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Let's Play HOCKEY

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The Trojans will put their PAC 8 title on the line at the University of Washington.

Wilbur, USC headed back to ACHA nationals

Former stickboy for Brooks, Woog steady in Troy

By Dave McMahon
Let's Play Hockey

University of Southern California men's hockey coach Mark Wilbur earned his 200th career victory earlier this season.

Now in his 10th season as head coach of the Trojans, the Golden Valley, Minn., native spent his early years in hockey as a stickboy for both Herb Brooks (University of Minnesota) and Doug Woog (St. Paul Vulcans).

Wilbur, who played at Armstrong H.S. (1980) and later with the Vulcans, was in solid coaching company in those dressing rooms.

"I was there for national championship wins by both — Herbie with the Minnesota Junior Stars and Gophers, and Doug with the St. Paul Vulcans," Wilbur said.

"And I was even at the National Sport Festival in '79 as an assistant equipment manager, which allowed me to skate in some practices with the guys that eventually went on to Miracle fame. It was a lot of work, but great fun. Hey — where was the assistant equipment manager in *Miracle!*"

Wilbur was more concerned with honing his own game than picking up coaching tips.

"I don't remember ever thinking 'I want to coach someday.' I was more focused on how I was going to develop as a player," he said. "But, it did give me an opportunity to see how challenging and rewarding coaching can be. Having sat in those locker rooms for so many years — basically from '71 through '80 — I recognized something special about both coaches. Herbie and Doug had an ability to

demand a lot, but were also able to connect on the most basic of human needs — being a friend and/or mentor.

"The side I remember of Herbie was in that scene where he remains loyal to O'Callahan. That loyalty is a two-way street — you earned it from both Herb and Doug.

"But, as a kid, you don't have the knowledge or awareness that you will someday have the communication skills to carry out the varying demands of being a head coach from team and player needs to public (tv, radio, reporting) and corporate needs."

When USC went unbeaten in 2000, the first congratulatory letter Wilbur received was from Brooks.

"He noted that given our record at USC, 'I must have been doing more in those locker rooms than just taping sticks and filling water bottles!'"

Wilbur is carrying on one of Brooks' visions of offering kids a place to play in college.

"Maybe someday we will actually live up to what Herb was frustrated about in turning out so many good players that suddenly have no place to play," Wilbur said. "Wouldn't it be great if Division I college hockey was as widespread as basketball is today?"

For now, the Trojans are off to their fifth appearance at the national tournament in the past eight years. The American Hockey Coaches Association national tournament for club teams will be hosted by the University of Maryland.

A late-season loss to BYU dropped the Tro-



Courtesy of USC Hockey (2)

Armstrong H.S. graduate Mark Wilbur has led the USC Trojans club team to the ACHA national tournament for the fifth time in eight years.

jans from third to fourth in the West. USC, 26-2-1, is the four-time defending PAC 8 champion.

First, USC will put its PAC 8 championship on the line in Seattle Feb. 20-21, where the University of Washington will host the tournament.

USC had not lost a game since the first week of October 2003 when they squared off against the BYU Cougars.

"We chased the Cougars every step of the way but simply couldn't find the crack to blow the game open. Quite frankly, had their goalie gone for coffee, I'm not sure we could have scored," USC coach Mark Wilbur said.

BYU came away a 4-3 winner, which quickly

cast a shadow over whether the Trojans were going to keep their ranking and get an invitation to Nationals.

USC then had a pair of games against No. 6 San Jose State, and came away with a 5-3, 6-3 sweep.

USC is celebrating the 80th anniversary of its hockey team. Under Wilbur, the team has watched all 400 of its players graduate.

The Trojans do not provide scholarships and receive less than eight percent of the school's total operating budget. Wilbur, a double Trojan, earned his undergraduate degree in accounting in 1985 and his MBA in 1994.

For more information, check out uscicehockey.com.

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