

Free safety Ron Rabune leads USC's '50' defense

By Jeremy Garlington

Outstanding defensive efforts are often taken for granted by Gamecock football fans.

With much of the attention being given to Todd Ellis and his spectacular passing efforts, little recognition or praise has been given to the individuals who have contributed to USC's superb defensive showing this season.

Senior free safety Ron Rabune is one such player.

Rabune, from La Palma, Calif., is the leading tackler on the Gamecock defense and recorded a career-high 17 tackles against Georgia last Saturday, in perhaps his best performance as a collegian. On the season, Rabune has 48 tackles, 16 ahead of the second-leading Gamecock tackler, fellow senior Derrick Frazier.

For his performance against Georgia, Rabune was named defensive player of the game by the USC coaching staff. Nevertheless, he feels his personal performance is a reflection of a total team effort.

"We took nothing for granted against Georgia," said Rabune. "Anytime you take a run-oriented team such as Georgia out of its running game and force them to pass, you've got to feel good about your performance."

Furthermore, Rabune claims most of his tackles can be attributed to both the defensive line making things happen in the backfield and the fact USC has played predominantly run-oriented offenses this season.

This week's homecoming game against Appalachian State will be Rabune's last chance to enjoy the annual event as a player, and he hopes history will repeat itself.

"Obviously, I'm glad we have not lost a homecoming game since I've been here, and I don't want that to change."

Rabune also commented that he has yet to miss Cockfest, an annual homecoming pep rally at Williams-Brice Stadium.

After a redshirt year, Rabune played mostly on special teams and as a reserve strong safety his freshman and sophomore seasons. Last year, as a junior, he played a back-up role to All-America free safety Brad Edwards, now a member of the National Football League's Minnesota Vikings.

Despite his lack of playing time before this season, Rabune said even if he had it to do over again, he would stick with his decision to attend USC, although he was also pursued by

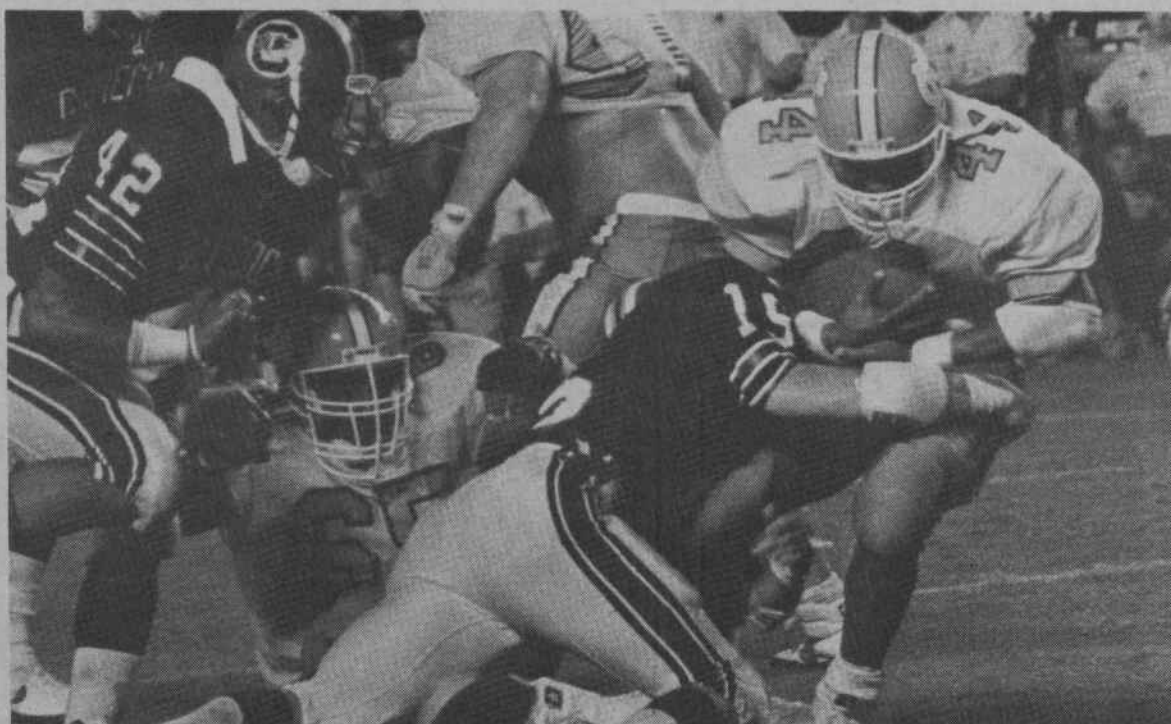
perennial college football power UCLA.

"Once I made my first visit to USC, my mind was made up to come here," said Rabune. "The people here are great, and I've made great friends from the very beginning."

As the Gamecocks head into this week's game, Rabune is filled with confidence and the satisfaction of being the leading tackler on the No. 8 team in the nation, but says this week's game with the Mountaineers will be approached much like all the others.

"We were very satisfied with our performance against Georgia, but we must also remember that on any given day any team can beat us."

Ron Rabune will certainly try to keep that from happening.



USC senior free safety Ron Rabune tackles a North Carolina ballcarrier in USC's season-opening 31-10 win. BRIAN SAULS/The Gamecock

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