

# Senior remembers N.C. State but focuses on East Carolina

By RICH TAYLOR  
 Staff Writer

The difficulty in selecting the greatest individual offensive performance in USC football history would be enormous. Efforts by former greats Jeff Grantz, George Rogers, Sterling Sharpe and Todd Ellis would all merit serious consideration.

Defensively, however, the choice is clear. Patrick Hinton played the game of which defensive players' dreams are made in 1988 against N.C. State in Raleigh.

Hinton was a one-man gang against the Wolfpack, recovering a fumble and intercepting three passes, returning the first 83 yards to paydirt to ignite the Gamecocks to a 23-7 victory.

His efforts earned him *The Sporting News* National Defensive Player of the Week and were instrumental in his being named first team AP All-South Independent at season's end.

Two years later, Hinton is now a senior and the Gamecock's leading tackler. But not suprisingly, he can still remember "the game" like it was yesterday.

"Oh yeah, the N.C. State game will always stick out in my mind," he said. "There was a lot of adversity that week and we came through and won the ball game. It was a great win for us and got Coach Morrison his 100th career victory."

What transpired after the game is also etched in Hinton's memory.

"Coach Morrison came to me and said 'Patrick you had a great ballgame'," Hinton said. "That really sticks out because it was the

first time he came to me personally after a game and expressed how he felt. That kind of hit me in a soft spot. Since he died, that's what I'll always remember Coach Morrison by."

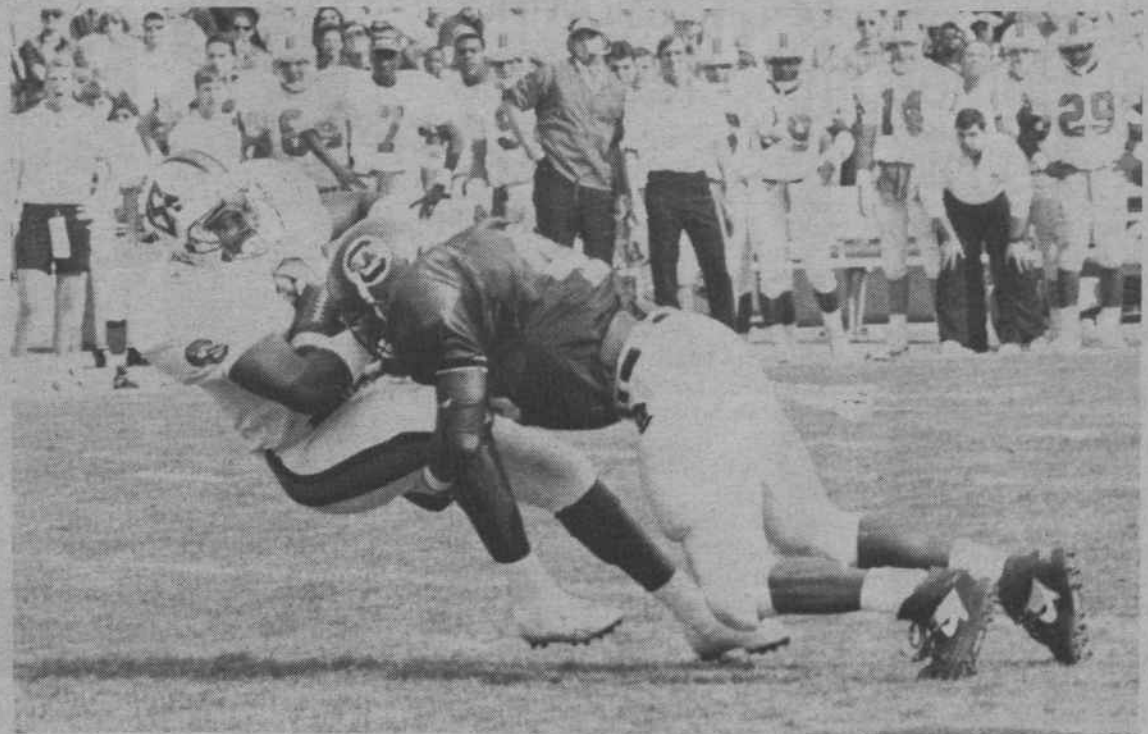
Even though a return trip to N.C. State is only three weeks away, Hinton said he is not looking ahead to that game just yet.

"We are all focusing on playing East Carolina Saturday. They have a good team. They could have beaten Georgia (a 19-15 loss). Anytime you go into Athens and almost pull out a win you've got a good ball team. We're definitely not underestimating them," Hinton said.

"The team has reacted in a positive way from the Georgia Tech loss. We're working hard and realize the mistakes we've made. Right now our focus is going back to the basics and doing the things that got us where we were before the Tech game. We'll bounce back in a positive way," he said.

Coach Sparky Woods is relying upon senior leadership to help get the Gamecocks back on the winning track against ECU, with Hinton playing a major role.

"Patrick is a very talented athlete," Woods said. "He is also a very intelligent football player which helps put him in a position to be around the ball and make a lot of plays. Pat is a great practice player. He comes to work every day and is a real good example for the other players as far as his work habits are concerned. Patrick is a real contributor and good senior on our football team because he leads by example and is a very hard-



File photo

Gamecock linebacker Patrick Hinton makes a tackle in this past season's loss to North Carolina State. Hinton leads the USC defense in tackles this season.

nosed and exciting player on the field."

Hinton is certainly confident of his ability to play a major role in a game's outcome. He makes it clear, however, that success for the team outweighs any individual goals.

"I like to go into a game thinking I can do pretty much whatever I want against our opponents. But I go out there and play for the rest of the guys too because they're working for the same goals that I am," he said. "If I happen to make the most tackles, that's fine. But I don't mind if I only make one

tackle if we win. As long as we win, I'm happy."

Hinton believes that one of Carolina's greatest assets is their loyal and vocal fans.

"Carolina fans are great, nothing but great. I love it when we pull up at a stadium. There are all those Gamecock fans screaming and yelling no matter where we are. The game that sticks out most to me is 1987 at Wake Forest when our fans took up nearly the whole stadium. It was like playing at home. That's when I knew our fans were the best. I wouldn't trade them for anything in the world," he said.

A psychology major who graduates in December, Hinton would naturally like to extend his playing career a few more years.

"Hopefully, I can go into professional ball. It is one of my dreams and aspirations right now," Hinton said. "But if that doesn't work out, I'm going to try to start a business with some of the guys graduating with me this fall."

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