

# Wall's Lawson Honored

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BY JOHN BUSH

STAFF WRITER

Mike Lawson, a senior midfielder at the Rochester (N.Y.) Institute of Technology, has never let his handicap get in the way of success ... on and off the field.

For the second straight year, Lawson of Wall, was named to the 2005 National Soccer Coaches Association of America/Adidas Men's College Scholar All-America second team.

Lawson, who is deaf, is one of just 10 NCAA Division III men's soccer players to receive the Academic All-American honor. He also is one of six players in all of Division I, II or III to earn a second consecutive selection.

"I feel honored to be on the Scholar All-American team because I appreciate being recognized for all my hard work,' Lawson said. "To end my collegiate soccer career by getting this award two years in a row is extremely satisfying and fulfilling.'

A 5-foot-9, 170-pound lefty, Lawson capped his collegiate career last season by earning the Empire 8 Athletic Conference men's soccer Player of the Year award for the second consecutive year. A co-captain, Lawson finished second on the team in scoring with 12 points on four goals and four assists. All four of his goals put the Tigers in the lead for good.

As a junior, Lawson totaled five assists and four goals. Again, all four goals were game-winners. For his career, Lawson finished with 40 points on 13 goals and 14 assists, good for 20th place on RIT's all-time scoring list.

"Mike Lawson is the finest student athlete I have had the pleasure to coach in my career,' said RIT coach Bill Garno, who has coached the Tigers for 10 years. "His contribution to RIT, both on the soccer field and to the greater RIT community, will never be forgotten.

"The fact that 11 of the (13) goals Mike scored in his career here at RIT were game-winners is a telling statistic as well. Mike always played with the success of our team as his uncompromised priority.'

Despite being born deaf, Lawson has been playing soccer since he was 6 years old. He played at Wall High School and was a first-team All-Shore selection as a senior in 2001, leading the Crimson Knights with 10 goals and 12 assists. Lawson also has played on three state championship travel teams for the PDA Soccer Club, and took part in the Olympic Development Program.

When it came time to choose a college, RIT was a natural choice. He enrolled at the school's renowned National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a leading technological institution for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

"I ended up at RIT because it is a school with about 1,500 deaf students and 13,000 hearing students,' Lawson said. "RIT has all the support services and technology that deaf students need. For example, they have approximately 230 interpreters.'

Being deaf has never hindered Lawson's ability to play soccer at a high level. At Wall and RIT, he had an interpreter for assistance on the sideline and practices, but his on-field awareness and competitive desire more than compensated during games.

"His vision is one of his strongest attributes,' said Ed Lawson, Mike's father. "Because he couldn't hear he always had to look up. Most kids look down dribbling the ball, and Mike never did that. I remember coaches, when he was starting to go up through the soccer ranks, they all were amazed at the vision he had. And his fitness level is incredible.'

"I am very self-motivated and set the bar very high for everything I do,' Mike Lawson said. "I just never let the deafness hold me back from accomplishing all my goals. For the most part, there have been very few communication problems. I almost always have an

interpreter which minimizes any communication problems.'

Lawson's career highlight at RIT came in the 2004 season, when the team earned a berth in the Division III Tournament. Not surprisingly, it was Lawson who propelled RIT into the NCAAs. Facing St. John Fisher (N.Y.) College in the Empire 8 final, Lawson scored on a penalty kick 50 seconds into the second overtime to lift the Tigers to a 1-0 victory and into the NCAA Tournament. RIT lost to SUNY Geneseo (N.Y.), 1-0, in the first round and finished 9-8-1.

Last season, RIT went 8-7-4, ending with a 2-1 loss to St. John Fisher College in the semifinals of the ECAC Upstate Men's Soccer Championship. The team narrowly missed qualifying for the Division III Tournament, losing in the Empire 8 Tournament final to Nazareth (N.Y.) College in a penalty-kick shootout after a 1-1 tie.

"Not making the NCAA Tournament in 2005 was one of the most disappointing moments of my soccer career,' Lawson said. "As can be expected, as great as making the NCAA in 2004 was, not making the NCAA in 2005 equals how disappointed I was this year.'

Not that 2005 was a total loss for Lawson. In January of last year, Lawson was in Melbourne, Australia, serving as captain of the U.S. men's soccer team at the 2005 Deaflympic Games. It was his second stint in the Deaflympics. As a 17-year-old, he was the youngest player on the U.S. men's soccer team at the 2001 Deaflympics in Rome, Italy.

"The Deaflympics in Melbourne, Australia, was the greatest experience of my life,' said Lawson, who plans on playing in the 2009 Deaflympics in Taipei, Taiwan. "I was captain of the team and we placed ninth out of 16 teams. It was the best U.S. finish ever. I particularly enjoyed meeting deaf athletes from other countries.'

A social work major, Lawson carries a 3.53 grade-point average. He is set to graduate in May of 2007, and hopes to continue playing soccer in a premier league in Rochester as well as become a coach.

John Bush: (732) 643-3604 or [jbush@app.com](mailto:jbush@app.com)