

McBeth sees double for Gamecocks

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During the fall, you could catch a glimpse of him on the gridiron as the regular kickoff specialist for coach Lou Holtz and the Gamecock football team. Now, as the projected starting center fielder for South Carolina's nationally ranked baseball team, you can get a much deeper look at Marcus McBeth, the Gamecocks' most prolific two-sport star.

A 6-foot-1-inch sophomore from Enoree, McBeth played in 52 of 58 games as a freshman and started 16 for the Gamecocks, who finished the year 35-23 and won the Southeastern Conference East title.

"I thought Marcus did a tremendous job last year as a freshman," said Ray Tanner, USC baseball coach. "And now, as a sophomore, he's progressed to a great extent."

In 90 at-bats last season, McBeth hit .267 with a home run and 12 RBIs.

However, McBeth's strong point, and probably the most valuable asset he brings to the Gamecocks, is his outstanding defensive ability.

"Defense is my major strength," said McBeth, who can back up his statement with a .984 fielding percentage and a cannon for an arm, which Tanner says is "undoubtedly the strongest throwing arm in the SEC."

While attending Woodruff High School in Enoree, McBeth was All-State in both football and baseball. In football, he played wide receiver and defensive back while handling both the punting and place-kicking duties.

In the spring, McBeth clearly was a man among boys, hitting .481 for the baseball team his senior year and even compiling a 1.59 ERA as a pitcher.

Although he starred in both sports at Woodruff, it was his talent on the diamond that got McBeth recruited by Tanner and USC. McBeth tried out for the football team after receiving encouragement from his baseball coach. The football coaches liked what they saw, and the rest is history. Now, McBeth's biggest obstacle is trying to manage his time between both sports.

"[Playing two sports] is kind of tough at times," McBeth said. "But as long as you keep your priorities in order, it's fine."

When asked if he plans to continue playing both sports throughout college, McBeth said, "I'm really not sure right now. It's something that I think about often. It's really not causing me a problem right now, though."

McBeth's attention is clearly focused on the upcoming season, when he'll play a key role in Carolina's defense of its title. McBeth expects to be a late hitter in the batting order, perhaps lead-off at times.

Over the summer, McBeth gained experience in the Shenandoah Valley League of Virginia. There, under the guidance of coach Kevin Anderson, McBeth sharpened his already potent skills.

"[Anderson] helped me improve my bunting skills, and he also helped me with swinging the bat," said McBeth, who also admits to having a problem with hitting off-speed pitches.

"I just want to be a major contributor," he said. "If we need a guy to step up and come through with a game-winning hit, I want to be the guy to do it."

McBeth has an optimistic outlook on this year's team and its chances for success in 2000.

"We have no limits," he said. "All the guys are really excited about starting, and with the attitude we have, I think we can go a long way - even to Omaha, where maybe we can win the big show."

McBeth also has some words of wisdom for Carolina fans.

"Keep your eyes peeled," he said. "We've got a lot of great guys on this team. It's a great squad. It's also more of a family, I feel. There's a togetherness this year which will probably account for more wins. I think if you watch closely, you'll see the cream slowly rise to the top."

