

**INSIDE:**

Gamecock women's tennis and women's golf begin 2000 campaigns with strong showings



**SCHEDULE**

- Track at Va. Tech Invite, today
- Women's tennis vs. Ark., 2:30 p.m.
- Baseball at Old Dominion, 1:30 p.m.
- Softball at Texas A&M, 9 a.m.
- Softball at Arizona, 1:30 p.m.

# Postseason slipping away

USC drops ninth straight to Rebels, needs six wins to qualify for NIT

**MEN'S BASKETBALL  
ROUNDUP  
GAMECOCK SPORTS**

If one word could describe the South Carolina men's basketball post-season chances, it would be desperation.

Thanks to their most recent loss, 83-75, to SEC West cellar-dweller Ole Miss on Wednesday, the Gamecocks face a daunting task if they expect to still be playing in late March.

Barring a miraculous run through the SEC tournament, USC must win their next six games to finish at .500 and to be eligible for the National Invitational Tournament.

In a good chance to break an eight-game losing streak, the Gamecocks received 15 points from sophomore guard Jamel Bradley but still fell to the Rebels. With the loss, South Carolina dropped to 1-9 in the conference and 9-14 overall.

Ole Miss forwards Rahim Lockhart and Marcus Hicks scored 18 points each to lead Mississippi to its fifth straight victory at home over the Gamecocks, scoring often and easily against USC's overworked and undermanned defense. The Rebels (15-7, 3-6 SEC) won for the third time in their last four SEC games.

Hicks gave Ole Miss a 16-6 lead in the opening six minutes, scoring six of seven field goals. But South Carolina cut the margin to 16-12 on a jumper by freshman center Marius Petravicius with 9:58 left in the first half.

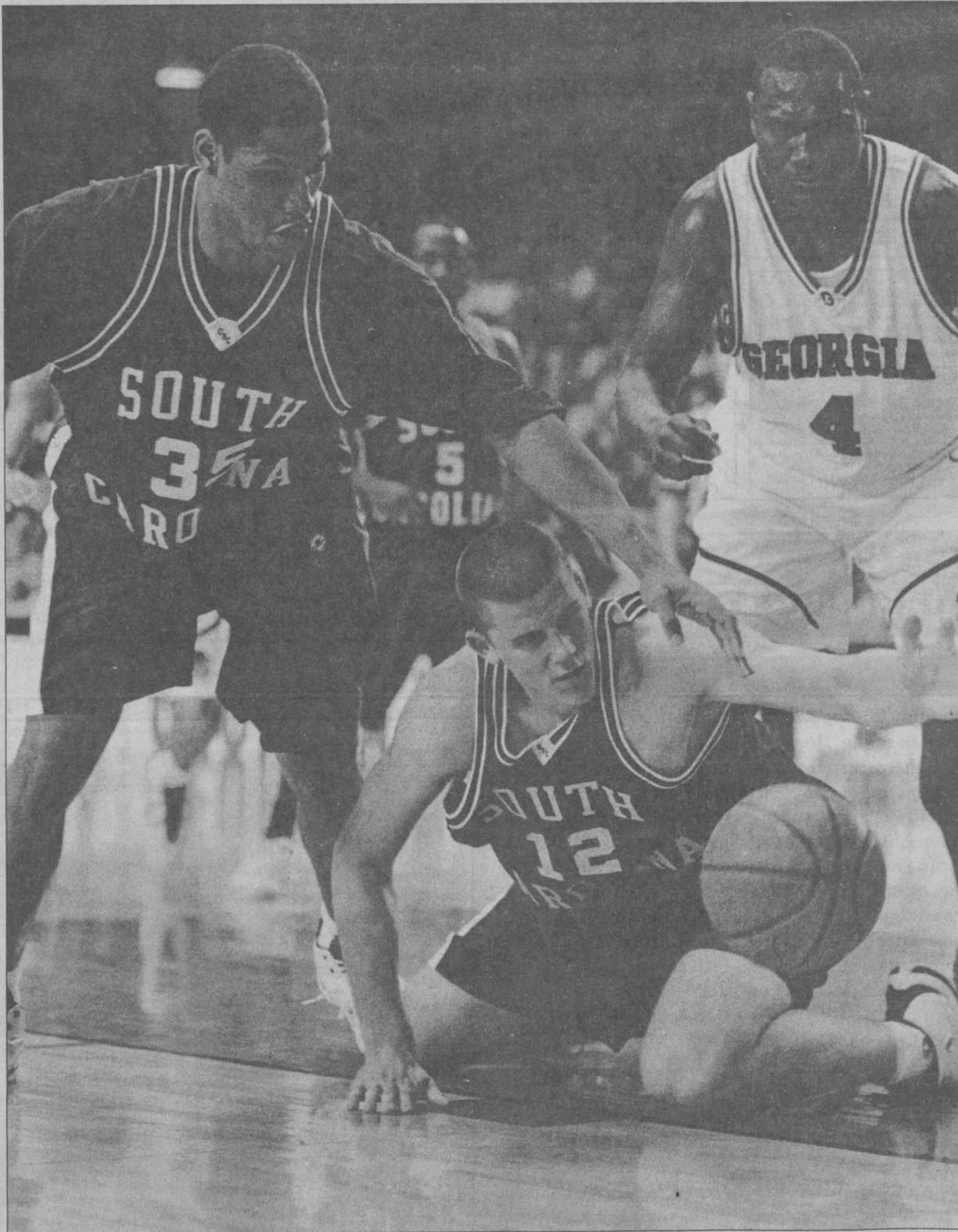
The Rebels responded with a 12-1 run, highlighted by consecutive 3-pointers from guards Emmanuel Wade and Jason Harrison, giving the Rebels a 28-13 lead.

USC, down 33-20 at halftime, opened up the second half with a 3-pointer by David Ross, adding to his 11 points for the game.

Although the Gamecocks got as close as seven points in the final minute, the Rebels hit 20 of 28 free throws to seal the victory, adding to USC's 4-23 SEC record of the past two seasons.

USC shot 25 percent in the first half, its second-worst offensive output of the season, but rebounded in the second half by scoring 55 points, its most in the second half this season. However, the effort wasn't enough, and the Gamecocks got the same result as most of their other games this year, a close loss.

Although USC is coming off the toughest 10-game stretch in the coun-



USC's Antonio Grant, 35, Marius Petravicius, 12 and Georgia's Anthony Evans, 4, scramble for a loose ball in USC's Jan. 22 loss to Georgia. The Gamecocks lost their ninth straight game Wednesday and need to win out the season to qualify for postseason play.

## Warner overcomes tragedies for success



CHARLIE WALLACE  
SENIOR WRITER

There is a disturbing trend in today's sports world: tragedy.

Whether it's athletes getting into legal trouble, suffering career-ending injuries or even dying, the sports world has few positive figures or situations.

The trend of bad news continued Wednesday as the professional side of sports suffered another loss.

Derrick Thomas, an all-pro linebacker and NFL veteran of the Kansas City Chiefs, died suddenly of cardiac arrest.

Thomas, who had been paralyzed almost two weeks ago after being injured in a car wreck, had just been released from the hospital.

Doctors said Thomas had been rehabilitating well and had just been placed in a wheelchair. He was on his way out of the hospital when he told his mother that he didn't "feel so well." Thomas then suffered the heart attack that took his life.

Hall-of-Famer Walter Payton succumbed to cancer, Charlotte Hornets guard Bobby Phillips died in a car wreck and now Derrick Thomas, one of the most prolific pass rushers in NFL history, is gone from this life, as well.

These sobering facts make us, as fans, realize that these sports icons, whom we so highly look up to for their God-given ability and talent with which we will never be blessed, are more like us than we know. They make mistakes, they get in trouble and their families go through hard times.

Thomas was only 33 when he died. He had a good five years of football left in his career and, financially, he was set for the rest of his life to do whatever he wanted.

But who exactly was Derrick Thomas the person?

For what did he stand? What were his views on life?

It is rare to find a professional athlete who has a "life" outside of his profession.

Chances are that Thomas had a happy life, he just cared not to share it with the rest of the country.

The fact remains that there are few athletes we know who are genuinely happy.

It seems so many get into money, legal or personal trouble and we wonder, "What in the world? They have life given to them on a silver platter. They have all the money they need."

However, despite what the world tells us, money does not ensure happiness.

Every now and then, a rare person comes along who is blessed with athletic ability, financial success, fame and contentment. One person who fits this silhouette perfectly is Super Bowl-winning quarterback Kurt Warner.

Warner, who has played in the NFL for only one year, has accomplished things that many players never will. In addition to leading the St. Louis Rams to victory in Super Bowl XXXIII, Warner also was the league MVP, as well as the Super Bowl MVP.

Warner will be the first to tell you all of these accolades are just icing on the cake. After playing in Europe, the Arena Football League and everywhere else you can possibly imagine, Warner deserves what he has been given.

Five years ago, Warner was stocking aisles at a local supermarket, a most humbling experience. And not too long ago, his wife's parents were killed in a tornado, a tragedy not too common.

So what were Warner's first words after winning the Super Bowl?

Not "I deserve this."

Not "I'm better than everyone else."

Not "I'm going to Disney World."

## Collins returns to mound

BY JEFF ROMIG  
SPORTS EDITOR

Clint Collins was a 4-time South Carolina Player of the Year and a High School All-American coming out of Bamberg-Ehrhardt High School in 1997.

When he arrived at USC in the fall of 1997, Collins was one of two in his class who could hit, field and pitch well enough to get the chance to do all three.

Kip Bouknight was called on solely to pitch, leaving Collins alone in that category.

As a freshman, Collins got the chance to show off all his skills, finishing the year 3-2 with a 6.75 ERA on the mound and .289 with three home runs and 14 RBIs at the plate.

Last year, he was used exclusively as an everyday player, but wasn't able to replicate his freshman numbers, .215 with a home run and 10 RBIs.

This year, Collins knew his place. He was back on the mound and was penciled in as USC head coach Ray Tanner's closer out of the bullpen, until something unexpected happened.

"In late November I started getting a pain in my side," Collins said. "I went to the doctors and battled with it for about a week. About two or three weeks ago, it started hurting again."

Collins went to the Thomson Student Health Center, but no one was available, so he took himself to the emergency room. Tests were run, Collins was diagnosed and an emergency appendicitis procedure was performed.

"I was a little nervous," Collins said. "I've never had surgery before, so I really didn't know what to expect. Everything turned out all right."

Now, Collins is back in action as he practiced lightly with his teammates for the first time on Tuesday.

"I did a little easy swinging and a little easy throwing just to get back into it," Collins said. "The doctor told me that on Thursday, I can start doing some light stuff, getting ready to go."

Collins expects to travel with his team to the Franklin Life Classic in Charleston this weekend.

"As far as playing time, I don't know if they (the coaches) think I'm ready after the

surgery," Collins said. "They want me to be 100 percent when I get back in there."

A healthy Collins will bolster a bullpen that has already seen solid performances from Scott Barber, Lee Gronkiewicz and Jamie Poston, but Collins isn't ruling out hitting.

"This year, we decided to go with a DH role and a closer role," Collins said. "That way, I didn't have to throw every day across the field."

Tanner knew the move from third back to the mound would be a good one for Collins' arm.

"There's never been any question about Clint's ability and his arm strength," Tanner said. "We're going to let his main focus be on the mound and maybe do some DH or pinch-hitting for us. If he can get healthy, there's no question that he can add a lot to our bullpen, but we're certainly not going to rush him at this point."

Collins is happy with the new role the USC coaches have given him.

"I'm just a country boy from Bamberg going out there and I just try to throw it as hard as I can and get people out. I've been good at it, so hopefully it's going to continue into this year."

## Wrestling club to start for to USC students

BY SHANNON ROOKE  
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

A new sports club is on its way to South Carolina.

USC's very own wrestling team is already practicing and looking to fill its first roster.

As of now, the school does not sponsor the new Gamecock wrestlers, but they will be signing up with the well-known USA Wrestlers Organization. This national wrestling group will sponsor American freestyle wrestling tournaments, give the club more benefits and also hand out a rulebook and guide to help with the practices.

The tournaments will include other wrestling clubs from around the country and perhaps give the club the experience it needs to become a financed sport at Carolina.

Junior Justin Buckingham, a former wrestler at Fort Dorchester High School, is conducting all practices and looks forward to the seeing the turnout from the students.

"I've just missed it a lot," Buckingham said. "And although there's been a lot of paperwork involved, I think it'll be worth it in the end."

The club held its first practice last weekend and received 14 new names on the sign-up sheet.

"It's hard to tell what kind of response we'll get from everyone," Buckingham said.

"We're looking to fill the weight classes for the freestyle tournaments and hopefully turn the heads of the USC athletics department for having a wrestling team."

Practices will take place in Room 306B in the Blatt P.E. Center on Fridays at 6:30 p.m. and Saturday at 2 p.m.

Players should come ready to practice and take part in a new sports team.

"We just want everyone to know that anybody and everybody is welcome to come out," Buckingham said.