

Softball to host regionals

BRYAN JOHNSTON Sports Editor

The Lady Gamecock softball team will look to make their third trip in school history to the NCAA Women's College World Series when they host the NCAA Regionals this weekend.

USC, South Florida, Kansas and UNC-Greensboro will battle it out for the right to advance to the World Series when they take to the field today, Saturday and Sunday.

"I'm real excited to be home," head coach Joyce Compton said. "The fan support this year has been the best that it's been in the 11 years I've been here. It'd be great to put a couple thousand fans out there in the stands and really open up [the opponent's eyes]."

The No. 2-ranked Lady Gamecocks will take on UNCG today at 4:30 p.m.

The Spartans (40-23, Big South Champions) are making their first-ever appearance in the Championships.

Head coach Melody Cope said the key to beating USC is to figure out pitcher Trinity Johnson, but that's no small task.

"Everyone that has had a chance to see her this year is just overly positive about her," Cope said. "They say 'if you can figure Trinity out, you can do well against South Carolina.' But with a 60-3 record, it doesn't seem like anyone has figured her out yet."

UNCG is led offensively by Steph Workman,

Lara Long and Danielle Sekula.

Workman, a lefty slapper, is leading the team in batting average with a .360 clip. Long is leading the team in RBI with 38 and is batting .337. Sekula, who has been injured a good part of the season, is batting .319 in the 17 games she has played.

On the mound, Christine Hornak is the ace. The junior right-hander is 27-14 with a 1.98 ERA. In 263 1/3 innings pitched, Hornak has struck out 259 batters.

South Florida is the No. 2 seed and will play Kansas at 2 p.m. today.

The Bulls (49-11) qualified for the Championships by winning the Southern Atlantic Softball Alliance. USF is making their second-straight appearance in the Championships. Last season was the first time the Bulls made the tournament.

USF head coach Ken Eriksen said his team is not a team of superstars, but it has gotten the job done.

"We won ugly all year long with a lot of come-from-behind victories," Eriksen said. "I wouldn't say we've been stellar on the field, but we've done the job and the team knows how to win."

Kansas is the third seed and is an at-large qualifier from the Big 12 Conference. The Jayhawks come into Columbia with a 36-21 record and are making their seventh NCAA appearance.

Kansas coach Tracy Bunge said that Carolina

has an advantage playing at home.

"Playing at home, you know the field, you'll have a good crowd as well as avoiding last-minute travel arrangements," Bunge said. "As far as the players are concerned, they get to sleep in their own beds and it's probably a comfort level that they're happy to have."

Bunge said the strengths of Kansas lies in their pitcher, Sarah Workman, and a balanced hitting attack.

Workman is 26-18 with an ERA of 1.55. Workman has also struck out 228 batters in 284 2/3 innings.

At the plate, Sarah Holland, Shannon Stanwix and Sarah McCann are leading the way.

Holland is leading the team with a .392 batting average and seven homeruns. Stanwix is batting .343 with 18 doubles, and McCann is batting .333.

Senior All-Americans Chanda Lee and Trinity Johnson said a lot of fans would be great for the team.

"Our fans have been phenomenal and I think it gives us another reason to go for our goals," Lee

1997 NCAA Regional Information Columbia, SC Lady Gamecock Field May 16-18

Today

Game 1: No. 2 seed South Florida (49-11) vs. No. 3 seed Kansas (36-21), 2 p.m.

Game 2: No. 1 seed USC (60-3) vs. No. 4 seed UNC-Greensboro (40-23), 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 17

Game 3: Winner Game 1 vs. Winner Game 2, 11 a.m.

Game 4: Loser Game 1 vs. Loser Game 2, 1:30 p.m.

Game 5: Winner Game 4 vs. Loser Game 3, 4 p.m.

Sunday, May 18

Game 6: Winner Game 3 vs. Winner Game 5, 1 p.m.

Game 7: (If Necessary), 3:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$5 adult general admission, \$3 students
All session passes: \$10 adults, \$6 students
Available at USC Ticket Office or call 777-4272

said. "We want to do well not just for our team, but for them as well."

"I think this weekend will be real exciting," Johnson said. "It's nice to know we have so much fan support and hopefully we'll be able to get some more. It helps us to play better when we have a lot of people out there."

Carolina softball breezes to tournament title

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Schultze each went 2-for-3 in the victory.

Saturday, Carolina made quick work of the upset-minded Auburn Tigers, knocking them off 9-0 in five innings.

Plew was the offensive hero in the game as she went 2-for-3 with five RBI. Her triple in the third inning and double in the fourth helped end the game early due to the mercy rule.

Those victories sent USC into

Sunday's championship game where senior All-American Trinity Johnson was once again the key to the victory.

She kept the Lady Gators off-balance the whole game as she gave up only two hits on her way to improving her record to 32-2 on the season. The tournament's MVP tied the South Carolina school record for victories in a season with her performance.

Carolina put three runs on the board in the second inning. Junior Sky Brown

tripled to right and was driven in by junior Carrie Elliott's single up the middle. Elliott moved to third on Troesh's sacrifice bunt and to third on McCutcheon's single.

Senior Chanda Lee knocked her in with an infield single and McCutcheon was driven in when sophomore Kim Pietro's reached on a fielder's choice.

USC scored again in the fourth when Schultze was driven in by junior Karri Peters' sacrifice fly.

Plew reached on an infield single in the fifth and stole second. She was eventually driven in by Elliott's second RBI of the game. Elliott finished the game going 2-for-3 with two RBI and a run scored.

The No. 2-ranked Lady Gamecocks pushed one more run across in the sixth inning. McCutcheon reached on a single to left and moved to second on Lee's sacrifice. Pietro drove her in with a base hit to right to cap off the scoring.

Six runs would be more than enough for Johnson. When she is pitching, one run is usually plenty. For the tournament, Johnson was 2-0 with a 0.46 ERA. She struck out 22 and combined with sophomore Nikki Beers to no-hit Auburn.

The championship trophy and Johnson's MVP trophy weren't the only pieces of hardware making the trip back to USC. Seven Lady Gamecocks were named to the All-Tournament

team.

Besides Johnson on the mound, Brown, McCutcheon, Schultze and Troesh helped make a clean sweep of the infield awards for Carolina. Plew made it from her outfield position and Lyons made the team for her play as the designated player.

Although the pitching was strong, the awakened bats of Carolina were a big key in the tournament.

In their last 10 regular season games, USC averaged four runs on seven hits. But in the three tournament games, Carolina broke loose for 21 runs on 29 hits.

"I think this is probably the best three games that we've put back-to-back as far as our offensive output," Compton said.

Up next for the SEC Champs is the regional tournament, which they will host this weekend. Carolina plays UNC-Greensboro today at 4:30 p.m. and will play either South Florida or Kansas Saturday. The winner of the regional will advance to the NCAA Women's College World Series May 22-



BRYAN JOHNSTON The Gamecock

Senior Trinity Johnson was named the SEC Tournament Most Valuable Player.

26 in Oklahoma City, Okla.

"The SEC Championship is a stepping stone to our ultimate goal of the World Series," Lyons said. "It is nice to bring this back to Columbia, and hopefully we can do it again [this weekend]."



BRYAN JOHNSTON The Gamecock

The Lady Gamecock softball team captured the school's first-ever SEC Tournament Championship this past weekend in Columbus, Ga.