

TEDDY LEPP/The Gamecock

USC's sophomore forward Beth Hunt fights for a rebound in Saturday's win over Southern Mississippi. Hunt scored 23 points and grabbed a team high 16 rebounds in the victory.

## Lady Gamecocks run record to 9-0

By KEVIN ADAMS  
Sports editor

For a while, a long while, it looked as if the Lady Gamecock basketball team's perfect record and No. 17 national ranking were in jeopardy.

Led by flashy senior guard Catrina McCants' 22 points in the second half, Southern Mississippi threw a sizable scare into USC players and fans alike Monday night at the Carolina Coliseum. But the Lady Golden Eagles finally succumbed to the Lady Gamecocks' inside game and lost the Metro Conference match-up 85-80.

"I'm thrilled to death to win this game," USC head coach Nancy Wilson said. "I think that Southern Mississippi played an excellent basketball game. They answered everything and more that we would throw at them."

With the win, USC improves to 9-0, the best start for a Lady Gamecock squad since 1981-82, when Pam Parson's squad went 10-0 to begin the season. USC is now 2-0 in Metro play.

But it didn't come easy. Trailing by seven at halftime, 42-35, Southern Miss came out like gangbusters in the second half, grabbing a 52-50 lead on Alexis Hall's second consecutive three-point goal.

After the Lady Gamecocks came back to take a brief four-point lead, McCants struck with a three-pointer to cut USC's lead to one at 56-55 with 11:57 remaining.

A little more than two minutes later, the Lady Golden Eagles, now 6-3, had grabbed a 64-60 lead behind two more three-point shots from McCants, who hit all four of her three-point attempts in the second half and finished with 32 points.

That's when Schonna Banner,

Beth Hunt and Lisa Diaz took over. The trio combined for 22 of USC's final 25 points.

Down 68-66, Diaz hit a 14-foot jumper left of the lane, Hunt scored on a coast-to-coast layup, point guard Sherry David hit a short jump shot and Banner hit a turnaround jumper in an 8-0 USC run to give the Lady Gamecocks a 74-68 advantage with 5:57 to go.

Southern Miss then went on a 8-2 run of its own to tie the score at 76 with 3:23 remaining before Diaz and Hunt hit consecutive jumpers to put the Lady Gamecocks ahead to stay.

Banner headed the USC attack with 28 points and eight rebounds, while Hunt had 23 points and 16 rebounds. Diaz added 19 points and six assists. Overall, the taller Lady Gamecocks outrebounded Southern Miss, 42-25.

Banner said after the game that despite Southern Miss' strong showing, the Lady Gamecocks never lost their confidence.

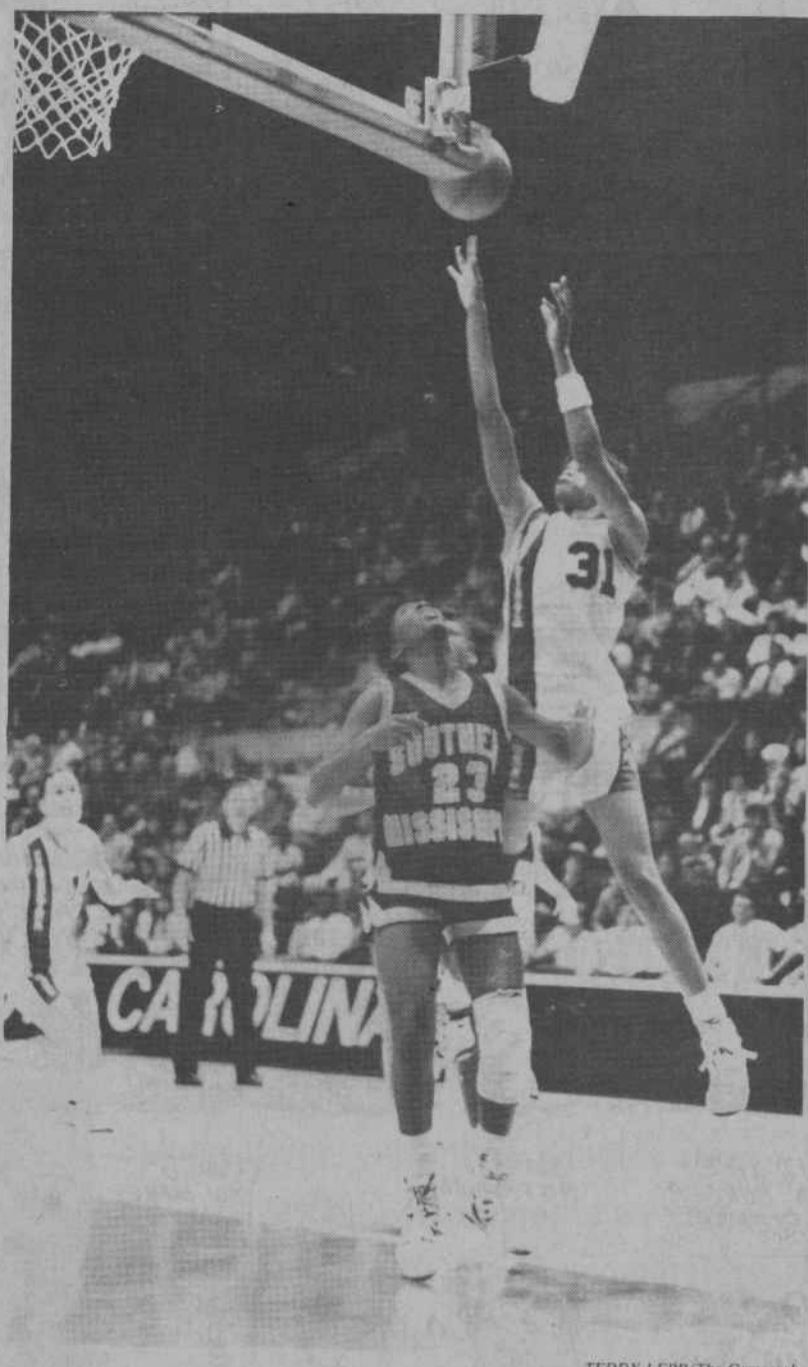
"We were telling each other during the game just to hang in there and not give up because we knew that we could beat them," she said. "This is our court, our place, and we knew we could do it."

Banner was also pleased with her personal play.

"I think this was my best performance, and I hope I can keep on performing like this because if I do, I think everyone else will pick up."

Wilson agreed.

"I really thought that a real key player for us tonight was Schonna Banner, defensively and offensively," Wilson said. "Just mentally, more than anybody, she seemed to be



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Lady Gamecock junior center Schonna Banner puts up a shot in Saturday's 85-80 victory over Metro Conference opponent Southern Mississippi. Banner led USC with 28 points. USC will face 7th ranked Georgia at home on Thursday.

See Ladies page 11

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