasons playing in Lawanson's defense, while Ben Sorenson recorded 14.5 sacks in his two seasons under Lawanson as well.

Before landing in Sacramento, Lawanson spent two years at Arizona State and held the title of defensive quality control coach in 2012 when he worked with the team's safeties and special teams and was the manager of player development in 2013 when he assisted with tight ends and fullbacks.

From May of 2004 through February of 2012, Lawanson was a defensive coordinator for three high schools in Texas. He was the co-defensive coordinator at Hillcrest in Dallas from 2004-05. He then took the reins of the defense at Haltom High School for the 2006 season before moving to John Horn High School in Mesquite

(2007-2011).

Lawanson spent two seasons at Tulsa and two seasons at Cal Poly in 1999 and 2000 before coaching at the high school ranks. He coached running backs at Cal Poly and spent one year with linebackers and one with the secondary while at Tulsa.

Lawanson was a two-year starter at outside linebacker at San Diego State in 1995 and 1996. He was an honorable mention All-WAC selection following his junior season. Before attending SDSU, he played for two years at Fresno City College.

After finishing his eligibility, Lawanson spent parts of two seasons on his alma mater's staff, helping coach defensive backs and special teams. He graduated from SDSU in 1998. He and his wife, Beth, are the parents of Treyger, Sam and Arianna.
