

1993 full of expectations for Gamecock football team

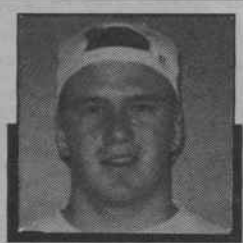
The roller-coaster ride that was the 1992 Gamecock football season ended in an upbeat fashion, leaving everyone optimistic about next year and the years to come.

This off-season has been one of many fond memories and future speculation for Gamecock fans. The football team experienced one of the most unbelievable seasons in recent history. The Gamecocks lost their first five games, including several lopsided contests to the likes of Georgia, Arkansas and Alabama.

During this stretch, the Gamecocks lost their starting senior quarterback, Wright Mitchell, who quit the team. While riding the crest of what would become the nation's longest losing streak at that time, the team underwent their infamous player revolt. Emotions were high, and so was the confusion as to what actually took place.

The only certain thing was that a sizable percentage of the players were unhappy with the direction the team was headed and asked for the removal of their coach, Sparky Woods. South Carolina's head coach issued an ultimatum for the players to return to practice ready to listen to him and his staff. The players did return, and, apparently, Woods said and did the right things.

The Gamecocks came out that



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week and defeated 15th-ranked Mississippi State at Williams-Brice Stadium under a national media microscope. That win began the upward turn for the rest of the season, and it also began the deluge of Steve Taneyhill hype. Every day, the papers ran stories

about Taneyhill's long hair and earrings and even more stories about how his teammates wouldn't care if he wore a dress.

At any rate, this freshman was providing the young Gamecock football team with the confidence and enthusiasm they had lacked earlier in the year. With Taneyhill at the helm, South Carolina finished the year with five wins in their last six games, losing only to Florida in Gainesville by a very close 14-9 score.

Perhaps the most exciting game of the year was the home game against Tennessee, which the Gamecocks won on a game-saving tackle by Hank Campbell that prevented a successful two-point conversion in the closing seconds. That game also saw the birth of what could be a tradition at Williams-Brice Stadium, cup tossing.

The last game of the season was the annual Carolina-Clemson game that had been dominated by the Tigers in recent years. Fan anticipation and emotion were

very high all week, and vandalism by Carolina supporters to Clemson's campus added another memorable chapter to this storied rivalry. South Carolina went into Death Valley and controlled the game on both sides of the ball.

With the victory by the Gamecocks, both teams finished with 5-6 records, but they meant very different things to each team. Clemson and its fans were devastated with the reality of the losing season that the Cocks had sealed for them. South Carolina's season, on the other hand, seemed to be ending in a bowl-game atmosphere that no one wanted to end.

With the addition of a solid recruiting class, providing players at needed positions, next season promises to be one of the most successful in some time. The team will lose only five starters, fewer than any other SEC school.

And what is particularly exciting about the second-half performance of the football team is that the success wasn't achieved on Taneyhill's shoulders alone. A running game that had been unproductive in the first half of the year began to put up impressive numbers with the introduction of a new offensive scheme during the transitional midway point of the season.

Rob DeBoer and Brandon Bennett both benefited from a more diverse attack that began using the tight ends, the screen pass and the draw play more effectively. Both backs seemed to have the uncanny ability to break a big run just when the team needed it.

Mike Reddick displayed pass catching abilities out of the backfield as well as the ability to advance the ball upfield after the catch, and redshirt freshman Joe Troupe has had an impressive spring season to date.

The offensive line, where the Gamecocks will feel the biggest loss, were the unsung heroes in this newfound success. Giving Taneyhill enough time to pass and the running backs holes to run through proved vital in the SEC, which emphasizes strong play along the line of scrimmage.

The receiving corps provided big-play capability. The early loss of Don Chaney to the NFL draft will hurt this area of the team, but Asim Penny, Toby Cates and Terrell Harris all showed they have the talent to step up and contribute.

With so much attention being given to the offense, the defense could very well be the catalyst for next season's success. This past year saw the defense turn in several impressive performances late in the season. Mississippi State, Florida and Clemson all had trouble moving the ball against South Carolina. Even with the loss of Cedric Bembery at the nose guard position, South Carolina opponents will have a difficult time scoring against what will amount to a very balanced defense.

The line will be anchored by Mike Washington, Eric Sullivan, and David Turnipseed. These young players will be called upon to put pressure on opposing quarterbacks and stop the run. If they can't do this, it could be a very long season for the Gamecocks. They should, however, benefit from having already gained meaningful playing time and knowing they have very talented players behind them to take the pressure off of them.

The linebacking core is going to

be one of the most talented in the SEC. Eric Brown, Ernest Dixon, Hank Campbell and Chris Rumph all return, having spent time as starters last year. Each one of these players is very solid against the run and have great pass-rushing abilities.

The linebackers will have to do both of these things this season to make up for some of the inexperience along the defensive front. In addition, the lack of exceptional speed as a group is an area that will have to be addressed. The possible loss of Lawrence Mitchell to another knee injury would deprive the Gamecocks of a gifted athlete, but, fortunately, the Gamecocks are as deep at this position as any other.

The secondary, the self-proclaimed "Lynch Mob," will feature a group of players as talented as they are self-confident. They like to challenge opponents and play an extremely aggressive style of football. This group, comprised by the likes of Frank Adams, Jerry Inman, Tony Watkins, Norman Greene and Ron Nealy, prides itself on being around the ball every play. All have exceptional speed and like to play very tight coverage when possible. If last year's improvement during the season is an indication of what the secondary can do on a regular All-American, but had struggled until he eventually hit his stride late in the year. Simpson will have to hit on a more consistent basis for the Gamecocks this year.

The demanding schedule the Gamecocks are going to play surely means that at least several games are going to be decided by a field goal or less. The punting duties also fell into Simpson's hands, and he has proved more than adequate. Simpson's strong leg put opponents in bad field position many times.

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