Mckie says he is a winner because he was

Bi Mckie talks about bis success can turn. It's paraas part of the Gamecock basketball team, and bow be got there. The Gamecocks will play Arkansas at 8 p.m. tonight on J-P Sports and University of Florida at 7 pm. Saturday on AM 560.

staff writer WILLIAM FOLKS

Bjorn Aubre Mckie will never wear the championship ring he won last season when his Gamecock basketball team claimed the University of South Carolina's first-ever Southeastern Conference title.

It's not that he lost it, it's just the hard-earned symbol of excellence, a precious, lifetime momento of outstanding achievement, won't even fit onto Bj's finger. But it does fit nicely somewhere else: on the ring finger of his father, Bernard Mckie.

"There's nothing more important than family," Bernard once said. "When all else fails, that's the one place you mount to have that."

With that in mind, Bernard and his wife, Beverly, have done much more than just raise a great basketball player,. They have brought up a humble, un- MCKIE compromising



young man whose selflessness and selfrespect is truly beyond reproach.

He is a superstar, a sure-fire NBA prospect, a nationally acclaimed shooting guard who may be the most talented basketball player to ever set foot in Frank McGuire Arena. But because of his shy, modest demeanor and unassuming personality, you'd never know it if you met him off the court.

"Bj is quite honestly my hero," Berhard said. "We've always had a special relationship in that I really appreciate him being the type of kid that he is because as parents, that's made our job easier. I think it's the ultimate when a kid says, 'Hey, I've worked hard for this but I realize the work that my dad and my mom have put in, and I want to give my dad this ring.' And within the next breath he said, Mom, the next time we win it, I'm giving it to you.' That just shows you how unselfish he is, as a person and as a player."

Bj said his parents' support has meant everything to him.

"They're two of my best friends as well as my parents," Bj said. "They always tell me that if I dropped basketball tomorrow they would still love me just as much, and they're always there for me whether it's a good or bad situation, leading me in the right direction, guiding me, giving me constructive criticism when needed.

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KARAOKE

"They've meant so much to me, and they've always given me their support and their understanding."

A native of Irmo., Bi's decision to come to school at Carolina ranks as one of the defining moments in the evolution of Gamecock basketball under coach Eddie Fogler. His first season at USC, he broke the school's freshman scoring

of-Famer Alex English. As a sophomore, Bj led the Gamecocks in scoring and was named firstteam All-SEC as well as honorable

mention All-America. So far this season, he has averaged 17.5 points per game and ranks among the SEC's leaders in nearly every offensive category.

But Bj's numbers will never tell the whole story.

raised that way To watch him pended disbelief as he twists and contorts his 6-feet-2-inch frame in mid-air several times a game to launch one of dizzying array of record, which was held by NBA Hall-He plays the game with a gracefulness and control seldom seen at the college level; whether it be gliding through the lane for a layup, slam-

home a fast-break dunk, or launching his potent jump shots from behind the 3-point arc.

play is of-

tentimes

an exercise

in sus-

ming

Bj's mother, Beverly Mckie, has a special insight on South Carolina's res-

ident superhero. "He used to love Superman," recalls Beverly, "and he was always running. When he was little he would get me to pin a towel around his neck, and then he would take off running down the

"One day I remember he was just running, running, running really fast and I told him, Bj, stop it. That's just enough. You need to stop.' Well he stopped, turned around and said Okay,

Her son laughs when confronted with the story.

"I was just a little kid with a whole lot of energy," Bj said.

In many ways, Bj Mckie still is.

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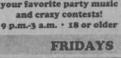
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