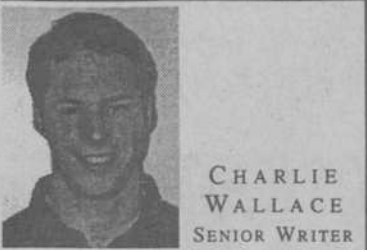


GAMECOCK SPORTS

The recruiting wars are finally over



CHARLIE WALLACE
SENIOR WRITER

It's finally over. The phone calls have stopped, the knocks at the door have ceased, and the letters have quit coming in the mail. For high school senior football players across the country, Wednesday closed a book on the most emotionally trying time of their lives so far: being recruited.

National signing day ends months of discussion about where players are going to school to continue their careers. Debates and speculation that have raged for weeks finally have come to a halt. At the same time, however, Wednesday also opened a new forum of discussion: which teams got the best recruiting classes.

The general consensus across the nation is that the South took names and kicked tail. In most recruiting rankings, Florida and Tennessee were either No. 1 in the country or close to it. The Gators, who are blessed with being located in the middle of the nation's recruiting hotbed, clearly had the finest class.

"We did get most of all the guys we went after this year," Florida coach Steve Spurrier said. "It seemed like they all wanted to come play for the Gators this year."

What sounds like Spurrier's same old cocky attitude is actually the truth.

The Gators got a commitment from perhaps the best player in the country,

quarterback Brock Berlin from Shreveport, La. Although Berlin only stands at foot 1, 190 pounds, his statistics are eye-popping. This past season, Berlin threw for an astounding 4,219 yards and 36 touchdowns. But probably the most impressive stat of all is that in his four years, his team was 60-0 with four state championships.

So Berlin, who has not lost since at least 8th grade, goes to another team that is not used to losing. And in Spurrier's system, if a quarterback loses, he sits the bench.

Tennessee and Alabama's recruiting classes also were consistently ranked in the top five in the country. As they say, the rich get richer.

So do the poor get poorer? Well, as in all aspects of life, where there are winners, losers will follow. However, in South Carolina's case, I'd say they've worked their way up from rags to middle class.

Carolina signed a rather impressive group of guys, considering the horrible record of 1-21 over the past two years. For a recruit, seeing that stat is like seeing a skin disease.

Most players don't want to go anywhere near it. If that's the case, Carolina has 26 newly-infected recruits. However, coach Lou Holtz is adamant about getting a remedy.

"We believe that these athletes can play," Holtz said. "You really can't tell about a recruiting class until a couple of years down the road, but our coaches did a tremendous job recruiting these players."

Included in the class are several top players. Sumter running back Jamacia Jackson, defensive lineman Carl Smalls from St. Andrews, Cross quarterback Rod Wilson, and Hallahan defensive back

Rachiem Monroe are Top 15 players from the Palmetto State that will most likely have an immediate impact on the playing field in the 2000 season.

The Gamecocks also stole a few blue chips from neighboring states as well. Tupelo, Miss., defensive back DeAndre Eiland, Waldorf, Md., defensive back Gonzie Gray, and Camilla, Ga., quarterback Dondrial Pinkins are all likely to make an immediate impact. However, players who can contribute right away doesn't necessarily bode well for on-the-field success.

Talent is always great to have. Indeed, programs are made or broken on the kind of talent that comes into the system. However, experience plays a big role.

The football team will look awfully young this upcoming season. Most of the team will have a majority of sophomores and freshmen seeing plenty of action against teams such as Florida, Tennessee, and Alabama who, in addition to snagging the best players in the nation, already have the best teams in the nation.

Carolina's recruiting efforts were definitely remarkable. Riding the name of Holtz and the added promise of playing right away, the Gamecock coaching staff was able to work some miracles. Sure, some of the big fish got away again. Florida State stole the top two players in the state by luring offensive lineman Alex Barron and wide receiver Michael Boulware.

However, give Holtz and his crew time. The present is the best opportunity Carolina has had at playing with the big boys. This past recruiting season, USC competed. Win some games next year, and USC soon will be winning the recruiting wars.

MEN'S

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nately going to have to step up and take the slack. I'm not going to say that he would have prevented some of Dupay's shots but his defensive presence would have definitely made it harder."

In the last six games, many Gamecock fans might have believed that missed foul shots were part of the close-call losses. Heading to the line 28 times against Florida and sinking 22 of those free throws, USC proudly proved that wasn't the case.

With two of their big players, Tony Kitchings and Marius Petravicius, fouling out of the game in the second half, the Gamecocks spent much of the game on the other side of the free throw line.

"We did it to ourselves, we had a lot of dumb fouls," said Kitchings, who had eight points on the night for USC. "I just didn't play smart tonight."

Fogler had to agree. "We can't play with our big guys in foul trouble," he said. "Not in a game like that."

In the end, the Carolina players gave the luck to Florida.

"I don't think the better team won," USC's Antonio Grant said. "Some shots fell for certain teams on a given night and they just fell Florida's way tonight. Everything that we did, they had an answer for it."

In summary of the USC season so far, Tony Kitchings put it simply.

"Like our story goes, we stay close and just can't get over that hump."

With the win, Florida head coach Billy Donovan racked up his 100th career win and his Gators sealed a 5-2 SEC, 16-4 overall record. Ending their road trip, Florida now will head home for another SEC match-up against the Georgia Bulldogs.

As for the Gamecocks, they now head off on a two-game SEC road trip. They first will be in action against SEC East opponent Kentucky Sunday at 1p.m.

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USC signs 26 to football team

BY JEFF ROMIG
SPORTS EDITOR

There was no nationally acclaimed signee.

There was no drama reminiscent of the Derek Watson soap opera that occurred in 1999.

There was nothing to draw the normal attention to USC recruiting.

So, now that USC has its 2000 class signed and sealed, will they deliver?

"I don't know," said Lou Holtz, USC head football coach. "I do know this. We made a commitment to each other that every athlete that we were going to recruit or sign would be looked at by three different coaches. We honored that all the way down the line."

"We didn't go by reputation. We didn't go by, 'did this individual make all-state?' We went in, we looked at the film and we did a thorough job on character and integrity."

But would USC's 1-21 record over the past two years kill any possibility of bringing in top athletes this year?

"It doesn't mean you're going to have a bad year recruiting, but it certainly makes it difficult," Holtz said. "If you work and approach it the right way, you can have a good year. I think that's exactly what happened."

One position that Holtz knew was in need of immediate attention was quarterback. The Gamecocks definitely filled that need, signing three including Cross High School's Rod Wilson and Dondrial Pinkins from Camilla, Ga.

"They're both big. They're both strong. They both can run. They both have strong arms," Holtz said. "I think they have excellent potential for the type of quarterback we need to have."

The Gamecocks also signed Jarrod Reese out of Coffeyville (Kan.) JC. Reese played for the University of Oklahoma before transferring to junior college. How-

ever, it is not known if he will qualify academically.

"He's got an uphill struggle, but if he does make it, he falls into the same classifications as the other quarterbacks," Holtz said.

Another need that USC was looking to address was the offensive line. This was done even though Orangeburg-Wilkinson's Alex Barron chose Florida State over the Gamecocks.

"Alex Barron is maybe as good of a lineman that has been in this state for a while," Holtz said. "He is special. I guarantee you Bobby Bowden will coach at least four more years when he gets him."

Holtz was very pleased with the offensive linemen that he brought in—a line that includes three 300-plus pound linemen.

Chad Walker (6-4, 300) of Albertville, Ala., could be the best of the bunch.

"If Chad Walker can stay healthy, Chad Walker will be as good a lineman as there is in the country," Holtz said.

Jason Harris (6-6, 340) graded out at 85 percent and recorded 72 pancake blocks as a senior at Wade Hampton in Greenville.

"We saw his feet and his personality and we thought he could really be a good one," Holtz said.

Holtz also did very well in the state of South Carolina, which was a goal of his. Twelve of his signees are from the state, including Wilson, Brian Brownlee, a linebacker from Abbeville, and Sumter's star running back Jamacia Jackson, who Holtz was very happy to be visiting when he was.

"Jamacia's father was a minister," Holtz said. "When I visited Jamacia, and this is ironic, his father led us in prayer when I was getting ready to leave and he prayed for my safety on my recruiting travels. Three hours later, the plane crashed with all my stuff on it."

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2000 USC Football Signees			
Name	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
James Adkisson	6-4	210	WR
Corey Alexander	5-9	178	RB
Jonathan Alston	6-5	247	L
Brian Brownlee	6-3	230	L
DeAndre Eiland	6-0	175	CB
Ron John-Finn	6-4	240	L
Jeremiah Garrison	6-1	205	L
Andrea Gause	5-9	175	RB
Gonzie Gray	6-0	180	RB
Jason Harris	6-6	340	L
Jamacia Jackson	6-2	195	RB
Jack Johnson	6-2	215	L
Nick Johnson	6-5	320	L
Rachiem Monroe	5-9	175	DB
Tagiy Muhammad	6-1	180	RB
Dondrial Pinkins	6-3	215	QB
Jarrod Reese	6-3	210	ATH
Dunta Robinson	6-1	170	L
Carl Smalls	6-2	255	L
John Strickland	6-4	295	L
Preston Thorne	6-0	265	L
Hart Turner	6-5	230	L
Chad Walker	6-4	300	L
Rod Wilson	6-3	203	QB

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- GINT 365
- GINT 491L
- GINT 554
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- HIST 112
- HIST E111
- HIST Z111
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- SOWK 791
- SOWK 792
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- SPAN E122
- SPTA 110
- SPTA 201
- STAT 110
- SWAH 122
- THSP 140
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