

staff writer WILLIAM FOLKS

When Recus Nix was just a middle-schooler in North Charleston, he seemed to always find himself going up against this same kid whenever he and his friends went to the playgrounds downtown to shoot hoops.

Fast off the dribble, quicker with the pass, able to hit pull-up jumpers from the top of the key; this particular youngster was a defender's worst nightmare, and it was more often than not young Recus' job to try and contain him.

Well, if there was any doubt before about this junior guard's skills, especially after you consider that each of the starters from his Allegheny, Md., Junior College team now play NCAA Division-I basketball, let this little tidbit put those doubts to rest.

The youngster from the playground was none other than fellow Charlestonian and Gamecock floor general Melvin Watson.

"He's one of the big reasons I came here," says Nix of his teammate. "I knew Melvin when we were both in Charleston, and I remember playing against him for the first time when I was in the eighth grade. I never really hung out with him all that much but he was always such a fun guy to play basketball with."

Recus rolls his eyes and shakes his head at the next question.

"Yeah, I remember trying to guard him back then."

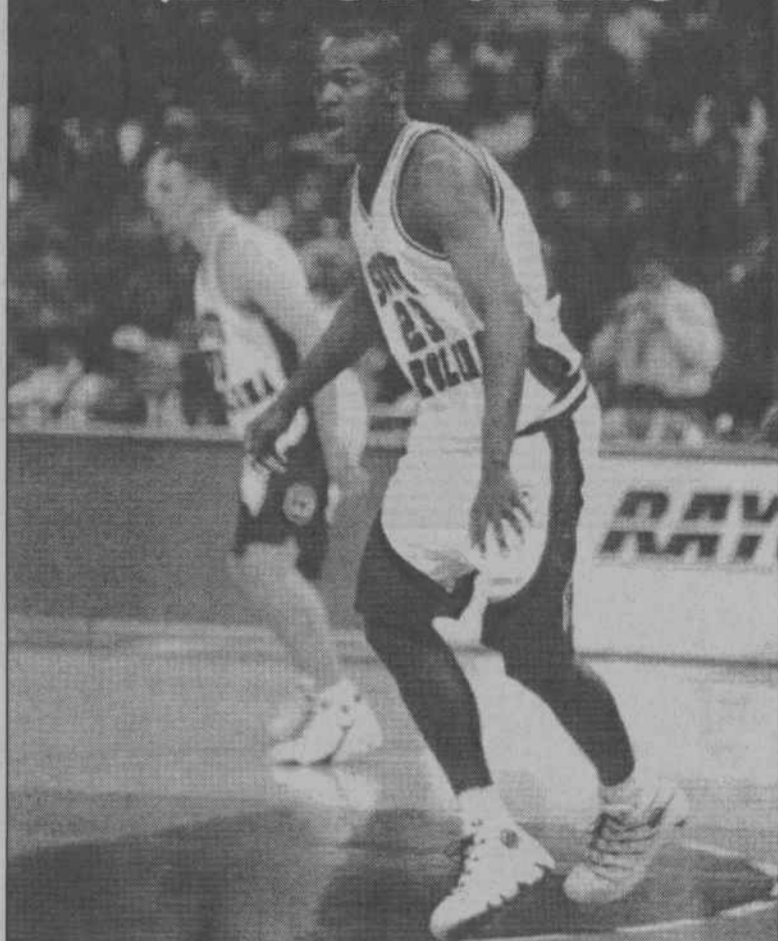
A superb defender (possibly the best in the nation's junior college ranks while at Allegheny), Nix comes into Coach Eddie Fogler's program with seemingly limitless athletic potential. He plays the ball with a ferocious intensity that literally blankets opposing point guards, and he moves away from the ball in man-to-man coverage almost like a hawk in search of its prey.

He jumps, he rebounds, he steals, he assists and, one last thing: Recus Nix can also score.

At Allegheny, he averaged 17.5 points a game his sophomore season while shooting an unbelievable 61.9 percent from the floor. He also averaged 6.5 rebounds, four assists, and three steals per game as a sophomore to round out his sensational junior college career.

"It really helped prepare me," Nix said. "We had six different guys on that Allegheny team that were averaging over 15 points a game, and our competition was always tough. Bob Kirk also taught me a lot about being patient

Just in the Nix of time



BRYAN JOHNSTON The Gamecock

Junior transfer Recus Nix has made a solid contribution coming off the bench for the 10-2 Gamecocks.

and waiting my turn, because I didn't start my first year up there, either."

Recus says that while he may not start this season in USC's backcourt, if he has his way it shouldn't be too far off in the future.

"I know I need to learn the system here. I think once I get the plays down everything else will take care of itself. When I do that, I know I'll be more comfortable and can go out there and just play instead of having to worry about where I'm supposed to be all the time. Things will feel more fluid when I've learned the process."

One of three new faces in the Gamecock line-up this season, Nix believes that his learning process will be easier here at Carolina than it might have been at other schools due to the

unity and closeness of this Gamecock team.

"They've accepted me with open arms from the first day I got here," he said. "It's a close-knit family on this team. I can't tell you what a great group of guys I'm playing with. Each one of them would go out of their way for me and Coach Fogler is the same way."

"He's really shown us how to be responsible, how to follow through with things. We're a group of young guys and he makes sure everyone's on point. He stresses getting to classes on time, making our appointments, and so many other little things that never really get noticed. But he's also an amazing coach who knows what to do with talent."

Rest assured, Carolina fans, Recus Nix has all the talent in the world.

Michigan wins national championship in first Ace Bowl

ace HUNT
Kickin' some Ace

Welcome back to campus for what promises to be an exciting semester of Gamecock athletics. Its time to trade in those days of laying around being lazy for hitting the books and getting ready to cheer on a fast improving Gamecock basketball team.

But one thing really got me upset over the break. The lack of a true national champion in college football. The Rose Bowl was a fun game to watch, but ended controversially by a bad call by those SEC refs that we have come to know and mostly hate at USC games this year.

The Orange Bowl was what everybody expected it to be. A blowout! Nebraska is year in and year out one of the best if not the best team in college football and they get no respect. Sure, the Big 12 is not the greatest football conference in the nation, but when Nebraska beats everybody by at least 30 points that shows how strong they really are.

Tennessee had Peyton Manning. He didn't win the Heisman and shouldn't have seeing as how junior quarterback Ryan Leaf of Washington State had a better season than Manning.

So by virtue of Nebraska's blowout of Tennessee and, just as importantly, the retirement of Tom Osborne they leapfrogged Michigan in the coach's poll to claim a share of the national championship with Nebraska, the Sports-writer's poll top vote-getter.

So, with a split national championship, I got to thinking about how great it would be to have Nebraska and Michigan meet on the gridiron for the title.

Don't leave the polling up to people like Craig James and Brad Scott.

Leave the decision up to Scott Frost and Charles Woodson. And seeing no real shot of Alliance Commissioner Roy Kramer dictating that this game be played, I resorted to my last option of pitting Michigan and Nebraska — The Playstation.

The game was simulated on the Playstation with the game "College Football 98." The game features the exact plays and players that are a part of all 111 Division I college football teams.

The game started out as a close battle for field position for most of the first quarter as the Michigan defense held the triple option to near nothing. With the running game virtually stopped by Michigan, Scott Frost had to go to the air and challenge Heisman Trophy winning defensive back Charles Woodson.

And Woodson won the battle with an interception as the first quarter ended. The good field position only required the Wolverines to move the ball 45 yards to the goal line and that is what they did as the turnover calmed down Brian Griese and he started hitting his receivers with a fervor.

In only 55 seconds the Wolverines were up 7-0 on 10 point favorite Nebraska. After another defensive stand and strong passing effort from Griese, the Wolves scored another touchdown with less than a minute left in the first half to stretch the lead to 14-0.

Nebraska could muster nothing in the final minute and the halftime score stood at 14-0 Michigan.

Nebraska continued to struggle and fumbled the ball on their first possession of the second half. Michigan could do nothing with the ball by virtue of their fumble recovery being at the Cornhusker 25-yard line, the Wolverines kicked a field goal to make their lead 17-0.

By now I was wishing that I could change the channel, but with still a quarter and a half to be played I knew that Nebraska could come back, and that is what they did.

Scott Frost finally decided to go to the air and found his tailback Ahman Green for a couple of big gains and then finally the end zone to make the game 17-7 with only seconds remaining in the third quarter.

After a Cornhusker defensive stop, Nebraska started running all over the Wolverines. Green showed why he will be an NFL first-round draft pick with several big gains. Then, faced with third and long from their own 45-yard line, Green broke into the open field to score and bring the score to 17-14 with three minutes left in the game.

Michigan made two first downs, and looked to be in a good position to run down the clock much like they were able to do in the fourth quarter of the Rose Bowl, but could not convert on a third down opportunity that would have allowed them to run out the clock.

Nebraska got the ball back with 55 seconds remaining and no timeouts. Frost started firing the ball down the field, and appeared to be on their way to victory when, on second and 10 from the Wolverine 45-yard line, Frost was intercepted by Woodson and the game was over.

The Wolverines ran out the clock, and pulled the upset to prove that they were the true national champions.

Although Michigan won that game I still think Nebraska has the depth and talent to beat anyone in the country nine times out of 10. I don't guess college football fans will ever really know until we have "January Madness" in the form of a college football playoff.

YOU TELL US

Each week, the sports staff will ask you a probing question. What we want is your opinions. After reading the question, we want you to email your response to GmckSports@aol.com by 9 p.m. on Wednesday. Be sure to include your name, year in school, major and hometown.

So here's your chance to voice your opinion. Don't say we never did anything for you. This week's question is:

How would you have determined this year's NCAA football national champion?

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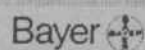
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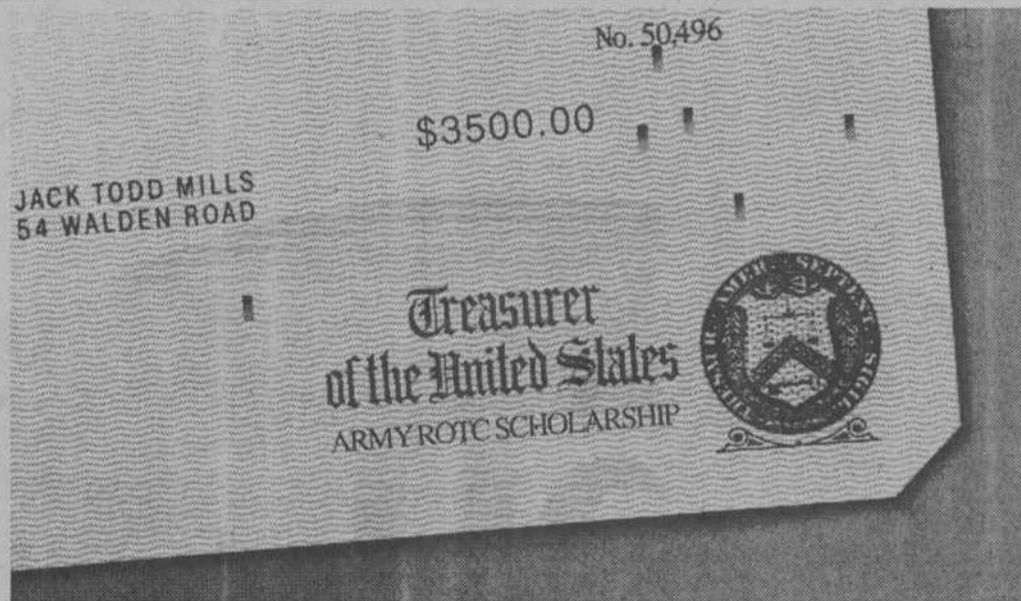
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