

Scandinavian trip was a success Football team shifts sights towards UCF

I'd like to officially welcome all of you back to Columbia for another year of Gamecock sports. This year promises to be a wild ride as the Gamecocks battle for league and national supremacy.

We here at The Gamecock Sports Department will be there through it all: the good and the bad; the pretty and the pretty ugly.

We promise to give you the best possible coverage three days a week so you can stay on top of things.

With today's date, only 8 days remain until the Gamecock football team takes the field against Central Florida. But, I'm personally a little sick and tired of hearing about USC football.

Granted, the south is football crazy, but I'm not from the south and I can't take but so much football babble.

So for the rest of this column I promise not to mention anything about Gamecock football.

Let's fast-forward to basketball season. The schedule was released a couple of weeks ago and it looks great.

At least 13 national or regional television appearances, the most ever for a USC basketball team, highlight

Bryan Johnston Scrum Down

the 29-game 1996-97 men's basketball schedule. The Gamecocks will play at least 15 games against teams that advanced to 1996 post-season action, and will play in two of the nation's premier in-season tournaments.

But while the schedule looks great, it's the atmosphere at Frank McGuire Arena that is getting the fans excited. At the beginning of last year's season, the arena had empty seats scattered about and you could pick where you wanted to sit.

But as the Gamecocks improved rapidly and a post-season berth was at stake, the place was packed like a church on Easter Sunday.

The fans returned and went crazy. By the time the NIT rolled around, excitement was at a feverish pitch. The students are now into the game and standing throughout. Don't forget about those insane people who paint their bodies and harass opposing players, coaches and the refs.

This coming season promises to be a great one. USC returns nine players and Hagen Rouse, who was red-shirted, while only losing one (Malik Russell).

They also bring in two quality recruits in Herbert Lee Davis and Antonio Grant.

The Gamecocks have just returned from a two-week tour of Scandinavia in which they played, and won, eight games against professional and national teams from Finland and Sweden. This trip should help build team morale and make Carolina that much better.

As much publicity as USC will get this year on television, the best will come from two prime-time games that will be aired on ESPN.

The Feb. 4 game against Kentucky and Feb. 18's game against Arkansas will be seen nation-wide. Hopefully Dick Vitale will grace Columbia with his presence, BABY! Carolina's game against Cincinnati on Feb. 15 will be seen on ABC and CBS will pick up the Tennessee game on Feb. 22.

As you can see, the program is on the rise and fans are excited. So if by the beginning of November, the Gamecock football team has no chance of a bowl, just tell yourself that basketball is just around the corner. Save your vocal chords and start making those wacky signs because Carolina basketball fever will be coming to our campus soon.

BRYAN JOHNSTON Asst. Sports Editor

Gamecock football is so close that you can practically hear "2001" playing in Williams-Brice Stadium. Two-a-days and the preseason are officially over. Now the Gamecocks are focusing on their first opponent - Central Florida.

The opener against the Knights is only eight days away, and the excitement is starting to build on campus. But the question everybody wants answered is: "How well are the Gamecocks going to do this year?" That's an interesting question, and the answer is a mystery. Not even the coaches are sure of what to expect from this squad.

One has to be impressed with the work habits of this year's team. Out of 70-plus players, only six failed to make their time in the mile and a half run.

This indicates that the Gamecocks put in extra hours over the summer.

"One, they came in and reported in-shape," coach Scott said. "I told them that if they worked hard over the summer, we wouldn't have to spend our practice time conditioning. The second thing, I think our football team is further along as far as maturity and knowing what the coaches are asking for. They are learning how to practice."

When USC started practice on Aug. 10, they welcomed 23 new players to a get-acquainted session.

A group of 18 freshmen, two junior college transfers and three walk-ons were the first to use the new practice complex on Bluff Road, across from the stadium.

Since then, the Gamecocks

have gone through two-a-days in both shorts and shoulder pads, and finally full pads on Friday, Aug. 16. In that time, USC has experienced the normal injuries and missing players that all teams go through.

Sophomore Kerry Hood fractured his ankle and had to have surgery. He will likely miss the season and be redshirted. Sophomore Andray Spearman missed a day due to a death in the family. These circumstances are to be expected, so the team moved on minus two.

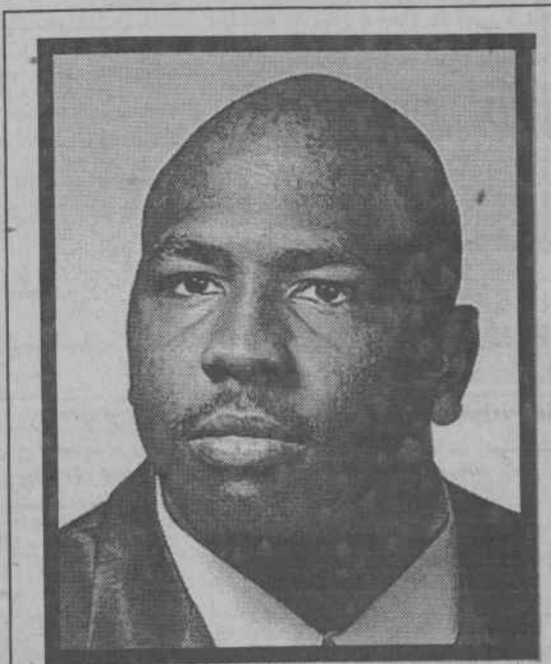
The coaching staff also unveiled new t-shirts with this year's slogan, "Not Satisfied," on it. The past two years the coaching staff came up with: "Together We Will" in 1994 and "Count On Me" last season. The players made the selection for this year's theme.

"Several of the players came to me at the first of the summer and said that they were not satisfied with what happened last year," Scott explained. "We didn't need a team meeting to decide our team slogan, because that came from within. I think it says a lot about their attitude."

Over the course of the preseason, Coach Scott continued to have praise for several freshmen. Wide receivers Jermale Kelly and Donovan Norman, center Scott Browne, and backs Troy Hambrick, Jacob Bush and Boo Williams were singled out.

Among the trio of backs, Coach Scott said, "Boo is getting more comfortable in the open field and has done some amazing things."

But don't forget about the veterans. Redshirt sophomore quarterback Anthony Wright



Senior Partick Garth is a leader of the Gamecock defense. The first game, which is against Central Florida University, is only eight days away.

edged out Barnhardt for the starting position, but both will see playing time.

Running back Duce Staley, and receiver Zola Davis were impressive as the two come into this season with high expectations following last season's performances.

On the defensive side of the ball, big things will be expected from transfer Daren Hambrick, as well as Arturo Freeman and Ben Washington. Washington, an All-SEC candidate at strong

safety, returns after making a team-high 93 tackles in 1995. Freeman started last year at free safety.

In special teams, Cortney Leavitt is in a battle for the place-kicking job with Reed Morton. Leavitt will be punting for the Gamecocks.

Now, all you have to do is wait for next Saturday's game where you can spot off some of the things you learn today and impress a few folks. It may be more entertaining than the game itself.

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