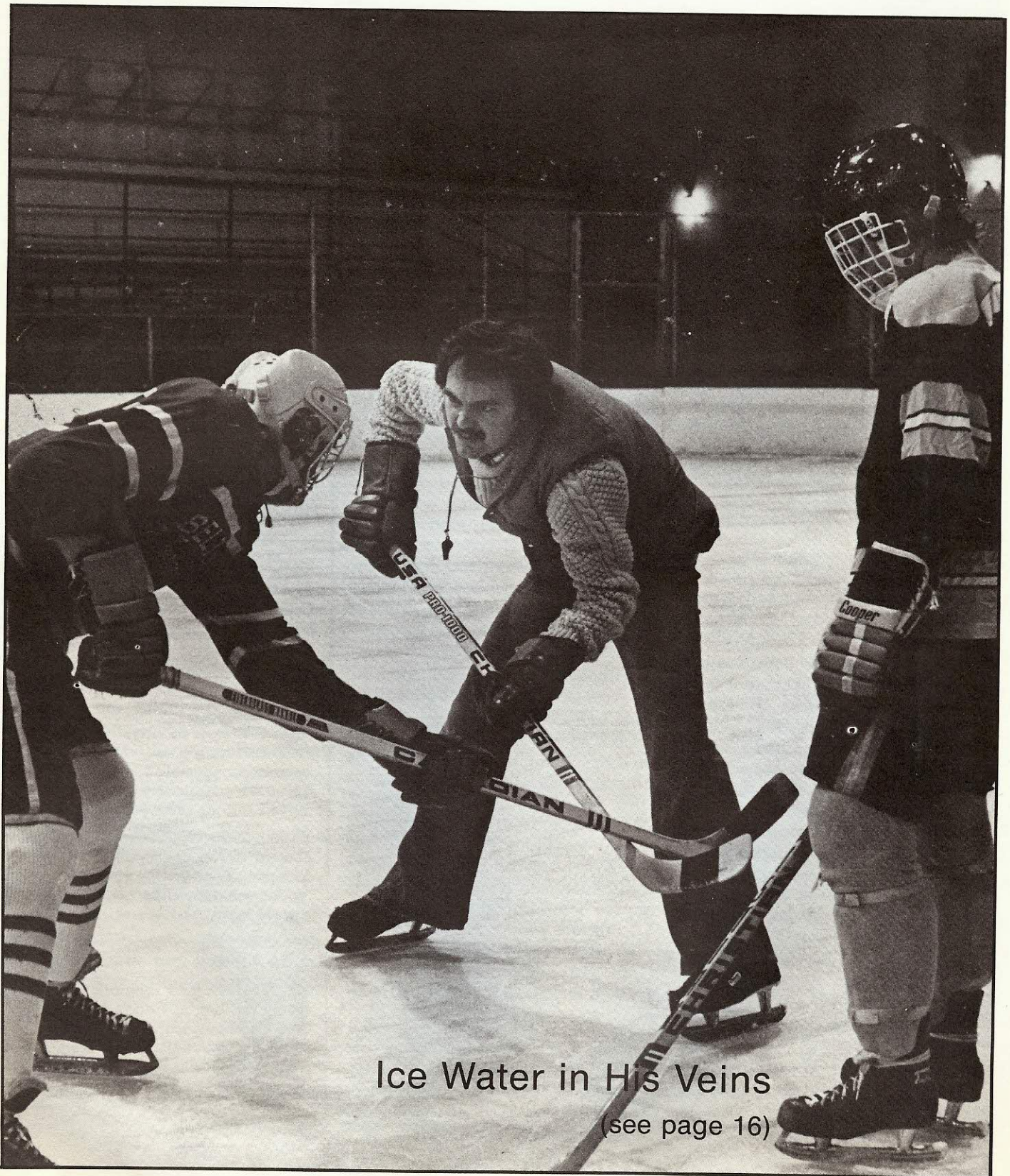




# Coal Courier



Ice Water in His Veins

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# Ice water in his veins

Bob Koch is a hockey coach, referee, and youth program director

Twenty-six-year-old Bob Koch must have ice water running through his veins — ice water that could turn into a glistening hockey rink.

Koch, a section supervisor at the Southern Ohio Coal Company's Raccoon No. 3 mine, has to be one of Ohio's most avid hockey enthusiasts. A native of Philadelphia, Koch can be found at Ohio University's Bird Arena three, four or even more nights each week during the winter months, coaching or officiating hockey.

Bob serves as director of the Athens youth hockey program, a city recreation department-sponsored activity for boys five to 19 years of age. The program is split up into five age groupings, and Koch coaches the team comprised of the oldest boys, ages 15-19.

If that weren't enough, Koch also serves as treasurer of the Blue Line Booster Club, a support organization for the Ohio University hockey team, and when he's got a free moment or two, he officiates college hockey games.

It seems as though Koch has always been involved in starting hockey programs someplace. "When I was 17, halfway through my junior year in high school, we were able to get a hockey team started at my school that played in the Intercounty Scholastic League," he recalls.

Then it was off to college, and Bob chose the Colorado School of the Mines, "because I didn't want to become just another number at Penn State.

"When I left Philadelphia on the plane to start my freshman year, I was a math major," Koch says. "By the time the plane landed in Denver, I had decided that I didn't want to get stuck holding a calculator all my life and I made up my mind to change majors."

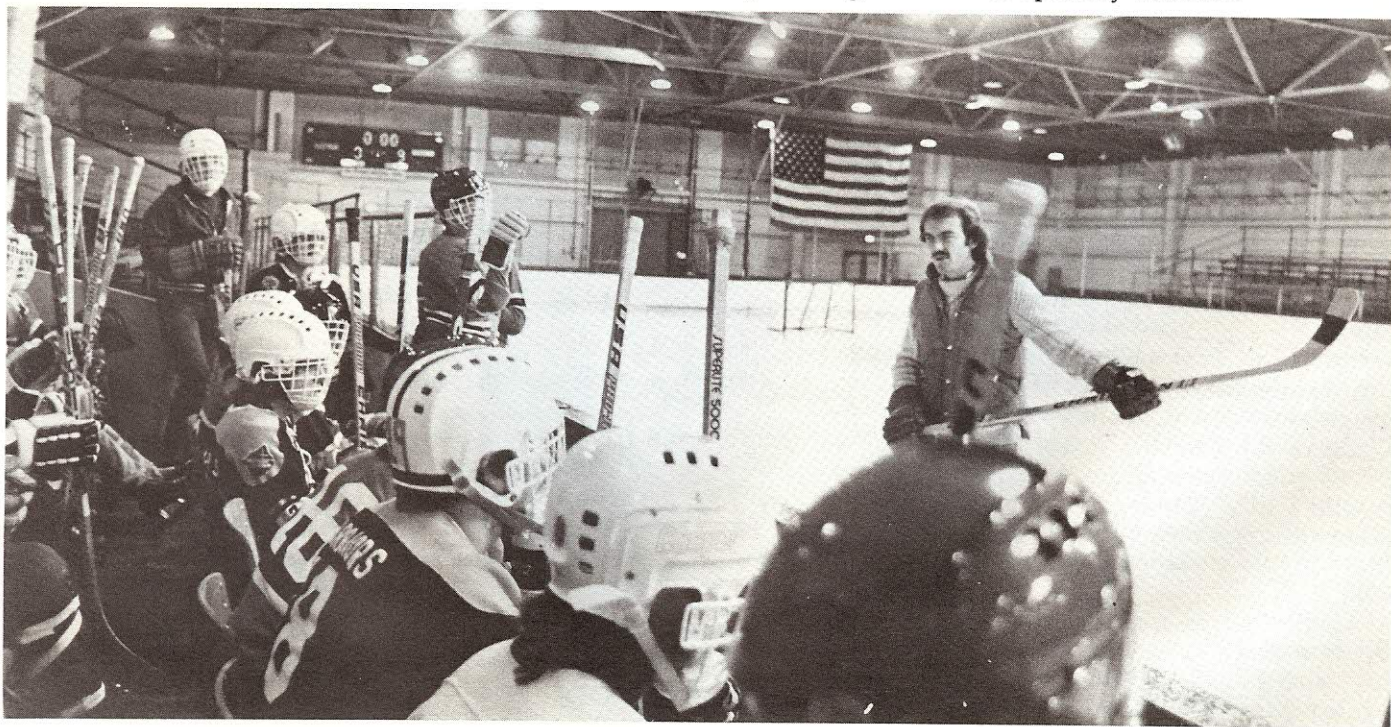
Although Bob had never had any kind of experience with mines or coal when he left Philadelphia, he became interested in the possibility of mining engineering at the Colorado School of the Mines when he learned that partial scholarships were available for engineering stu-

dents. Soon thereafter, Koch was a mining engineering major who had received one of those partial scholarships.

Koch was such a hockey buff in Colorado that he spread his education over five years so that he would have the free time he wanted to play hockey several evenings a week. "My second year there, a number of other fellows and I started our own team, and then started up our own league, playing other men's teams from Denver and Boulder."

Bob has no false illusions about his own playing ability. "I was not an above average stickhandler, not an above average shooter, and not an above average passer," he chuckles. "I basically played on desire. I really thrive on the game, and it helped me put together a couple of seasons I could be satisfied with."

"My most distinguishing characteristic was penalties," Koch says. "Three of the four years that I played hockey in Colorado, I was among the top three players in the league in most penalty minutes."



Bob Koch, a section supervisor at the Raccoon No. 3 mine, gives his Athens youth hockey team a pep talk prior to a practice session in Ohio University's Bird Arena.



Koch played center both in high school and in Colorado and likes that position best because "the center gets to go all over the ice. I like to chase the puck, and if someone else has the puck I like to go after them. I guess I wasn't disciplined enough to stay in one position all the time. But the importance of the center's position is that he is a bridge between the offensive and defensive ends of the ice."

In his own playing and, now, in his coaching, Koch stresses selflessness. "I like setting up the plays and making the good passes," he says. "To me, an assist is always as good as the goal itself. I would always be just as happy with two assists in a night as I would be if I had scored the two goals."

Koch worked at Southern Ohio Coal in the summer of 1976, then started working fulltime in the Meigs Division in June 1977, after his graduation from the Colorado School of the Mines. He was a mining engineer at Meigs then, but now bosses the 009 Section at Raccoon No. 3 on the midnight shift.

And it hasn't taken Bob long to get involved on the local hockey scene. He is in his first year as director of the Athens youth hockey program, reporting happily that this year's turnout of 130 youngsters is the largest ever for the program.

"The director has quite a few duties," he explains. "He has to determine the budget for the program, and help arrange for sponsors when needed. He has to work with the university to arrange the hours that our program will be able to use the arena. He has to supervise equipment needs — uniforms, pads — and he has to line up volunteer help and make sure each of the five age groups has qualified coaches."

Koch feels that "we've worked hard and brought some quality people in here to help. When I got here, it seemed like there was very little instruction going on, and the kids were just playing pond hockey. The Ohio University hockey coach and other people have been working with the kids and their skill level has really improved."

Although Koch is the overall program director, once the season starts he spends most of his time coaching the high school age team. "Two years ago, the high school boys didn't play any games against other



Koch, after showing two of his players the best way to go after the puck on a face-off, gives them a chance to practice what they've learned.

communities," Koch says. "Last winter, we played three games. This year, we've been able to build our schedule up to 11 games."

"I want our kids to have the experience of playing out-of-town teams," he says. "This year, we've been able to play teams from Dayton, Columbus, Cincinnati and Troy."

The biggest problem in coaching youth hockey, Bob feels, is that "every kid wants to go for the puck. These young players have to remember to stay in their positions, stay in their zones, and keep spread out. They can get suckered out of position pretty easily."

Koch has also been a part of starting something new for the Ohio University hockey team — its Blue Line Booster Club. "This is the first year for the club, and already we have over 100 members," he says. "What we're trying to do is build a nucleus of support for the hockey team outside of the O. U. student body."

And then there are the nights when Koch dons the zebra-striped shirt, puts a whistle on his knuckles, and skates forth to officiate college hockey games.

"Officiating hockey is just something that has kind of evolved for me," he explains. "When I played in high school and in Colorado, I saw what I thought was some of the

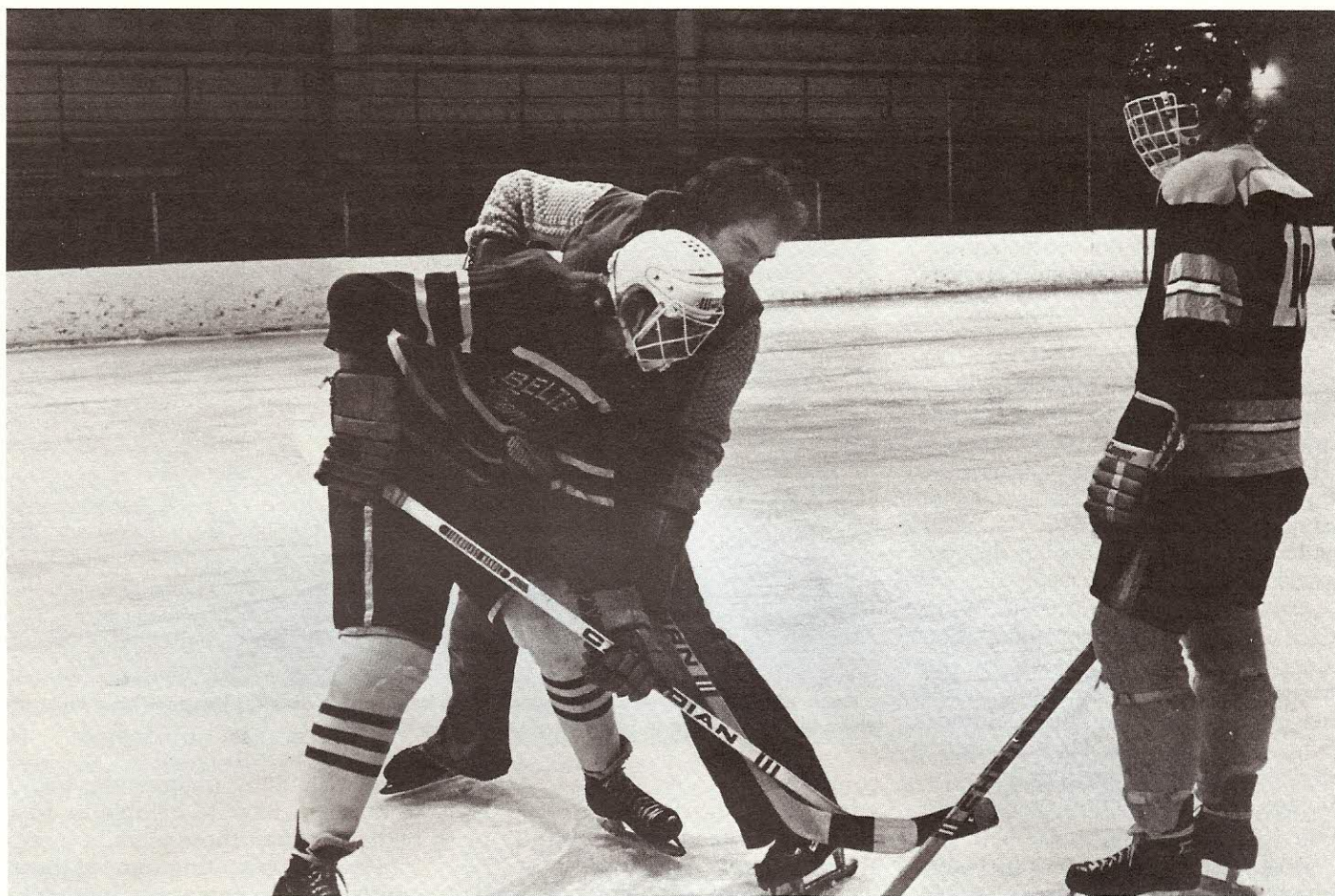
worst officiating imaginable. I said to myself 'I have to be able to do a better job than these guys.'

"I started officiating some of these youth program games and gradually worked my way into doing college games as a linesman. A college game uses three officials — a referee and two linesmen. The referee has to be certified, but the two linesmen don't."



Koch still knows how to handle the puck, as he shows here during an intrasquad scrimmage.





Instruction is a basic part of the coach's job. Koch, who shows two of his players some of the finer points of stick-handling in the photos above and below, says his players have come a long way in learning the fundamentals of the sport.

"I have been toying with the idea of going to a summer camp this year, taking some formal instruction, and then going after my certification. Actually, I'm pretty confident that I have the rule book memorized well enough that I could pass the test right now," he says, "but I want more on-ice experience first."

Koch would be interested in refereeing games involving some of the state's college hockey powers, such as Ohio State or Bowling Green, but there's one aspect of being an official that doesn't have such great appeal.

"It's awful tough getting between some of these players when they get into a scrap," he winces. "When two guys get to swinging at each other, you've got to get between them. I've had to wrestle some pretty big guys off of other players who were down on the ice. I guess the key is you don't try to be aggressive yourself — you just try to neutralize that man."

Although hockey fills up most of Bob's spare time in the winter, he is busiest in December — and rarely home during that month, taking advantage of extra ice time at the university.

"In December, our high school age team practices five days a week since the college students aren't around. I spend all of my free time in December at the rink. I guess I like midnight shift because it gives me an opportunity to do things like this. Our practices in December were from 3 p.m. until 5 p.m., and that would come right at shift change."

Koch feels that youth hockey programs such as the one being provided in Athens are a great benefit to a community and its young people, and enable participation at a reasonable price.

"When I was in high school, our team played on a club basis instead of as a varsity sport," he remembers. "I had to pay \$250 for all of my equipment, plus \$125 to support the team. These kids in Athens pay a grand total of \$18 to support the program, and we furnish their jerseys, pants and socks. They have to provide their skates and sticks. That's a real bargain."

But if you want to talk hockey — or any other subject — with Bob Koch during the winter months,



you'd better be prepared to meet him at the mine, or wait for him at Bird Arena. Catching him at home is a rarity. And if you call him, you'll hear a recorded message saying:

"Hi. This is Bob, I'm not home now, but after the tone, you'll have 40 seconds to leave your name, phone number and message. Say, did you know that the Ohio University hockey team has two home games this weekend against Indiana? Game time Friday night . . ."

Even a recorded version of Bob Koch doesn't miss a chance to get in a word for hockey.