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USC's Physically Challenged Athletes Scholarship Fund Kicks Off 30th Anniversary at "First Lap" Celebration

- ◆ *Matt Barkley and Kristofer O'Dowd to participate in ceremony*
- ◆ *Annual 'Swim With Mike' swim-a-thon raises funds for scholarships for disabled athletes*

LOS ANGELES – March 3, 2010 – Nearly \$10 million has been raised over the last 30 years through USC's "Swim With Mike" swim-a-thon fundraiser benefitting 92 Physically Challenged Athletes Scholarship recipients. The fund is the only one of its kind allowing students who have overcome life-challenging accidents or illnesses to pursue both undergraduate and graduate degrees at USC and beginning eight years ago, other college campuses.

To kick off its 30th anniversary, a special "First Lap" celebration will take place on March 7, 2010 at the Annenberg Community Beach House – 415 Pacific Coast Highway; Santa Monica, CA – from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Special guests include Jake Olson, and USC Football Team players Matt Barkley and Kristofer O'Dowd.

Olson, a 12-year old USC fan who lost his eyesight to cancer, has been an inspiration to the USC Football team and his favorite player O'Dowd. Olson was eight months old when diagnosed with retinoblastoma, cancerous tumors, in both eyes. Doctors were able to save the right eye through a combination of chemotherapy and radiation, but it had to be removed last year leaving him permanently blind. The last thing Olson hoped to witness prior to his surgery was to watch his favorite USC Trojans in action.

Olson, O'Dowd and Barkley will ceremoniously swim the "First Lap" kicking off the next 30 years of Swim With Mike and its Physically Challenged Athletes Scholarship Fund.

"Although Jake Olson is too young to go to college, he symbolizes the next generation of physically challenged athletes and what our scholarship fund stands for," said Mike Nyeholt, co-founder of The Physically Challenged Athletes Scholarship Fund. "For the last 30 years, we've raised nearly \$10 million to help students return to their education after a life-changing accident or illness. It's only fitting that we kick off the next 30 years with someone like Jake and his favorite team and role models, Kris O'Dowd and Matt Barkley."

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For the 2009-2010 academic school year, USC has awarded \$757,000 collectively to 42 disabled athletes through its Physically Challenged Athletes Scholarship Fund. The scholarship will provide tuition and financial assistance toward housing and books at USC and 34 other universities.

Of the 42, a total of 12 are enrolled at USC, and 30 at universities spanning the nation. In order to qualify for a Physically Challenged Athletes Scholarship, applicants must have suffered an illness or injury that resulted in a physical disability that substantially limits major life activity; have participated in organized high school or college athletics prior to the illness or injury; meet admissions requirements of the selected university, and maintain a 2.5 GPA while enrolled.

The scholarship fund is 100% volunteer-run, supported by corporate and private donations, and the annual Swim With Mike swim-a-thons (www.swimwithmike.org). Swim With Mike began as a fund-raiser, "Swim *FOR* Mike," to purchase a specially equipped van for three-time All-American USC swimmer, and past NCAA Inspiration Award winner Mike Nyeholt, who became paralyzed in a motorcycle accident in 1981. At Nyeholt's suggestion, the excess monies raised that year were used to aid other athletes overcome paralyzing or physically disabling injuries or illnesses, and return to school. With the help of Nyeholt's teammate and now USC Associate Athletic Director Ron Orr, "Swim *WITH* Mike" was born the following year when Nyeholt returned to swim laps. Last year, 800 participants swam laps and helped raise more than \$900,000.

The 30th annual Swim With Mike swim-a-thon will be held at the University of Southern California's swim stadium on April 17, 2010. For more information, visit www.swimwithmike.org.

A satellite Swim With Mike Hawaii will take place for the sixth year at the University of Hawaii on April 24, 2010. Other satellite events include the 4th annual Swim With Mike at Stanford, and 3rd annual at UCONN, dates TBD.

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