

Gamecocks showcase NCAA potential at SEC Championships

Men's and women's swimming and diving teams finish 7th and 8th respectively in Alabama

BY KATIE SCHMIDT
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — The USC swimming and diving teams' chances of winning the SEC Championships have not been the best over the past several years, but this year's performance might be the beginning of a bright future for the Gamecocks.

The Gamecock men finished seventh overall in the SEC competition, and the women finished eighth, but the team's raw talent has begun to show. With 26 freshmen on the team and a few experienced performers to set the standards, a change in the team's confidence levels could be seen after the success of the week's events.

One of the team's veterans, diver Brandon Hulko, set the tone in one of the first events of the competition. Hulko, a junior, won two bronze medals this week. Hulko, an All-American and U.S. National

Team member, took third in both the one- and three-meter springboard events.

"I felt more confident this year than in the past," Hulko said. "Having two years under my belt gave me enough preparation of what to expect. I am one step closer to achieving something better next year."

In two weeks, Hulko will know whether he has earned a spot in the NCAA Championships, which will take place next month in College Station, Texas.

Other athletes winning medals for USC included freshman Tamas Szucs (gold in the 200-yard freestyle), freshman Tricia Rye (silver in the 200-yard breaststroke), freshman Istvan Bathazi (bronze in the 400-yard individual medley) and junior Zolt Gaspar (gold in the 50-yard freestyle and bronze in the 100- and 200-yard butterfly). These four athletes will all compete in the NCAA competition next month.

Gaspar, last year's SEC Swimmer of the Year, was overwhelmed by his performance in Tuscaloosa.

"It was unbelievable," he said. Gaspar has had an outstanding season for USC so far, swimming the fastest collegiate time in the 50 freestyle earlier this year. Gamecock head coach Don Gibb

spoke of the great family support and the enthusiasm the team showed this week.

"You can look at years past," he said. "We have never sent this many young athletes to the NCAA championship."

Gibb, who was a SEC and NCAA champion, has only been head coach at USC for two years, but he has secured a foundation for many successful years to come. USC also posted three provisional marks for the NCAAAs this past weekend.

In the 200 butterfly, freshman Chris McCrary finished ninth, which provisionally qualifies him for the NCAAAs. Fellow freshman Megan Johnson provisionally qualified in the 200 butterfly, where she finished eleventh. Finally, Gaspar, McCrary, Ed Murphy and Mickey Kramer finished fifth in the 400-yard freestyle relay, also good enough for a provisional spot.

The SEC Championships will be aired March 3 on FoxSports South. The men's NCAA Championships will be held March 22-24 in College Station, and the women will compete March 15-17 in Long Island,

The sports desk can be reached at gamecocksports@hotmail.com



Readers: Now you have a chance to enter the Gamecock Sports Challenge. Take a look at next week's games and submit your picks to gamecocksports@hotmail.com. You can also bring your picks up to RH 333. We will choose one person's picks at random each week. If you can beat all four other panel members, you'll win a free Gamecock T-shirt!

Gamecock SPORTS CHALLENGE

Kyle Almond	Darrah Densmore	Brock Vergakis	Kevin Langston	Tripp Brogdon
Sports Editor (27-13)	Sports Staff (24-16)	Editor in Chief (20-20)	Gamecock Staff (18-22)	Reader (20-20)

Tennessee-USC	Tennessee	Tennessee	Tennessee	Tennessee	Tennessee
Memphis-So. Miss.	Memphis	Memphis	Memphis	Memphis	Memphis
Indiana-Purdue	Indiana	Purdue	Indiana	Purdue	Indiana
Florida St.-Clemson	Florida St.	Clemson	Clemson	Florida St.	Florida St.
Stanford-UCLA	Stanford	Stanford	Stanford	Stanford	UCLA
Alabama-Ole Miss	Ole Miss	Ole Miss	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama
USC-Miss. St.	USC	USC	Miss. St.	USC	Miss. St.
Georgia-Arkansas	Arkansas	Arkansas	Arkansas	Georgia	Arkansas
Duke-UNC	Duke	Duke	Duke	Duke	Duke
Kentucky-Florida	Florida	Kentucky	Florida	Kentucky	Kentucky

LAST WEEK'S WINNER: TIE - Kyle Almond and Brock Vergakis (8-2)

NEXT WEEK'S PICKS (MARCH 5-MARCH 11)

- SEC Tournament Winner
- ACC Tournament Winner
- Big Ten Tournament Winner
- How many wins in the SEC Tournament for USC?
- Big East Tournament Winner
- Southern Conf. Winner
- Big 12 Tournament Winner
- C-USA Tourney Winner
- Oregon at Oregon St.
- Arizona at Stanford

Turn in picks by 1 p.m. Sunday, March 4

SEC

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it's on. And if it's off, it's off."

If Johnson's game is on, the rest of the conference might be in trouble. Johnson's superb play carried the Razorbacks to a surprise SEC Tournament title last season and earned them a postseason berth.

Elsewhere in the SEC:

Alabama: The NCAA told Alabama on Thursday that it was officially investigating the Tide's football program for recruiting violations.

In a preliminary letter of inquiry to the school, the NCAA said they were investigating whether university representatives offered inducements to prospective players and provided

extra benefits to those enrolled from 1997 to 2000.

No specific violations were cited in the letter, but according to the *Commercial Appeal*, the Memphis area has received a lot of attention from the NCAA.

The NCAA is looking into one claim that a high school coach in Memphis received \$200,000 to steer Parade All-American Albert Means to Alabama. Also, former Alabama running backs coach Ivy Williams was recently questioned about his recruiting success in Memphis, which includes Ahmaad Galloway, a feature back last season for the Tide.

"The University of Alabama fully intends to continue its aggressive investigation of any issues involving rules compliance, working closely with NCAA officials," University President Andrew Sorensen said in a statement. "Our goal is to get to the bottom of these matters

as quickly as possible."

Tennessee: In women's basketball, it's more of the same in the SEC.

No. 1 Tennessee (28-1, 14-0 SEC) finished a perfect SEC regular season Sunday, the fifth in its history, with a 63-49 win over Auburn. The Lady Vols have now won four straight conference titles and are on a 17-game winning streak.

"I told [Tennessee head coach Pat Summitt] this is a special team for her because they're unselfish," Auburn head coach Joe Ciampi said. "That's the mark of a championship team right there."

Summitt likes her team's chances for another reason.

"What separates us from the rest of the teams is our bench," she said. "Depth could help us win a championship in Memphis, Tennessee (the site of this week's SEC

Tournament)."

That depth came in handy when star Tamika Catchings went down with a torn ACL weeks ago. According to Summitt, Lady Vols Semeka Randall and Kristen Clement have done a good job in stepping up their play since Catchings went down.

"Semeka Randall and Kristen Clement have led by example, and that is what Tamika did so well for us," Summitt said. "Those two have also committed to more than just scoring, including things like becoming better screeners, better passers and playing better defense."

Tennessee has a first round bye in the SEC Tournament, which starts Thursday.

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NBA

from page 10

situation.

Allen Iverson, maybe the league's most exciting player? He can't stop offending people with his rap lyrics. Gary Payton? Currently whining to be traded. Karl Malone? Complains about everything. Tim Duncan? Doesn't speak.

Just as the NBA has to concentrate on a certain fan, it also needs to concentrate on a certain player. It needs to find that player quickly and market the crap out of him. Whether it's one that I've mentioned, a diamond in the rough or a nucleus of players, the NBA needs someone to shore up its shoddy reputation, or no one will want to watch the games, low ticket prices or not.



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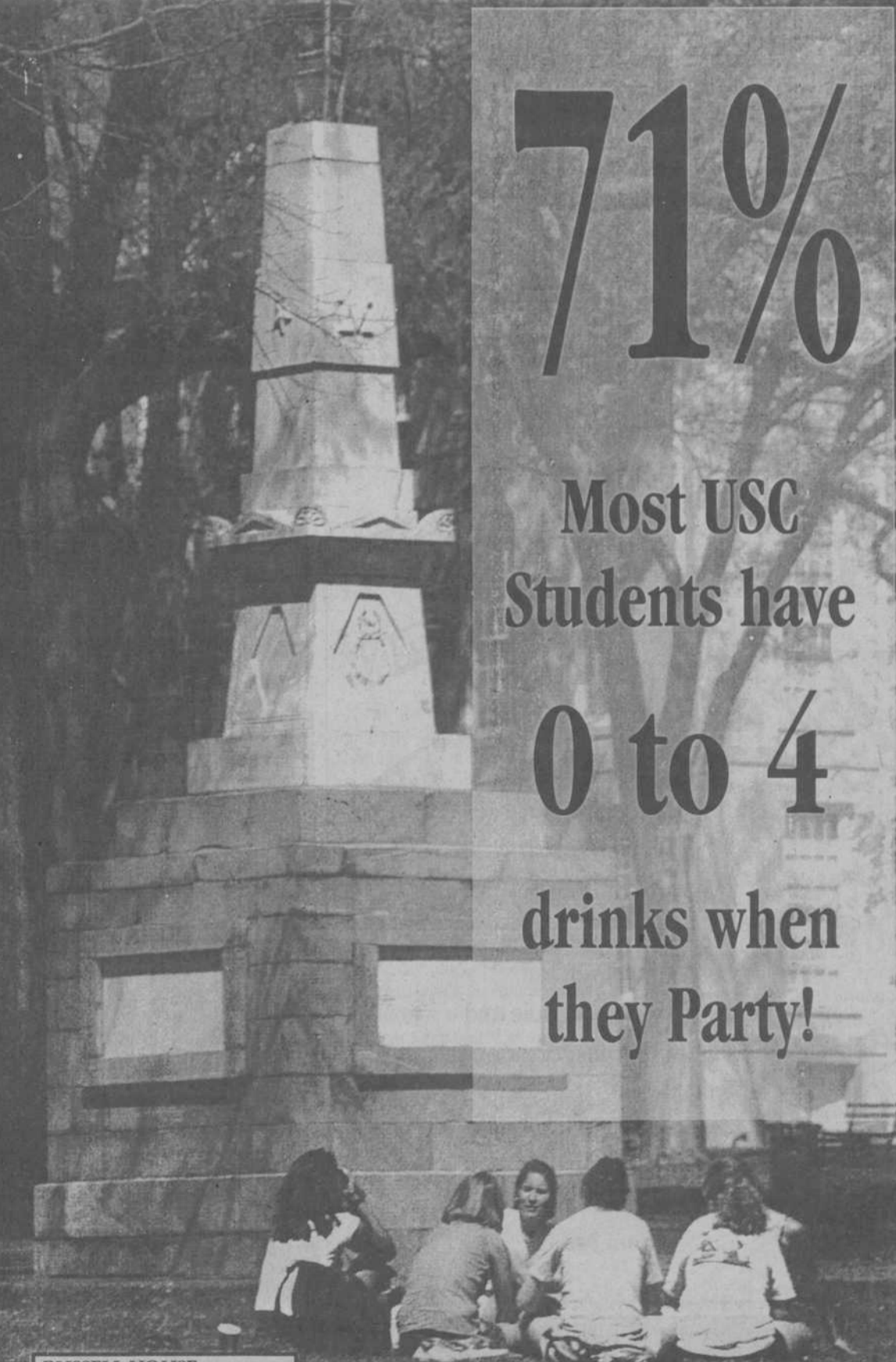
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