

SPORTS

Worthen wants national championship in '99

BY GINA CARUSO
STAFF WRITER

Sophomore soccer forward Joey Worthen is looking forward to another successful year at Carolina. Before he could prepare for the 1999 season, though, Worthen decided to play for someone else for a while.

Last spring, Worthen trained and competed with the U.S. U-20 squad, a team known for representing the best soccer players in America under 20 years old. With that experience, he got to play with some of the top players in the country and also work with an outstanding coaching staff. Worthen says the competition was valuable, not only on the field, but also off.

"I think that I can read the game a lot better," Worthen said.

"I've also acquired many new skills and learned how to play with other people. The experience was good for me."

Away from the game, Worthen, like many athletes, feels the pressures of managing athletics with academics.

Traveling with the team actually helped that aspect, he said.

"Being out of school last spring helped me learn to manage my time," he said. We [athletes] get other assistance like tutors and study halls which are very beneficial to me."

Through numerous international matches and an eventual trip to the World Championships, Worthen gained tremen-

dous experience with the national team, which should certainly pay off this season for the Gamecocks.

Regarding his career at USC, Worthen's statistics speak for themselves. As a freshman, the 6-footer from Salt Lake City, Utah, was third on the team in scoring with 18 points in 1998, putting him third on the team in that category. He also played in all 21 of Carolina's matches, starting 19 times.

After the season, he picked up an award for Co-Independent Rookie of the Year.

For now, though, he's looking ahead. Worthen plans to push his limits this season in hopes of improving his statistics. That doesn't mean as much as helping the Gamecocks achieve an NCAA tournament berth, though.

"I'll do everything I can to help us," Worthen said.

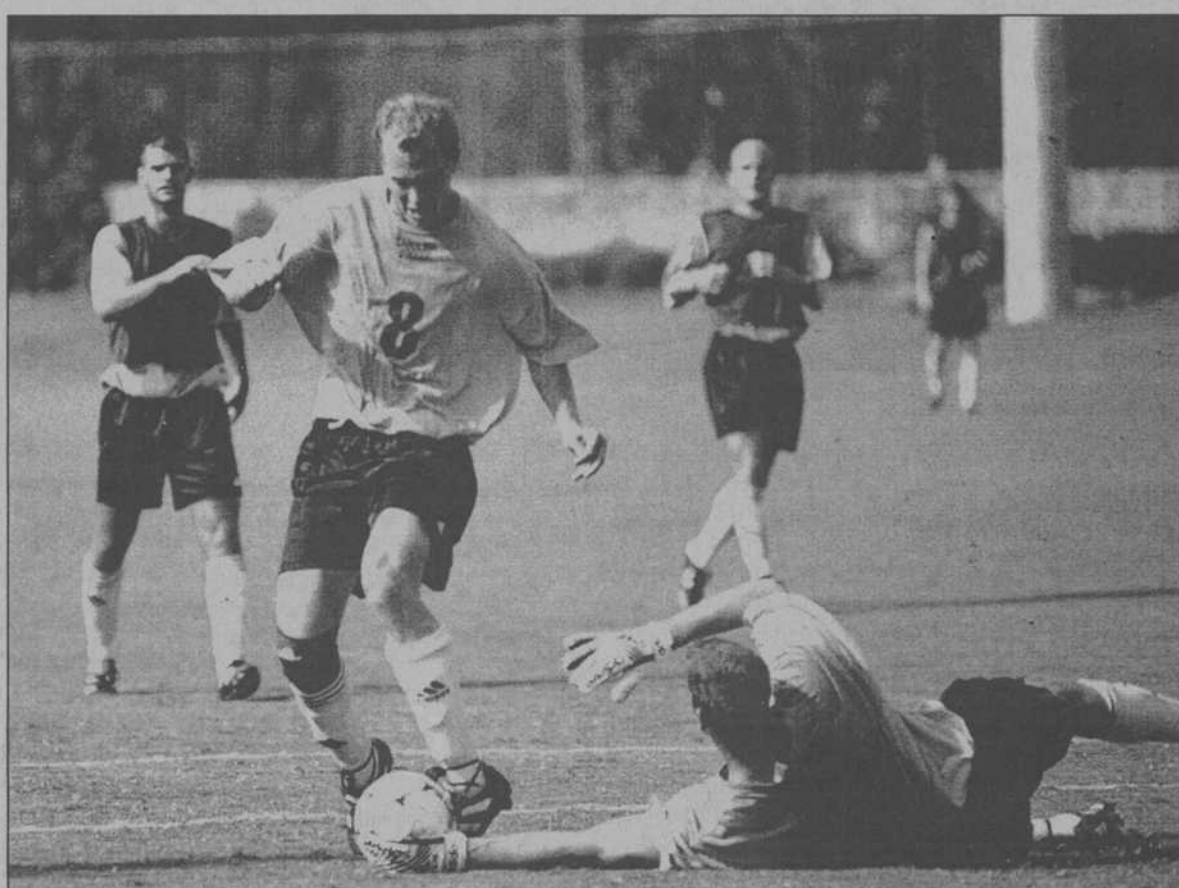
"The national championship is what we all want more than anything else."

Even if he doesn't get that, though, Worthen wants to continue playing soccer elsewhere.

Maybe he'll even take his lucky wristband and Metallica music with him. "I definitely want to remain playing for a long time," he said.

"Hopefully I'll go pro, either here or overseas."

Besides facing arch-rival Clemson this season, the Gamecocks certainly have their work cut out for them. Five of USC's opponents are ranked among the top 25



Joey Worthen, a sophomore forward and 1998's Co-Independent Rookie of the Year, tries to sneak a rare goal past goalie Henry Ring in practice Tuesday. USC opens its season against The Citadel tonight at 6.

in the country. Then again, Carolina finds itself in the No. 10 slot. Worthen is not only optimistic about that position, he's excited. "I like the added pressure that

the tough teams bring," he said. "We know they'll have their best game ready, and that forces us to play at our highest potential.

"We come into the game not only respecting our opponent, but having confidence that we can play with them," he said.

SEAN RAYFORD PHOTO EDITOR

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CLONINGER

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son was scheduled to start, the reputation of "the purity of the game" had fallen to a level almost equal to the belly of a snake. The reputation wasn't fully revived until last year, when the Great Home Run Race of '98 brought fans in droves to the ballparks to see Mighty Mac and Slammmin' Sammy compete. So this time, with all of this hype and great expectations for the 1999 season, the umpers decide to tarnish it all for a bit more money, and any fan who feels differently be damned.

Good riddance.

I don't feel the least bit sorry for these kinds of people, those who think money is the only reason to compete in professional sports. If I had my way, which, as anybody with any sense knows is absolutely, positively the only way anything should be done, these umpers would be tarred and feathered while wearing their wives' best dresses and then forced to go around apologizing to every fan in the country.

To clear up any confusion, it's not all umpires who will get the boot. Hats off to those souls who hold the independence to shrug off their so-called friends, not strike, and stay in the game. You men are a tribute to the sport you promote. Keep up the good work. (I say that because maybe, just maybe, an umpire will read this someday and start cutting Tom Glavine a break on the outside corner of the strike zone.)

Fans, look on the bright side. Baseball will be without the umpires who hold grudges against particular teams. And don't tell me umpires are unbiased, because it's a flat-out lie.

Who can forget the infamous Braves-Marlins 1997 NLCS? The winner goes to the World Series, the loser goes home. In a pivotal game, umpire Eric Gregg is behind the plate, and there's a pitching duel in front of him. The Braves have their ace, Greg Maddux, labeled by some as the best pitcher in the game, against Florida's Liván Hernandez, a fresh-faced rookie from Cuba.

Given these circumstances, Gregg proceeds to let Hernandez throw pitches that Florida catcher Charles Johnson can just barely get a glove on because they are three miles outside, but are called strikes anyway. Maddux works the plate with his usual pinpoint control but, strangely, doesn't get the same calls. Hernandez ends up with something like 13 strikeouts and a win, the last coming on a "strike" to Fred McGriff that, honest-to-God, almost hits Gregg on the foot. So much for bad luggage.

Anyway, baseball has prepared for the mass firing by hiring some replacement umpires who have already been proven ready by the MLB higher-ups. The fired umpers will have a hard time drawing unemployment after baseball is done painting its picture. I guess some people still don't realize that sports are supposed to be about entertainment. No one's showing up to see a little man in a blue shirt make calls; people come to see their heroes and idols do what they do best — play ball. With all of that in mind, why would an umpire ever think people would care if he went on strike?

The need for more money must have outweighed the risk; the umpers are gone, but baseball is still here. Tell me, is more money really that important now?

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