

USC renews rivalry with Georgia Tech

By The Associated Press

ATLANTA — Georgia Tech head coach Bobby Ross heads into his second year convinced he did the right thing by taking over the program, but he admits there were times last year when he regretted the decision.

USC will play Tech for the first time in 10 years. Ross, entering his 12th season as a head coach, previously was at The Citadel and at Maryland, winning three Atlantic Coast Conference championships in five years with the Terrapins before leaving after the 1986 season for Georgia Tech.

In Ross' first season at Georgia Tech, the Yellow Jackets managed a 2-9 record — their worst since 1981 — and were 0-6 in the ACC. Both victories were against smaller, Division I-AA schools.

"I haven't regretted coming here, but I'll have to admit there were times during the 1987 season that I did I'm only human," Ross told writers during the ACC Operation Football Tour in Atlanta on Monday.

"I was mad, really mad. That was a hard season. You could say we hit bottom, and maybe we did," he said.

But after a winter of rest and his first full

recruiting season, Ross is putting last season behind him and is optimistic about his 1988 team.

"I think we're on our way back. I'm putting last year behind me," he said. "I think we're a significantly improved team. On a won-loss basis, it remains to be seen."

One reason for his optimism is in numbers. He has 26 freshman scholarship players as opposed to only 14 a year ago, and returns 45 lettermen, including 13 starters, six on offense and seven on defense.

In addition, junior tailback Jerry Mays, the ACC's Rookie of the Year in 1985 and Tech's leading rusher in 1986 when he gained 842 yards, returns after missing all of last season after undergoing knee surgery. He reportedly is back to his old form.

Also returning are punter Sean McDevitt and place-kicker Thomas Palmer.

Lost because of personal reasons were senior starting tailback Richard Hills and linebacker John Porter. Starting quarterbacks Rick Strom and Darell Gast and fullback Malcolm King graduated, but four of five starting linemen return on offense as do wide receivers Greg Lester and Steve Daven-

port. Lester, as a freshman, led the team last season with 33 catches for 593 yards.

Defensively, five of seven starting linemen and linebackers return as well as two defensive backs, including three-year starter Cedrick Stallworth at cornerback.

When Georgia Tech opens its season at home Sept. 10 against Tennessee-Chattanooga, red-shirt freshman Lee Williamson will be the quarterback after beating out fifth-year seniors Todd Rampley and Mike Rhodes in spring practice.

"We've shown significant improvement in our offensive line and our defensive line — they're bigger and stronger," Ross said. "Our running game is stronger — if we stay healthy — in tailbacks Mays, junior Alphanzo Thomas and sophomore transfer T. J. Edwards. At fullback we've got lettermen Stefean Scotton, Nate Kelsey and Terence Curry.

"Our receiving is better with both wide receivers back and our defensive secondary, which had been a concern for us, may not be as big a concern as we thought it might be," he said.

But the bottom line is winning, and winning early.



Future quarterback?
An unidentified boy sits and watches the Gamecocks as they play football. Attendance reached record levels at Williams-Brice Stadium last year.

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