

Volleyball finishes second in SEC, earn first-round bye in conference tournament

DWAYNE MCLEMORE Asst. Sports Editor

The Carolina volleyball team swept Tennessee and Kentucky at home this weekend, finishing second in the SEC Eastern Division and earning a first-round bye in the conference tournament.

The team closed out the regular season with four straight wins and finished 21-7 (10-4 SEC).

Head coach Kim Hudson said she was happy with the second-place conference finish.

"I'm extremely proud of this team and the way we're playing right now," Hudson said. "Finishing second gives us a better chance to match with Florida in the finals of the tournament, and we certainly feel confident about that right now."

On Friday, Carolina defeated Tennessee 15-4, 15-2 and 15-11. The team was led by junior Heather Larkin, who hit .500 and recorded 11 kills, five total blocks and three service aces.

"Heather was on fire," Hudson said. "She really seems to be making the step to the next level."

The Lady Gamecocks opened up a

7-1 lead on the Lady Vols in the first game behind two of Larkin's aces. Tennessee came as close as 7-3 before falling.

Game two was also controlled by Carolina, who went up 8-1 on sophomore Stacy Donham's ace. Junior Shani Abshier would record an ace for the victory.

Tennessee played harder in the third game, battling the Lady Gamecocks to a 9-9 tie. Carolina led 12-11 when junior Lori Drost put the team up 14-11 with two straight kills, sealing the victory.

Hudson credited the team's blocking and other aspects in the victory.

"We served and passed real well, and we didn't make a lot of unforced errors," Hudson said.

The Lady Gamecocks hit .304 and Tennessee, which hit .000, dropped to 17-14 (6-7 SEC) following the match.

The more crucial game came Sunday against Kentucky, when the winner would finish second in the SEC Eastern Division and receive a first-round bye in the tournament.

Carolina honored Kelly Morrow and Lyndy Stevens on Senior Day and won the match 15-9, 15-12 and 15-7, getting

revenge for a loss to the Lady Wildcats earlier this season.

Abshier led the team with 21 kills, hitting .410 and recording 18 digs.

"We were really fired up for the match," Abshier said. "The key to the win was heart. We wanted it and really pulled together."

A kill and an ace by Abshier put the Lady Gamecocks up 2-0 in game one. The game remained close, as Carolina led 12-9.

Larkin would record a kill for the win.

Kentucky then went up 4-0 in game two, but the Lady Gamecocks battle back to take a 5-4 lead on an ace by Morrow.

Abshier recorded a kill to put Carolina up 10-9. The momentum stayed on the side of the Lady Gamecocks, who won the game.

After a 3-3 tie in the third game, Carolina scored seven unanswered points. Kentucky came as close as 10-6, but fell as Abshier closed the match out with three consecutive kills for the win.

Freshman Fe Laire recorded 16 kills and 23 digs, hitting .417. Larkin finished with 10 kills.

Sophomore Ashley Edlund contributed 43 assists in the match, giving her 1,144 on the season. The setter credited the team's play in the victory.

"We played relentless defense and had awesome blocking," Edlund said. "Everything worked well. We were ready for Kentucky, and it showed."

Hudson said the key to the win was consistency and agreed blocking played a big role.

"Our blocking was better than when we played them last time," Hudson said.

The Lady Gamecocks hit .333 on the match to Kentucky's .235, and also recorded 80 digs to Kentucky's 55. The Lady Wildcats dropped to 12-17 (8-6 SEC).

Carolina also held Kentucky's Gina Heustis to 16 kills. Heustis recorded 29 kills in the teams' prior match.

The Lady Gamecocks host this year's SEC Tournament, which begins Friday at the Volleyball Competition Facility.

Carolina will receive a first-round bye and will play at 11 a.m. Friday against the Western Division's third-place finisher.

Four days and counting ...



KIM TRUETT The Gamecock

Junior Shani Abshier led the Lady Gamecock on Sunday with 21 kills. The volleyball team defeated both Tennessee and Kentucky this weekend to clinch second place in the SEC East behind Florida. The clinching of second place means that USC will receive a first-round bye in next week-end's SEC Tourney that will begin in just four days. The Lady Gamecocks' first round match will be against Mississippi after they were defeated by LSU on Sunday. The match will be held at 11 a.m. in the New Facility on Friday.

Gamecocks gain respect against top ranked Gators, look to arch-rival Clemson next

ACHIM HUNT Sports Editor

When a team is without its two top runningbacks for a game against the top ranked team in the nation, the casual observer would say the team without the services of their runningbacks should just go out and look for respect.

They just need to go out, play hard and keep the game close.

On Saturday, the young Carolina Gamecocks hit the field confident they had a chance to win the ball game even without the services of tailback Duce Staley.

That same confidence was not shared with many other college football fans as even Carolina fans wanted respect.

Then something really weird happened.

Carolina intercepted a Danny Weurffel pass on Florida's first drive. That was the first interception thrown by Weurffel in the three games he has faced Carolina.

"Our defense made some really big plays out there," head coach Brad Scott said.

"They were able to keep Florida a little bit off balance, and until late into the ball game we did not give up many of the big games that they have all year long."

Carolina got the ball at midfield and took it down to the 30-yard line before Courtney Leavitt and the punting team pinned the Gators at their own three-yard line on a perfectly placed punt.

The Carolina defense made a nice stand by stopping two running plays and batting down a pass thrown by

Weurffel that was intended for wide receiver Reidel Anthony.

The offense then took the ball off of a Gator punt at the Carolina 35-yard line.

The drive seemed to have stalled when true freshman runningback Troy Hambrick appeared trapped in the corner by the Florida defense.

Hambrick then made a nice spin move out of harm's way, and then he saw a huge opening.

He proceeded to move all the way down to the seven-yard line, where quarterback Anthony Wright scrambled off of the bootleg play for the first touchdown of the game.

"I think to be able to go out there early and put some points on the board, was important," head coach Brad Scott said.

The extra point snap was bobbled, and a pass attempt by Courtney Leavitt was no good.

The score remained 6-0 in Carolina's favor with 8:57 remaining in the first quarter.

Then, on the very next drive, the Gators got on the scoreboard when the Gators Fred Taylor ran for a five-yard touchdown to give the Gators a 7-6 advantage.

After the next drive for Carolina stalled. It took a mere 12 seconds for the Gator offense to make the score 14-6 when Weurffel hit Jacques Green for a 56-yard score.

The Gamecocks good have folded the tents after the Gators made the score 21-6 on a Reidel Anthony score early in the second quarter.

But they did not.

Carolina took the ball right down the field and quarterback Anthony Wright scored his second touchdown of the games on an eight-yard run to make the score 21-12.

After the score, Wright appeared to strain a muscle, so backup Chad Barnhardt was sacked on the two point conversion attempt.

Florida struck again late in the second quarter when runningback Terry Jackson scored on a four-yard touchdown run on a fourth-and-two play.

That score gave the Gators a 28-12 advantage with 6:52 remaining in the half.

Carolina drove down the field to drain the rest of the clock, and they got a 27-yard field goal from senior Reed Morton to make the score 28-15 at the half.

The Gamecocks got the ball first in the second half, but were unable to move the ball.

On Leavitt's punt Terry Jackson blocked the kick and Mike Peterson recovered for the nine-yard touchdown.

After a Bart Edmiston field goal the score became 38-15.

On the next drive true freshman Troy Hambrick scored on a two-yard run to cut the Florida lead to 38-22.

"I think that Troy ran real hard in the game," Scott said. "Troy is that kind of player where the environment bothers him a bit. He picked his holes real well, and just hit them."

After two Florida touchdowns that were made in the fourth quarter to pad Florida's chance at the national championship.

The game ended on a 32-yard field goal by senior Reed Morton to end the scoring at 52-25.

The Gamecocks now must turn their focus to the Clemson Tigers who are coming off of a big win over N.C. State on Saturday.

"We have a great challenge next week in Clemson," Scott said. "I am not so sure that Clemson is not the hottest team in the country."

Kickoff is set for 5:30 p.m. The game will be televised by ESPN2.

Carolina Team Notes:

The last time the Carolina football team played against the No. 1 team in the nation was in 1991 when the Gamecocks fell to the Florida State Seminoles in Tallahassee.

The Gamecocks overall record against top-ranked teams now stands at 0-3.

Carolina junior linebacker Darren Hambrick was playing in front of the home crowd on Saturday in Florida.

Hambrick played for the University of Florida his first two years and transferred to Carolina after leaving the Florida football team.

The Gamecocks next game is against Clemson will be a must win for Carolina if they want to go to a bowl game this year.

The situation is the same as the 1996 season when the Gamecocks beat the Tigers 33-7 in Clemson to secure a Carquest Bowl Bid in 1994.

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