

Idaho's coach must piece together 'intense puzzle'

Former USC assistant coach Nick Holt says he doesn't regret leaving the co-national champions for Idaho

BY NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS
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MOSCOW, Idaho — A year ago, Nick Holt was an assistant coach with Southern California on his way to winning a share of the national championship.

Now he is the head coach at Idaho, coping with lopsided losses, the murder of one of his starters and a threat to drop the program back to Division I-AA.

For 42-year-old Holt, it has been a journey from football royalty to the

depths of Division I-A — and he wouldn't trade it for anything.

"I've been preparing myself for this opportunity," the former linebacker at Pacific said. "There's a lot more responsibility, a lot more to worry about."

Chief among his worries is Idaho's record — 1-5 overall and 0-2 in the Sun Belt Conference — heading into Saturday's game against Louisiana-Lafayette (3-3, 1-1). In Holt's three seasons as linebackers coach at USC, the Trojans lost just nine times. He could reach that total this year.

He was handed a big rebuilding job. The Vandals have been outscored 233-91 so far, and are playing 17 freshman.

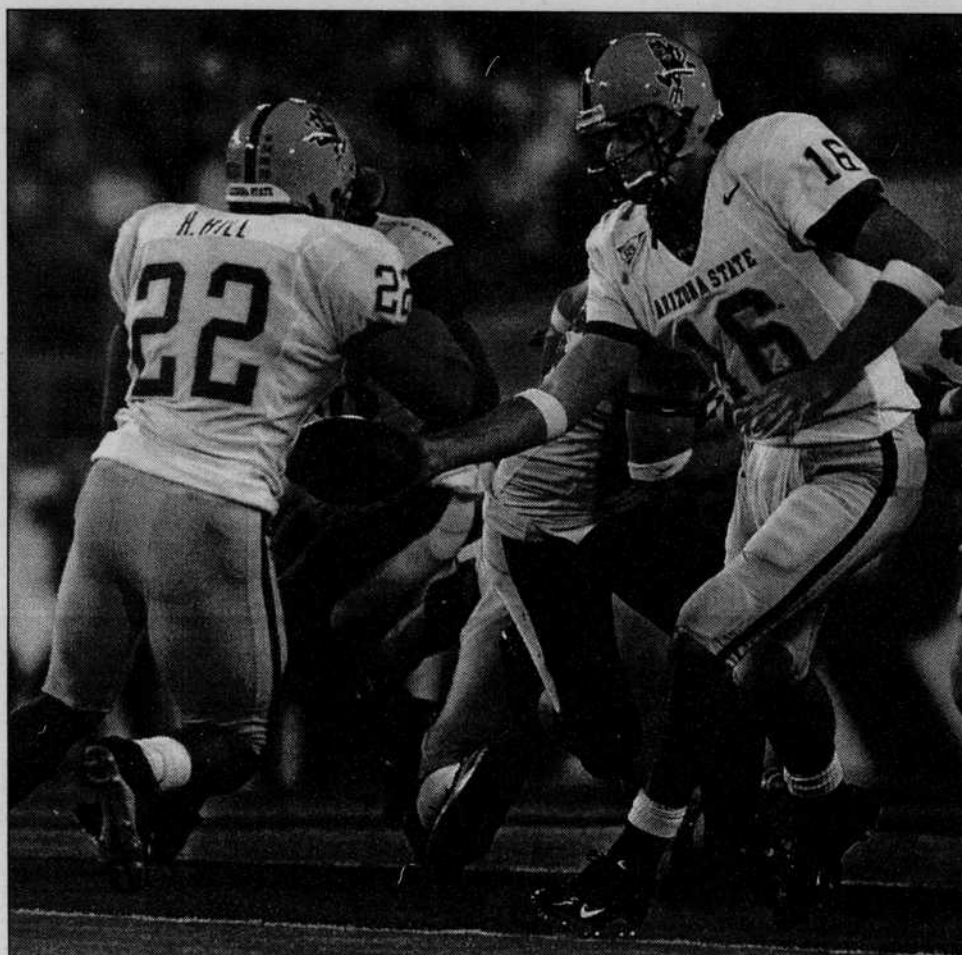
"That's two intense pieces of the puzzle," quarterback Mike Harrington said. "He's an intense guy."

Harrington had his best game in Idaho's 45-41 win at Eastern Michigan with his brother, Detroit Lions quarterback Joey Harrington, in attendance.

"That was my first win as a starter and coach Holt's first win as head coach," Harrington said. "It was awesome."

Senior safety Simon Stewart said Holt has brought a new intensity to the Vandals, particularly in practice.

COACH, page 15B



Arizona State quarterback Andrew Walter (16) and running back Hakim Hill (22) are two of the main components to the Sun Devil offense. No. 15 Arizona State (5-0) travels to No. 1 USC (5-0) this week, both teams' perfect records on the line.

DANIELLE HICKEY
PHOTO EDITOR

GOTW: USC will test Arizona State defense

Continued from page 10B

The Sun Devils are led by senior quarterback Andrew Walter, who is on pace to set every passing record in his school's history. Walter is Arizona State's career pass attempts leader (1,169), career passing touchdowns leader (70) and already holds the top two marks for total passing yards in a season. In 2003, he passed for 3,044 yards and two years ago, he threw for 3,877 yards.

This season, Walter has thrown for 1,249 yards, along with 15 touchdowns and just one interception.

Carroll said he realizes the quarterback he's facing this weekend is not just one of the best in the conference, but in the nation.

"We have seen him so much over the years. We have watched him grow up," Carroll said. "He is a marvelous talent with a great arm. He can throw the ball down the field as well as anyone in the country."

The Sun Devils are coming off a 28-13 road victory against Oregon two weeks ago, in which Walter threw for just 164 yards, but passed for three touchdowns.

The star of the game, however, was junior tailback Hakim Hill, who had a career-best rushing performance. Hill, who started the season as a backup, tore up the Oregon defense for 134 yards and 25 carries, along with one touchdown. The feat was

even more impressive because Hill played with a broken forearm.

"Hakim is a talented player and did a nice job for us at Oregon two weeks ago," Arizona State head coach Dirk Koetter said. "He will be fine. We just don't have much proven depth behind him."

Hill is the only one of four tailbacks on the team playing on scholarship. Tailbacks Cornell Candidate and Randy Hill are not available due to injury, and Loren Wade was suspended from the team.

That could pose a problem against a USC defense blistering with talent led by defensive linemen Mike Patterson and Shaun Cody. In their 23-17 victory over California last week, Patterson and Cody combined for 14 tackles and two sacks.

"In Mike Patterson and Shaun Cody, I can't imagine a better tandem in college football," Koetter said. "Those guys are so hard to block whether they are in their slant, stunt or bullrush mode. They are two dominant players and I think they are the key to their defense."

The Trojans also hold the nation's 14th-ranked scoring defense, giving up only 13.6 points per game through the first five games this season. USC has also surrendered only 306.6 yards per game of offense, which ranks No. 25 in the nation.

The only defense in the Pac-10

rated higher than USC in both categories is Arizona State. The Sun Devils rank 11th nationally and lead the Pac-10 in scoring defense, allowing only 11.8 points per game. They are also No. 21 in the nation in total defense, surrendering 304.4 yards per game.

"We have seven seniors who are playing on defense and I think that's a big part of our turnaround," Koetter said.

Arizona State's defense will be severely tested against a USC offense headed by quarterback Matt Leinart and tailback Reggie Bush, who form one of the most dangerous offensive duos in college football today. Together, they have helped USC average more than 405 yards and 33 points per game this season.

Koetter said the Trojans deserve all of the accolades they have as one of the nation's top football programs.

"USC is certainly a heck of a football team with great players," Koetter said. "They are well coached. They have survived and stood up to everything that has been thrown at them. That's a mark of a great team. They know they are going to get everyone's best shot every week and they always find a way to get it done."

Alex Tam is a freelance reporter for the Daily Emerald

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