

# Berson coaches U.S. youth soccer

By RICHARD W. ROWELL  
Staff writer

While most soccer coaches were relaxing during the off-season, USC head coach Mark Berson was busy training the United States Under-18 Youth National Team.

Berson was appointed assistant coach to the Under-20 Youth team around a year ago with the responsibility of assembling the future Under-20 group.

"Since the current team (Under-20) is out competing," Berson said, "it was my job to put together a group and give them international experience so they can step right in next year."

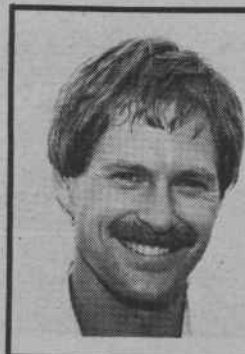
In building the Under-18 team, Berson's first task was to visit the four regional camps last summer, talk to the coaches and evaluate the players. From there, he assembled a group of 16 players who met during Thanksgiving at Los Crusis, N.M., for a training camp. Finally, the group assembled at Rutgers University Dec. 26 and trained there until leaving for the Soviet Union Jan. 8.

Berson had several major concerns in preparing for the tournament — the time of the tournament; a hectic travel schedule; differences in food, customs, and housing; and the ability to adjust to the speed of international play.

"The period of the tournament was bad for us because it was during a down time in the soccer season," Berson said. "High school games are over or the seasons have not yet begun and the players aren't in peak form. I felt while we were at Rutgers, we achieved our goal of mental and physical fitness necessary for international play."

Since the tourney was during Christmas, players were away from home for quite a while. Also, on the long flight overseas the team traveled through eight different time zones en route to Leningrad. On the day of its first game, the team woke up at 4 a.m., and the game was at 7 a.m., but Berson felt his team adjusted well.

The team traveled comfortably enough, despite not being able to drink the water or eat any fruit.



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Mark Berson

Berson credited his regional coaches for the improvement in travel problems.

"In the past, our teams have had trouble traveling, but our regional coaches have sent word to our players to develop a determined attitude toward adjusting to different customs and not letting it fluster them."

"The speed of play at the international level is much quicker than in the U.S., and there is no way to prepare for the change except to thrust our players into the international arena and let them see first hand," he said. "Our players were surprised at the quickness, both physically and tactically, but they adjusted well. Therefore, the trip was very encouraging because our players showed the ability to adjust to the circumstances which were presented to them."

Berson said U.S. teams are at a disadvantage on the international level because of this country's lack of a strong professional soccer league, something many other top countries have.

"We can't go out and watch a professional game every weekend," he said. "Nor can we become associated with a professional team and train with them. Therefore, our players are behind in terms of speed of play, speed of execution and speed of decisions."

Thus, Berson has two major goals for U.S. soccer — giving the American players international ex-

posure and making sure that when the players return, they are pressed to continue at the same level.

"The environment to develop players to a high level is always improving in this country because technically our players are capable," he said. "The problem is that they are not forced to execute as quickly as they are capable of — therefore, they don't. So we need to place our players in a more demanding environment, and the best way to do that is through international play."

"When returning home, it is almost impossible to continue to develop on the same level, so we need to get as close as we can. We can do that through more international play between clubs and regional teams and more play between states."

Berson feels the United States has closed the gap in its technical ability, saying the improvement is coming because it is being addressed in the regional developmental process.

"The No. 1 factor to address right now is for all of us to look at ways in which we can create a more competitive environment in which our players can develop," Berson said.

"We are improving and there are many positive signs. We must remember that our strength in this country is the great diversity in the styles of play and our types of players," he said. "Our challenge is to develop the most demanding environment we can for our players to compete in so we can continue to grow."

"It is clear that the game is the best teacher, and it is clear that the more competitive the game, there are more amounts of difficult situations, thus preparing our players for international play."

The United States's current Under-20 National team just competed in a tournament and finished in the top four internationally. Evidently, the philosophies of coaches such as Berson and the hard work of other regional coaches and young players are improving the quality of American soccer. And slowly but surely, this country is gaining respect for its soccer ability.

## SPORTS BRIEFS

### USC honors its scholar-athletes

USC honored its scholar-athletes at a reception at the Capstone House last week.

Athletic Director King Dixon reported that 109 of the 382 Gamecock student athletes earned grade point averages of 3.0 or better for the 1988 fall semester. Eight USC athletes recorded a perfect 4.0 average, including football players Mark Fryer (a two-time Academic All-American) and Joe Reaves, soccer players Gavin Coombs and Patrick Mihm, women's tennis player Carol Culik, woman swimmer Kristen Britt, men's swimmer Chris Dudka, and softball player Kris Kordonowy.

"We are so very proud of the accomplishments of our scholar-athletes," Dixon said. "These young people have done an outstanding job of keeping things in perspective and balancing their academics with their athletics. Our hats are off to them and our congratulations go out to every one of them."

USC Provost Dr. Arthur Smith also recognized the group at the reception.

### Women swimmers 12th in NCAA

The USC women's swimming squad finished competition in the NCAA Women's Swimming and Diving Championships Saturday in Indianapolis, ending the tournament with a 12th-place finish.

The 12th-place finish was two positions lower than the Lady Gamecocks' 10th-place finish last year, but it is the highest finish by a USC women's team without competing in relays.

Two USC women, Beth Wadlington and Renee Borup, finished 15th and 16th, respectively, in the 10-meter platform competition, which the Lady Gamecocks didn't

participate in during the regular season.

Wadlington and Borup earned All-American honors, and their efforts helped USC diving coach Randy Ableman earn "National Diving Coach of the Year" honors, the first such award in Lady Gamecock swimming and diving history.

USC's Isabelle Arnould earned All-American honors in the 1650 freestyle, finishing the event in fifth place with a time of 16:14.04. Also earning All-American honors for the Lady Gamecocks was Michelle Smith in the 200 backstroke, as she finished sixth with a time of 2:01.10.

### Track teams open outdoor seasons

The USC men's and women's track and field teams participated in their first meet of the outdoor season at the Florida State Relays in Tallahassee March 17-18.

On Friday at the University Invitational, senior Gamecock Reggie Nayer won the 1,500 meter race and freshman Art Henson captured the high jump title. For the Lady Gamecocks, sophomore Shannon Wyont took first place in the 1,500 meter race.

Saturday in the Open Invitational, Gamecock Paul Wiehern won the high jump competition and in the process qualified for the NCAA Outdoor Championships to be held in Provo, Utah the weekend of May 29. USC senior Ray Bolton placed first in the 100-meter dash and Gamecocks Nigel Stoddart and Eddie Miller finished second and third, respectively, to sweep the event for USC.

"I was really pleased with the way our kids ran for the first outdoor meet of the season," said USC head coach Charlie Strong. "If we continue to run like this then we can be a real good team."

Over 30 other teams participated in the event, including Eastern Michigan, Southern Illinois and Metro foes Cincinnati and Florida State. No team scores were accounted for.

## Ladies *Continued from page 8*

Gamecocks. Deitch is a very athletic player who likes to go to the net. She is 15-12 overall and 6-6 this spring.

"She has as much talent as any freshman in the country," Elkins said. "She needs to have better shot selection and do some things, again, that experience takes care of."

Senior Magdalena Ringstrom from Vasteras, Sweden, is playing very well at the No. 5 slot after becoming more aggressive this year. She is 8-4 this spring and 13-12 for the year.

"Magdalena Ringstrom has played real well," Elkins said. "In fact, against all four of the Top 10 teams we've played, she hasn't lost a set."

Cyndee Newton, a senior, is an excellent doubles player, but has struggled at the sixth singles slot. She is 9-14 in 1988-89 and 3-9 so far this spring.

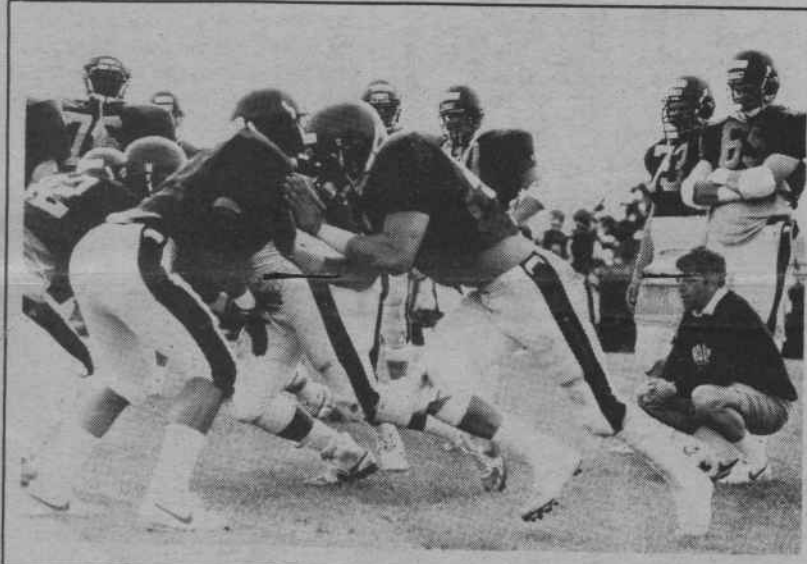
"She started out not playing real well and has lost her confidence, but is finally starting to play a little better now," Elkins said.

The Lady Gamecocks will look to turn things around in the eight matches remaining before the

Metro Conference Tournament, which Elkins still believes they can win.

"Before the season's over, we want to get back in the Top 25 again, and we want to win the Metro Tournament," he said. "I think both of those are reachable goals."

The bad news is that the good times for the Lady Gamecocks' tennis program are still in the future. The good news is that the future begins when San Diego State visits the Maxcy-Gregg tennis courts at noon today.



### Practice makes perfect

Gamecock linemen conduct drills before the watchful eye of a USC assistant coach during spring practice last week. The Gamecocks will scrimmage today at 3 p.m. before taking a week-long break for Easter.

TERRY HUNTER/The Gamecock

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