

the Party's over

USC closes 1998 CWS with seven-run victory over ASU

Story by Sam McKewon

Photograph by Mike Warren

Just in case anyone had forgotten, Southern California showed fans in Omaha it still knew how to be king of the College World Series.

The Trojans hammered out 23 hits, five of them home runs, winning its 12th national championship Saturday 21-14 over Arizona State — a score that would have made former USC football greats Marcus Allen and Ronnie Lott proud.

A record crowd of 24,456 at Rosenblatt Stadium watched as 42 records were broken and another 24 tied for offensive production. The championship game ended a CWS that saw a record 62 home runs hit, including nine hit in the championship game alone.

"This was just a sign of the times," Arizona State Head Coach Pat Murphy said of high-octane offense throughout the 52nd CWS, the 49th in Omaha.

Another sign of the series was that no lead, no matter how big, was safe.

That included a 8-0 lead by the Trojans (49-17) after the top of the second inning. Arizona State (41-23) stormed back to 9-8

by the bottom of the fourth.

After a scoreless fifth inning, the hit parade started it up again, with USC scoring 12 runs in the last four innings alone.

One-third of the Trojans runs came courtesy of the second baseman Wes Rachels, who was named the outstanding player of the series. Rachels was 4 for 4 Saturday with seven RBIs, including a three-run homer in the bottom of the second inning.

"I don't think I've ever had seven RBIs, even in Little League," Rachels said. "Never in my wildest dreams could I imagine doing something like this."

Jason Lane (9-2) picked up the win for USC, while Ryan Mills (8-4), who was selected sixth in the Major League Baseball Draft Tuesday, got the loss for the Sun Devils.

With the win Saturday, USC completed a run to the national title that many deemed improbable. The Trojans won a regional in Clemson, S.C., survived a first-round CWS loss to Louisiana State, won in extra innings against Florida, beat LSU twice and then beat ASU.

"A week ago at this time," USC Coach Mike Gillespie said, "we couldn't allow ourselves to think we could be playing for a national championship."

