

SOFTBALL

The Lady Gamecocks were picked to finish second in the SEC East, according to the SEC Preseason Coaches' Poll. The coaches picked No. 9 LSU to win the conference.

MEN'S TENNIS

USC's Jerome Jourdon defeated College of Charleston's Sagi Zakin 6-1, 6-3, and the team of Jeff Bergman/Rodrigo Pacheco also won in doubles action, as Carolina finished strong Sunday in the Winter Invitational.

Gamecock Sports

SCHEDULE

- Women's basketball vs. Georgia, 5 p.m. today, Frank McGuire Arena.
- Men's basketball vs. No. 6 Auburn, 7:30 p.m. today, Frank McGuire Arena.

NATE SAYS...

Nate says the USC equestrian team has been one of the most successful teams at Carolina this year. This past weekend, the Lady Gamecocks won the Tournament of Champions, defeating 24 other teams.

USC faces No. 6 Tigers

by Nathan Brown
Sports Editor

Fifty-six. Standing by itself, 56 means absolutely nothing, but put into the context of USC basketball, it has a peculiar way of linking Carolina and the Auburn Tigers.

Auburn comes into tonight's game against the Gamecocks ranked seventh in the nation, according to the ESPN/USA Today poll, and the Gamecocks are coming off their eighth SEC contest of the year. And as any math major knows, seven times eight equals nothing other than 56.

But wait, it gets stranger. In the past two games between USC and Auburn, the Gamecocks held the Tigers to 56 points and grabbed a win in both cases. In 1997, Carolina defeated the Tigers 66-56 in Columbia and in 1998 followed that with a win in Auburn, 61-56.

Now, here comes the biggest stretch of relating the number 56 to the two schools. If you take the number 32 (remember this number, it's important) and add the three and the two, you get five.

Then, if you take the three and two and multiply them, you get six. So in a fashion similar to going around your elbow to get to your butt, you get 56.

But by now, you're probably wondering, "Why the heck does 32 matter?"

Well, 32 is the number of USC's LeRon Williams, who has been suspended for the rest of the season by USC coach Eddie Fogler, and the Auburn game is the first contest he'll miss.

"As a result of his first suspension, LeRon had certain conditions that needed to be met after his reinstatement," Fogler said Monday.

"Unfortunately, one of these conditions was not met, and LeRon has been suspended for the remainder of the year."

Williams' suspension overshadows the Gamecocks' recent success.

USC has won two games in a row for the first time this season since defeating Jacksonville and the College of Charleston on Nov. 30 and Dec. 4. By the way, Carolina held Jacksonville to 56 points.

Senior BJ McKie was the leading scorer in both of these games. In fact, McKie has been Carolina's leading scorer for 14 of its 20 games this year.

Ironically, however, McKie didn't lead USC in points when he broke USC's all-time scoring record Saturday against Vanderbilt. McKie's performances against Vandy and Ole Miss did earn him SEC Player of the Week.

With Williams gone for the season and Antonio Grant and Tony Kitchings out with injuries, McKie will have to continue his strong play, while his teammates must elevate their own, if the Gamecocks are to have any chance against the Tigers.

Auburn enters tonight's game with the best record in the SEC, a remarkable 20-1 overall, while the Gamecocks have the only losing record in their conference at 7-13.

"I'm surprised [that Auburn is this good]; so is [Auburn coach] Cliff Ellis," Fogler said. "But you don't win 20 by luck. They're legitimate."

The tip-off time is slated for 7:30 p.m., but the actual starting time could vary, depending on the completion of the women's game beforehand.

The Lady Gamecocks look to rebound from Sunday's loss to Ole Miss when they take on the No. 4 Georgia Bulldogs. The ladies take the court at 5 p.m.



Sean Rayford Photo Editor

When the Gamecocks take on No. 6 Auburn tonight, they'll be without LeRon Williams, who was suspended for the rest of the season for violating team policy. Williams was the Gamecocks' second-leading scorer, averaging 8.2 points per game.

Heart propels Carolina to victory



David Cloninger
From the Cockpit

After another week of watching extensive athletic action and finding out I've been added to the FBI's Most Wanted list with fellow columnist Shawn Singleton, I'm back to bring you the inside view of Carolina basketball.

I attended both USC games in the past week, and surprise, surprise, the Gamecocks won them both behind the strength of two unlikely elements — one, a proven playmaker, the other, the same heart that propelled the team to the 1997 SEC title.

Hats off to freshman Aaron "Half-Pint" Lucas and William "Cyclone" Gallman for showing the Ole Miss Rebels and Candybilt Comma,dores the season isn't over in Columbia.

Wednesday's game against Ole Miss was a pleasant change of pace compared with the majority of this season. The Cockpit was filled with the true fans of Carolina basketball, all sporting their colors and making life a living hell for the Rebels, who quickly learned it's not wise to insult the members of the 'Pit.

During the game, SEC Player of the Week Keith Carter decided to question the circumstances of a friend of mine's birth right before he was bombarded with a tirade about how gutless and stupid he was.

Of course, Carter had a handful on the court anyway with the return of LeRon "Make 'em Bleed" Williams, who ended up brutalizing Carter every time he touched the ball and making two game-winning free throws.

In addition to the obvious presence of BJ "Too Sweet" McKie during the game, Carolina was led by a 21-point outburst from Lucas.

Lucas offered fans a glimpse of the future as he dished, drove and shot with the precision of a young Michael Jordan. The Gamecocks totally dominated the inside game, thanks to inspired play from freshman Damien Kinloch, who got a rare start and made the most of it.

Kinloch was all over the Ole Miss forwards and, with the aid of Gallman and Williams, forced the Rebels to shoot from the perimeter on their way to a 67-66 loss.

The game could be a spark for the rest of USC's season. Either way, a Carolina men's team finally had an SEC victory.

The second victim for the Gamecocks last week was a weakened Vanderbilt team, which seemed riled at recently being snubbed by the "We're as Good as an Ivy League School"

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