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## PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL COACH APPROACHES A GRAND MILESTONE

By Heather Rule - Special to USAHockey.com, 01/20/17, 11:00AM MST

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### **Meadville Bulldogs coach Jamie Plunkett nears 1,000th win**

For some coaches, reaching 1,000 games behind the bench could be considered a milestone. But Meadville, Pennsylvania, boys hockey coach Jamie Plunkett passed that years ago. Now he's closing in on 1,000 wins.

"I don't talk much about it," Plunkett said. "My daughters bring it up more than anybody else."

His team was just two wins shy of the milestone headed into this weekend. Plunkett, 61, has coached the Bulldogs for 31 years. He also works as an athletic trainer at Allegheny College.

He initially started coaching to reconnect with the game. He recalls his dad telling stories about the times Plunkett played as a youngster. His parents got up at five or six in the morning to take him to the local rink for games, where there were officials, parents in the scorers' box to run the clock and parents coaching.

"He was always big about giving back to the game," Plunkett said of his father. "People did it for you."

"I never forgot that, and one of the reasons I got into coaching, besides the love of the game, was to give back to the game."

Plunkett, a Toronto native, played youth hockey in Toronto and Vancouver as well as some junior hockey in Ottawa. He also played freshman hockey at Cornell University. At a friend's suggestion, he coached a youth hockey house league in 1980 in Ithaca, New York, before two seasons of junior varsity hockey at Cornell from 1981-83.

"It was around that time that I really started to enjoy the coaching part of it," Plunkett said.

In 1983, he got his job at Allegheny College. "In a moment of weakness," he coached the school's club team. His run with the Meadville squad started when some people in town approached him asking if he'd coach. He accepted.

"I guess it is 31 years now," Plunkett said. "I started out not really knowing what I was getting myself into and thought I would do it for a year or two."

His teams have won eight state titles, including one right away in 1987. The Bulldog dynasty continued a few years later, when they were state champs for five straight years, from 1992-96.

"We're the only Pennsylvania team ever to win five consecutive state titles," Plunkett said. "That would probably be something I'm most proud of because it's never been done before or since."

Part of the success is how he got his nickname: "Chief." People started calling him that because when his teams won state titles, they'd go through town on a fire truck, "and people would laugh and say that he's been on the fire struck more than the chief," said senior captain and four-year varsity player Jeffrey Millin.

Do something for three decades and it's bound to be a different animal over time. It's no different with Plunkett and hockey. He said he's changed as the game has changed, establishing friendships with former Penguins coaches Barry Smith and "Badger" Bob Johnson to learn more about the game.

His assistant coach and former player, Kyle Waite, can attest to Plunkett's ability to adapt, too, saying that Plunkett hasn't let the game pass him by.

"I think the biggest thing that makes him good at what he does is he absolutely loves the game," Waite said.

Hockey is a fast sport, but "Chief" can also break it down for the players, Millin said. Plunkett's ability to read the game is unlike anything Millin has ever seen.

So what's made his Meadville teams so successful? Well, a general uptick in area hockey interest after the Penguins drafted Mario Lemieux in 1984, for one, according to Plunkett.

As interest in the Penguins grew, so did the number of local rinks across the region, according to Plunkett. He came along when there was a very talented nucleus of freshman and sophomore players, resulting in those state titles.

"I was just very fortunate to walk into a good situation," Plunkett said.

He also realized, as his daughters (now 31 and 27 years old) grew up, the positive or negative role a coach can have on athletes. Someone once told him that some of the most influential people in your lives will be parents, teachers and coaches.

"That's something I try to remember, because what you say and do can have a lasting impact," Plunkett said.

Millin has been through a couple of tough seasons as a freshman and sophomore with Plunkett and the Bulldogs. But Plunkett taught his team to never quit and is very personable with all of the players, Millin said.

"He's really influenced me with not just hockey, but in life itself," Millin said.

Getting back to those 1,000 wins, this year's team made it the No. 1 goal to get him to the milestone. It'll be special and a game the players can brag about when they're older, Millin said.

Still, Millin knows his coach is pretty modest.

"Chief's a quiet guy," Millin said. "He's not going to be one of those coaches who go around and tell everybody about it."

Waite agreed. Few coaches in any sport have 1,000 wins, and not just that, Plunkett will have them all in the same program, Waite said.

"To be honest with you, I think it means more to him than he'll ever say," Waite said.

Plunkett didn't really expect it, but coaching turned into a big part of his life, he said.

"It really has grown into something much bigger than I ever thought it would."

*Story from Red Line Editorial, Inc.*

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