

SCORES

- ▶ USC Lady Gamecocks 53
- ▶ Vanderbilt Lady 'Dores 66
- ▶ Track Rankings
- Men's Team: No. 2
- Women's Team: No. 8

SPORTS

NATE SAYS

Nate says the Tennessee women's basketball team has won 25 straight games dating back to last year. In this year alone, they have a 5-0 record against the Top 10 and are 9-0 against the Top 25.

Friday, January 30, 1998

The Gamecock

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Grant tips off Carolina victory over Florida



SEAN RAYFORD The Gamecock

Redshirt freshman Antonio Grant dunks the ball late in the second half of the Gamecocks thrilling win over Florida Wednesday night.

asst. sports editor **NATHAN BROWN**

Finally, the marathon is over for the USC basketball team. After playing four games in eight days, a tired

and beaten Gamecock squad took to the hardwood Wednesday night in Frank McGuire Arena to play the Florida Gators, Carolina's fifth opponent in 10 days.

Because the Gators are an SEC foe, this game was extremely important for the No. 14 Gamecocks (15-3, 6-2 SEC) to win so they didn't fall any further behind division leader Kentucky than the current margin of two games.

With four lead changes, USC's all-important SEC standing looked to be in jeopardy, especially when Carolina was down heading into the last few minutes of the game. But the Gamecocks pulled out the victory, 74-72, with a last-second shot by Antonio Grant.

Going into the locker room, USC had a three-point lead but, after returning from halftime, saw their lead dwindle away. From the 17:04 mark to the last couple of minutes, Florida was ahead by as much as 10 points. Slowly but surely, Carolina chipped away at their deficit and tied the contest with 2:17 to go when Melvin Watson, who finished with 10 points and a team-high seven assists, scored two on a finger roll.

Florida answered back, moving up by two. Then it was time for LeRon Williams to take over the show and to show his old teammates and coach what they've been missing. On a putback, Williams, who ended with 14 points, tied the game. Then after a missed shot by Bj Mckie, Williams jumped up, grabbing the ball and stuffing it through the hoop all in the same motion.

"I guess that was the time Bj shot it," Williams said. "Knowing Bj, I thought it was going in. I just got ready for the ball to come through the net. And it came off. I just jumped, and it hit in my hands. It was my instinct saying, 'Dunk it. That's the only way to score. Dunk it.' That was great there."

After Williams' slam, though, Florida managed to even the score at 72 with 18 seconds left. Then came USC's last

possession. Watson dribbled the ball down the court and sliced through the defenders to put up the last shot. But it didn't go in. Instead, it dropped into the hands of Grant who layed it in to win the contest with only :00.9 seconds remaining.

"At first, it seemed like Melvin was trying to get the ball to Bj," said Grant, who came away with a total of 14 points and nine boards. "But Bj couldn't get open, so I was going to pop out on the wing. But then I saw Melvin broke the plane, and he was going to the basket. I was playing the four position, so I just turned in. The shot went up, and I looked [to see] no one was boxing me out, so I jumped right up. I was surprised to get the tap-in," Grant said.

It's almost a surprise that the Gamecocks won at all when you compare the shooting of both teams. Florida made four shots more than USC from the field. Of all the shots taken, UF had a higher percentage (51.9 percent) than Carolina (42.1 percent). And the best 3-point shooting team in the nation did outshoot USC from behind the arc, although the Gamecocks did hold UF below their average of 10.75 threes per game.

But with Florida sinking more shots from the field, the Gamecocks had to look elsewhere to win the game. They found the answer in foul shooting, rebounds and a never-quit attitude.

"I certainly want to congratulate my group for never quitting here tonight," USC head basketball coach Eddie Fogler said. "[It was] a game that the University of Florida pretty much controlled, particularly in the second half with their style of play and 3-point shooting. I thought, for the most part, we did a good job [defensively]. But they're obviously a great shooting team...Certainly, the rebounding factor was huge here tonight [for us]."

Carolina dominated UF on the boards by grabbing a total of 45 rebounds, compared to only 23 for the Gators. By snagging 22 offensive rebounds, USC racked up 29 second-chance points. Florida managed only nine. Even though he was suffering from a hip injury, William Gallman was the leading rebounder of the game with 10.

Not only did USC outperform UF on the boards but also from the free-throw line. In a physical game that saw two Gators foul out, USC went to the foul line 30 times and drained 22 of

those. Mckie scored nine of his team-high 16 points from the foul line. As a team, Florida was slightly less than impressive, hitting seven of 14.

"We were happy to get out of here with a win," Watson said. "Coach was saying if we can get out of here with a one-point [win], we're happy with that. And he was almost right, we won by two."

"But we'll take it like that. We're dead tired. We have tomorrow off. I'm pretty sure the guys will put it to good use. A lot of guys are sore and banged up. But we have to suck it up. We've got goals, and we're not going to sit back and let those goals slip away. We're going to keep working hard as a team and as a family."

Next game: The Gamecocks meet No. 20 Cincinnati. The Bearcats come to Columbia Sunday for a 12 p.m. tip-off. Last year, Carolina defeated the 'Cats 97-83 in Cincinnati by hitting a school record 15 3-pointers. USC leads the overall series 12-7 and posts an impressive 7-0 record at the Coliseum. The game will be televised on CBS.

Softball ranked sixth in nation

staff writer **JOE QUINN**

South Carolina's women's softball team is ranked sixth in the preseason USA Today/National Fastpitch Coaches Association poll released Friday.

The Lady Gamecocks, who won a school-record 63 games in 1997 and claimed both the SEC regular season and postseason championship while advancing to the College World Series,

return eight starters from last year's club.

Last year's star pitcher, Trinity Johnson, will not be pitching this year but will remain in a Carolina uniform this season.

Johnson, who is a finalist for the Honda Women's Athlete of the Year for 1997, will begin her first year as an assistant coach at USC.

The Lady Gamecocks will once again

be led by Head Coach Joyce Compton.

The pitching staff will be anchored by returners Sky Brown and Nikki Beers.

The Lady Gamecocks play their home games at the Lady Gamecock field located next to The Roost and Sarge Frye Field.

USC begins Feb. 17 with a doubleheader against Georgia Southern.

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