

Roller coaster Gamecocks lose eighth straight bowl game

By TRACY MIXSON
Staff writer

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — USC's football team may have felt it spent its 1988 season in an amusement park rather than on a football field, as the Gamecocks ended their roller coaster ride of wins and losses with yet another postseason bowl defeat.

What started out as a ride on the Tunnel of Love with a 6-0 start and Top 10 ranking ended up a trip through the House of Horrors as USC finished 8-4 with a 34-10 loss to Indiana in the Liberty Bowl.

The Gamecocks seemed to jump aboard a Ferris Wheel in the second half of the season, tumbling to Georgia Tech before rising above North Carolina State; losing to Florida State and then topping Navy before falling to arch-rival Clemson to end the regular season.

Meanwhile, back at the Roundhouse, USC's football

office personnel were riding a vicious merry-go-round of accusations that former players and coaches were involved with steroids and other illegal drugs while at USC. With problems both on the field and off, the Gamecocks had one more chance to grab the brass ring — a win at the Liberty Bowl would give USC its first bowl victory and second-best season in history.

But the Gamecocks played colder than the low 20-degree temperature that late December night in Memphis, allowing a dominating Hoosier squad to send USC back to the kiddie rides.

Indiana put the game out of reach before halftime by grabbing a 14-0 lead midway through the second quarter. The Hoosiers took their first possession of the game 88 yards for the game's initial score on All-American tailback Anthony Thompson's 7-yard rushing touchdown.

Indiana cornerback Erick Coleman intercepted a pass

by USC quarterback Todd Ellis to set up the Hoosiers' second score, a 10-yard pass from quarterback Dave Schnell to Cal Miller at 5:54. Another Ellis interception just before the half allowed a Hoosiers field goal to put the Big Ten Conference member ahead, 17-0.

The Gamecocks came back in the third quarter, rallying when Mike Tolbert recovered a blocked punt and ran 34 yards for USC's only touchdown of the game. Indiana's Pete Stoyanovich and USC's Collin Mackie traded a pair of field goals to round out the third quarter.

But faster than the Gamecocks could ask "Just what is a Hoosier, anyway?," Indiana increased its lead to 27-10 on an 88-yard bomb from Schnell to Rob Turner. A third Ellis interception set up the game's final score when Thompson added his second touchdown of the night at 8:31.

"We were concerned about Anthony Thompson, and Schnell had a great night — he really killed us with the

deep pass," USC head coach Joe Morrison said in a crowded interview room after the game. "We were disappointed in our inability to move the football.

"We thought we'd have better coverage and pressure on the quarterback, but you gotta block 'em before you can move 'em," Morrison said.

Indiana coach Bill Mallory agreed.

"We knew the key would be at the line of scrimmage," he said. "We did a good job of controlling the line on both sides of the football, and that made the difference."

It also made the Gamecocks look as if they had ridden one ride too many.

USC and its fans ended the season like one who leaves a long day at the state fair: weary and a little nauseated. But just like the fair-goer, the Gamecock faithful will be eagerly awaiting all the thrills and spills of the annual event next year when it returns like an old friend.

USC offense unproductive

By JOHN MILLS III
Staff writer

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Since game five of the 1988 football season when the Gamecocks took on Appalachian State in the Homecoming contest, the offensive performance of head coach Joe Morrison's team has been sluggishly slack.

The Gamecocks' loss to the Indiana Hoosiers in the Liberty Bowl was the result of continuing poor offensive performances and the team's inability to play a complete game at 100 percent.

"We just didn't play as a whole team. We might have had nine or 10 guys out there giving 100 percent. We didn't have 11 all of the time. And you can't win when you do that," USC freshman wide receiver Robert Brooks said.

That wasn't the first time Brooks spoke about a lackluster Gamecock team. He also did so after the Gamecocks hit the road for their first away game in Blacksburg, Va. to play the Virginia Tech Hokies.

Because of five interceptions from USC quarterback Todd Ellis, the

team relied on kicker Collin Mackie, who booted five field goals, enabling the Gamecocks to squeak by the Hoakies 26-24.

In the bowl contest Dec. 28, Ellis tossed three interceptions. Most of the time, Ellis said, the defense simply overpowered the Gamecocks, causing the interceptions.

"I didn't force any ball tonight. I threw one bad ball (for an interception)," Ellis said.

His Liberty Bowl performance set aside, Ellis had 18 interceptions and just nine touchdown passes in the 1988 regular season. In terms of touchdown passes, that's his worst season ever. Therefore, it was up to the Gamecock defense and special teams to score the points when the opponents shut down the offensive team.

The only Gamecock points in the 34-10 bowl defeat were scored by defensive end Mike Tolbert, who returned a blocked Hoosier punt 34 yards for a touchdown, and Mackie, who kicked the extra point and a 43-yard field goal.

After the game, the Gamecocks,

including Morrison, said the Hoosiers were not a better team. They did the same when the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets embarrassed the Gamecocks, 34-0.

When Morrison hinted that a better team had beaten the Gamecocks, he was speaking about the Florida State game, in which the Seminoles routed the Gamecocks 59-0.

No one may ever know, or admit, the reasons the Gamecocks lost to the Hoosiers, making USC's bowl record 0-8. Perhaps the coaches didn't properly motivate the team. Or maybe the Gamecocks couldn't bear the 30-degree temperatures during the game.

Whatever the circumstances, USC had just 23 rushing yards and 130 passing yards. The Hoosiers rushed for 185 and passed for 390.

When the 1989 season rolls around, the Gamecocks must be prepared to play at 100 percent in every game. Making them believe that is the coaches' job.

"He (Morrison) has given us every indication that he will be back," Ellis said.

Fryer named Academic All-American second time

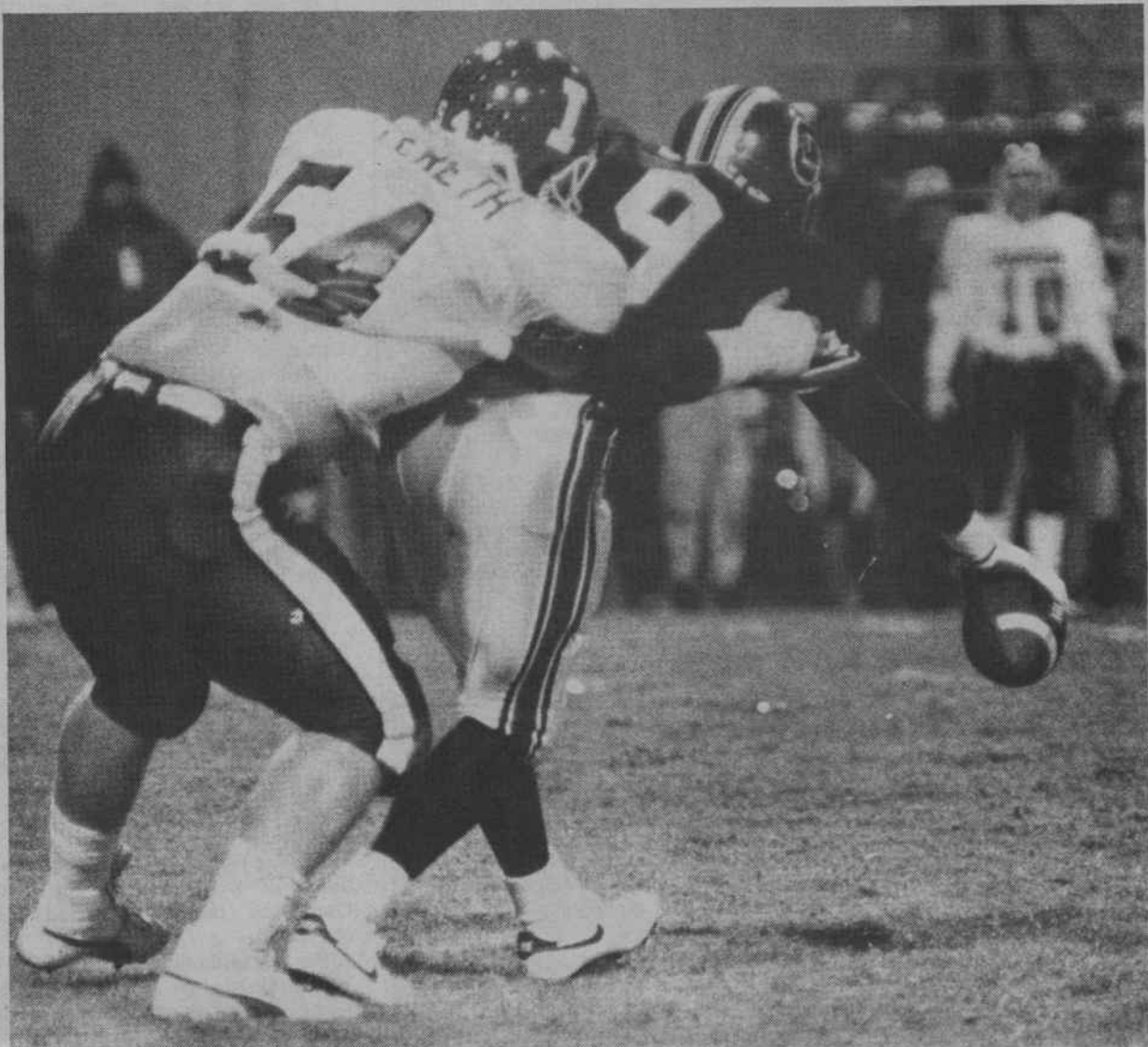
Mark Fryer, a junior offensive tackle on the USC football team, has been named to the first team Academic All-America squad for the second year in a row.

Fryer is a three-year starter for the Gamecocks and holds a 3.6 grade point average as an accounting major

in the USC College of Business Administration. Fryer also has received the USC team Academic Award for the past two seasons and also was recipient of the George Terry Attitude Award at this past year's team banquet.

"Mark Fryer is a tremendous

representative for the University of South Carolina, both on and off the football field," said USC head football coach Joe Morrison. "He does an outstanding job of balancing his academics and athletics and keeping things in perspective. We're extremely proud of him."



Indiana defensive tackle Doug Schlereth sacks USC quarterback Todd Ellis in the 1988 Liberty Bowl in Memphis, Tenn. The Hoosiers defeated the Gamecocks, 34-10. TURNER BOONE/Special to The Gamecock

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