If a team needs anything from its players, it's dependability. For three years around the turn of the century, the Placer High football team had such an athlete in Keone Kauo, a 5-11, 175 pound running back and defensive back.

For his record-setting exploits at Placer and his career at University Nevada, Reno, he will be inducted into the PHS Athletic Hall of Fame on April 25 in a ceremony at the school's iconic Earl Crabbe Gym.

Kauo (Class of 2001) was a starting running back and defensive back for Coach Mike Sabins' Hillmen from 1998-2000. By the time he finished his high school career, he had set Placer season and career rushing records and earned a full ride athletic scholarship to UNR.

On offense, Kauo rushed for more than a thousand yards in each of his three varsity seasons. By the time he was done, he had piled up a school record 4,276 yards rushing for a 7.1 yards average, and pounded across the goal line for 49 touchdowns.

In his sophomore year, he helped the Hillmen compile a 7-2-1 record and beat Bear River 12-7 o claim the Sierra Foothill League championship.

The next year, he was one of the team's captains and was named the SFL Offensive Player of the Year,. The Sacramento Bee named him to the All-City, Sac Metro team as a defensive back.

He especially remembers his senior year, when Placer finished the regular season 9-1, and qualified for the playoffs. The Hillmen beat Sonora 33-28 in the first round, but lost a heart-breaker to Oak Ridge20-14 in the section finals. The team's only two losses, thus came to the state No. 1 team Granite Bay in the regular season, and the section champion Trojans in the final.

His greatest memory from that year was beating Del Oro 13-12 on the Golden Eagles' home field to break a several-year losing streak to the rivals from Loomis. For the second year in a row, he was named the team's Most Valuable Player, and earned all-league honors as a running back and defensive back.

He also was again named to the All-City, Sac Metro team by the Sacramento Bee and was a member of the Optimist All-star football game. Placer High recognized his athletic abilities by awarding him the Outstanding Male Athlete of the Year.

Besides rushing for more than 4,000 yards in his career, he also had 28 receptions for 453 yards, averaged 12.8 yards per punt return and 20.1 yards on kick returns. Just for good measure he completed both of his pass attempts, one for a 13 yard touchdown.

But he was not just a one-way player. As a feared defensive back, he ended his high school career with 146 solo tackles, 68 assists, 24 tackles for loss, seven interceptions, five sacks, and five fumble recoveries. He earned the team's Hitter of the Year award his senior season.

Coach Sabins was quick to assess Kauo's contributions to his teams. "Hands down, the best player we ever had," he said. "He was a quiet leader and led by example — the kind of guy you want to have on your team."

Placer High remains a nostalgic place for Kauo. "It was a fun time of life with so many organizations, events, sports, and dances," he recalled. "I loved it — the open campus, Taco Tree. It was my home away from home. I spent so much time there with sports. Besides, it was a gorgeous campus."

A gifted athlete, he also played basketball his senior year for Coach Mark Lee, helping the team to an 18-6 season and the Kendall Arnett Tournament championship. For good measure he competed as a sprinter for the track team.

Several colleges showed interest in Kauo as a football player, including Princeton, Harvard, Sacramento State, UNR, Fresno State, and Boise State. He chose UNR because of its civil engineering program, and it was close enough for his parents to attend games.

He played free safety for the Wolf Pack and found himself pressed into action in the second game of his freshman season against Colorado State because of an injury to the starter.

"It really opened my eyes," he admitted. "The players were bigger and faster." But he became a starter for the rest of his career at UNR.

He was a team captain in his senior year and in 2001 and 2002 earned WAC All-Academic honors.

For his college career, Kauo was credited with 166 solo tackles, 83 assists, and eight interceptions, one of which was returned for a touchdown against San Jose State. That one was especially sweet because the Spartan receivers had spent the entire game talking trash to him.

Kauo currently lives in Hawaii and works for AKA Engineering Company. He is married to Bear River grad Anna Larash, whose father was his sixth grade teacher at Foresthill Elementary School.

The couple have three children, daughters Malia, a high school freshman and Lani a fourth grade student, and a son, Duke, a sixth grader.

The Athletic Hall of Fame ceremony will be held in the Earl Crabbe Gym on April 25. A reception will begin at 6 pm followed by the induction ceremony at 7 pm.

Tickets for the reception cost $25 until April 15, and $35 after, and are available online at placerathletichalloffame.org.

The 7 pm ceremony is free of charge to the public.