

Watson key in Gamecocks' 76-72 OT victory over Maryland

BRYAN JOHNSTON Sports Editor

Having the ball in Melvin Watson's hands with the game on the line can be scary for any of the Gamecocks' opponents.

Just imagine how Maryland felt having it happen to them twice.

Watson's three-pointer with 10 seconds left in overtime gave South Carolina a 76-72 win over Maryland Friday in the BCA Classic in Minneapolis, Minn.

Watson, who forced overtime with a three-pointer in the final minute of

regulation, hit the winning shot 20 seconds after Laron Profit had given the Terrapins a 72-71 lead with a three-pointer of his own.

"Coach wanted us to attack the rim," Watson said, but when the Terps dropped back into a zone defense, that wasn't possible. "They were aggressive playing the passing lanes. I just read my defender to see how far he was backing me off and I knocked it down."

Profit, who rallied Maryland late in regulation and again in overtime, shot an air ball on a long three-point

er, and redshirt freshman Antonio Grant made two free throws with 1.3 seconds remaining to clinch the win for USC in the season opener.

Junior Bj Mckie led the Gamecocks with 25 points. Grant, who missed all but five games last year and the entire preseason this year because of injuries, had a career-best 16 points.

Watson had 14 points after missing his first six shots of the game. His only points in the second half were his two key three-pointers.

"I think Melvin Watson is one of the best point guards in college bas-

ketball," USC Head Basketball Coach Eddie Fogler said. "I know that. As we play more games, I have all the confidence in the world in Melvin Watson. I think he's terrific."

The Gamecocks had a chance to win it regulation, but Watson lost the handle trying to dish it to Mckie, and Maryland's desperation shot missed, forcing overtime.

"Bj is our scorer, and we'll live and die with his shot when we're tied like that," Watson said. "I told Bj it was my fault. I should have executed the play."

Not that he owed Mckie an apology. Had it not been for his three-pointer with 59 seconds left, a NBA-range prayer that banked off the glass, launched only because of one second remaining on the shot clock, the Gamecocks never would have seen the extra frame.

"I just wanted to get it to the rim," Watson said. "When it went in, I was like, 'Thank God.' I was so happy. It was a big shot."

In overtime, Grant scored four consecutive points, including a three-point play, and Gallman tipped in a Mckie

miss to give USC a 68-64 lead, its biggest of the game, with 1:59 left.

Profit hit a three-pointer and another basket to tie the game at 69-all with 1:16 left, but Gallman scored inside again with 50 seconds remaining to put the Gamecocks on top.

Profit's three-pointer gave the lead back to the Terps, but only until Watson swished the winner from the top of the key.

Up next for the Gamecocks is an exhibition game at 7 p.m. Tuesday. USC then plays at 8 p.m. Friday against The Citadel in their second game of the year.

Despite the closeness of the game, Fogler seemed pleased with his team's effort.

"I'm proud of the way the team hung in there, being down 12 points in the first half," he said. "It's a 40-minute game."

Actually, this game was a 45-minute game. Those extra five minutes gave Watson another chance to work his game-winning magic.

Gamecocks Briefs

Joe Quinn

SEC 'Good Works'

Junior linebacker Ryan Koop has been named to the 1997 Southeastern Conference "Good Works Team."

The squad consists of one student-athlete from each of the league's 12 football teams who has devoted himself to community service.

Koop has been extremely active in the Athletics Department's community service program known as "Team Gamecocks." Koop has volunteered at schools in the Columbia area, including the Irmo Middle School "Rock-a-Thon," Midway Elementary "Read-a-Thon" and North Senior High Pageant, and he has been a Brennen Elementary School mentor. A sport administration major, Koop has also visited area nursing homes and participated in the American Cancer Society "Relay for Life."

Koop is from Tallahassee, Fla. He is a valuable special teams member for the Gamecocks and has played in all nine games this year with 11 total tackles.

Men's soccer

The fifth-ranked South Carolina men's soccer team downed Furman 2-1 Wednesday night at Eugene Stone Stadium behind two first-half goals.


The Paladins, who had allowed only three first-half goals and had never trailed at halftime before Wednesday, found themselves down 2-0 at intermission. With just over 12 minutes remaining in the match Furman's Stephen Rodriguez scored to bring the Paladins within one goal of the Gamecocks, but were unable to connect late to tie the match.

With the victory, South Carolina improves to 15-2-1, claiming their ninth consecutive victory. Furman drops to 14-5 and snaps a 20-match home winning streak that dated back to early 1996.


Men's tennis

For the first time in history, the No. 1 and No. 2 seeds in the ITA National Qualifying Tournament are from the same school. Carolina's Jerome Jourdon and Vladimir Pavicevic are the top seeds in this weekend's invitational at Chapel Hill, N.C.


Jourdon and Pavicevic will also compete in doubles. Olof Akesson has also been chosen to play in the tournament.




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