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Where Are They Now: Paul Wallrof, Puget Sound football coach

Former Husky always has been in high demand

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Paul Wallrof got out of coaching 27 years ago. When the University of Puget Sound started downsizing its football program, he quit as the head guy.

But when one of his assistants was given his job and asked him to stay, the man known as "Big Wally" became the Loggers' defensive line coach.

Wallrof got out of coaching 20 years ago, too. Had a heart condition. Didn't want to die on the football field.

Yet a few seasons later, when a new UPS head coach asked him to join that staff, he signed on for another stretch.

"When someone asks me, it's hard to say no," he explained.

Wallrof also got out of coaching a dozen years ago. More heart problems. Was told the condition would worsen with age. Still, when an old friend asked him to help out at Vashon High School, he re-upped for two more years.

On Saturday, Wallrof, 73, will be honored in Tacoma as a recent UPS hall of fame inductee at halftime of the Loggers' game against Claremont. He shouldn't have any conflicts. The middle school football team he coaches now, the one he took over after working with the grade school team last year, just started practicing.

"The reason I'm doing this is the parents of the sixth-graders that I coached last year, who are seventh-graders now, asked if I could help," he explained. "It's pretty hard to say no."

If it's not evident by now, Wallrof is one of those coaches people can't let go of. He's an old Marine, someone who inspires the troops. It's been that way since he was a two-way tackle for some fairly meager teams at Seattle's Cleveland High School.

In two years on the varsity, his '48 and '49 Eagles didn't win a game. When he was a senior, Cleveland got shut out in every game but one. This son of a local butcher never once thought about bailing.

"The neat thing about Cleveland is nobody gave up on us," he said. "The student body, parents and everybody in Georgetown and Holly Park supported us. There was never any booing. I grew to love football."

Wallrof played his next two seasons at Everett Community College for Walt Price, UTEP coach Mike Price's dad, and then served three years with the Marines, mixing in with former collegians while playing for base teams.

Once his military commitment was over, the very muscular 6-foot-3, 220-pounder decided he would join the Washington Huskies. He showed up as a walk-on player, a candidate without a scholarship. Checking in, he asked for jersey. The manager handed him No. 30, even after being told that the big guy was a tackle. Wallrof wanted to know why.

"He said, 'You're not going to be here that long,' " he recalled. "That really ticked me off."

Still, Wallrof had to prove himself to a lot of people. Counting a redshirt season, he played for three UW coaches in three years, John Cherberg, Darrell Royal and Jim Owens. The latter two were big on ruthless conditioning. Didn't faze the newcomer.

"They couldn't do anything to me that already hadn't been done in the Marines," he said. "Owens and his death march was nothing for me."

For the Huskies, he played a little as a junior, moved into the starting lineup as a senior. At the same time, he got married to Nancy Blair, now his wife of 48 years, and they would raise two daughters.

Coaching was never far off. After graduating from the UW, he returned to Cleveland. From the 1962 to '65, he was the Eagles' football leader. His teams finished a collective 6-23-3 but played with great heart, beating Franklin for the first time in 22 years and Garfield for the first time in 23.

UPS offered him an assistant's job. Of course, he couldn't turn it down. He's never said no to anyone.

This weekend, proceeds from the ceremony that will honor Wallrof will benefit Tacoma's Nativity House, a homeless center that his younger sister, Marge Brown, first got involved with. Along the way, she asked the coach to join the center's board of directors. She knew the answer all along.

"You can't say no to your sister," Wallrof confirmed.

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