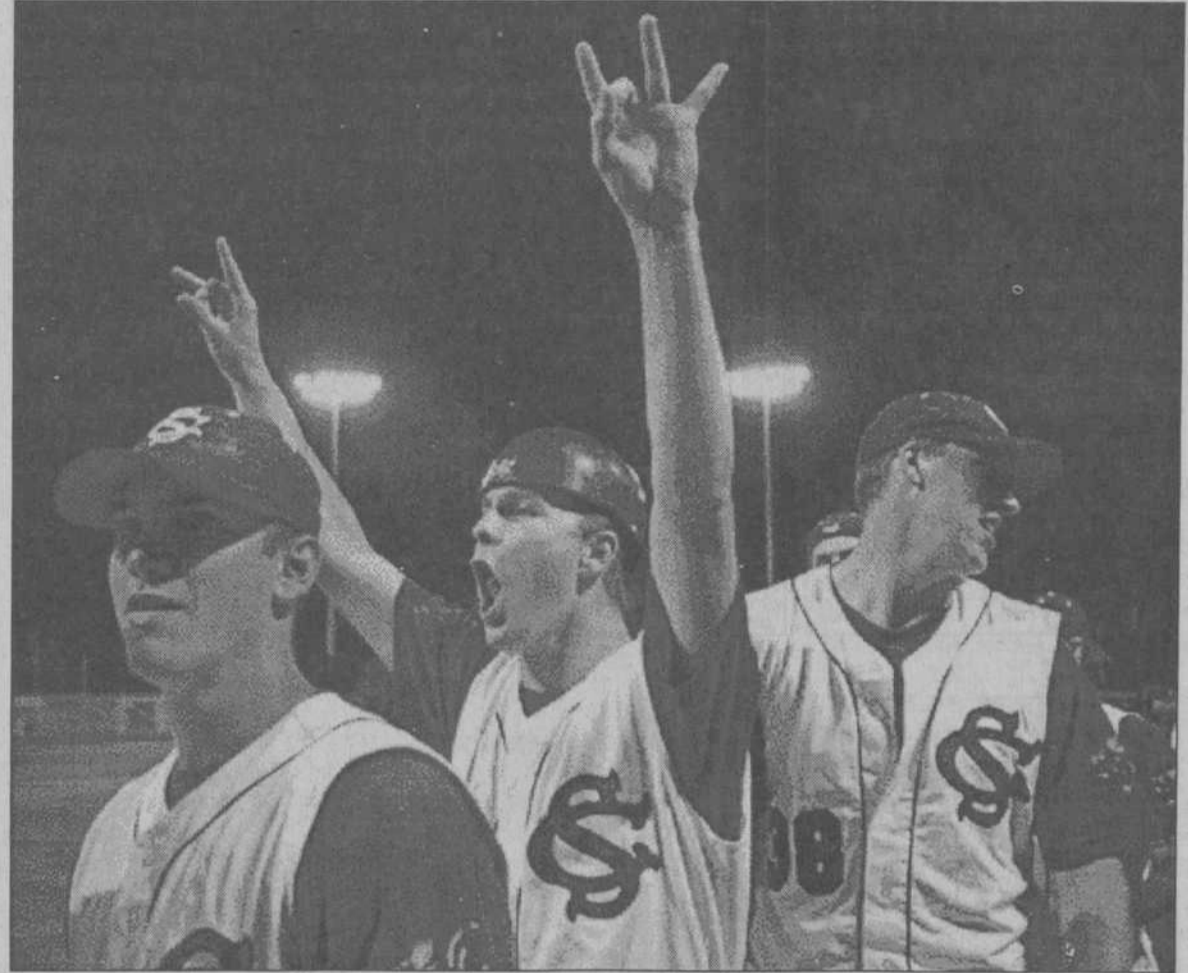




- Baseball at Clemson, 2 p.m. Saturday
- Softball at Ole Miss, 3 p.m. Saturday
- Men's basketball at Mississippi State, 3 p.m. Saturday
- Baseball vs. Clemson, 1:30 p.m. Sunday

Clemson rivalry resumes this weekend

BY SHAWN SKILLMAN
THE GAMECOCK



Sean Rayford/The Gamecock

Gamecock players celebrate their 9-8, 12-inning victory over Clemson at Sarge Frye Field this past year. Carolina swept the Tigers in 2000, also defeating them 6-3 at Clemson.

No. 7 USC (12-0)

Head Coach: Ray Tanner

PITCHERS



BOUKNIGHT BELL

Kip Bouknight racked up almost every National Player of the Year award in 2000. Transfer Gary Bell has won his first four starts as a Gamecock.

FIELDERS



DEES

Co-captain Brennan Dees hits third in the Carolina lineup. He shares the team lead in home runs with seven. Leadoff hitter Marcus McBeth also has seven homers on the year. He is a defensive gem in center field for USC.

MCBETH

No. 14 Tigers (6-3)

Head Coach: Jack Leggett

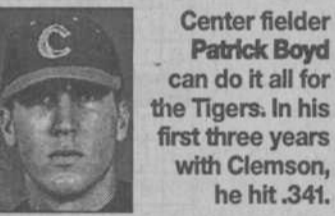
PITCHERS



SCHMITT LYNN

Jarrod Schmitt was 9-0 last year as a freshman. Senior Kevin Lynn was a reliever this past year, but has the stuff to be a quality starter.

FIELDERS



BOYD

Center fielder Patrick Boyd can do it all for the Tigers. In his first three years with Clemson, he hit .341. Shortstop Jeff Baker was named 2000's ACC Freshman of the Year. He hit an extra-inning home run at USC this past year.

BAKER

HISTORY

Overall series: Clemson leads 146-99-2

It's too early in the college baseball season to label any game a "must win," but this weekend's games between South Carolina and Clemson come pretty close.

The two-game home-and-home series, which starts at Clemson on Saturday, will be the premiere college baseball match-up in the nation this weekend and a revival of the teams' bitter rivalry that dates to 1899.

Both teams come into the game highly ranked. The Gamecocks have jumped to a 12-0 start and are ranked No. 7 in the country by *Baseball America*. The Tigers (6-3) are ranked No. 14.

"There is definitely more electricity in the air with the fans, the stakes and the recruits," USC head coach Ray Tanner said of the upcoming series. "It's just a great time for college baseball and great to be a part of."

The series will be a four-game set, with two games this weekend and two in late April. This weekend, Saturday's game will be played at Clemson, while Sunday's game will be at USC.

The change to four games was something Tanner and Clemson head coach Jack Leggett had been working toward for a while. For the past few years, the teams have only played each other twice in a season.

"Coach Leggett and I have talked about increasing the series, but we were never able to work out the date," Tanner said. "Ideally, the best format is the three-game series, but because we are in different conferences, it's difficult to have a date that works for both schools."

"But the Saturday and Sunday format is good," Tanner said. "There's so much emotion in this game that breaking them

up is better for both teams."

This past year's College Baseball Player of the Year, Kip Bouknight, is the probable starter Saturday for the Gamecocks. He is 3-0 on the year, with a 3.22 ERA to go with 20 strikeouts.

"Honestly, [the Clemson games] are some of the biggest games of the year," Bouknight said. "We want to do all we can to win all our games, especially in the SEC, but there's no other game I'd

rather win than Clemson."

Though the USC offense has shown power with 26 home runs this season, it's been the men on the mound that Tanner feels are key to the Gamecocks' great start.

"We are 12-0 and played pretty good because of our pitching staff," he said. "We were in some dog fights with VCU and Richmond, and George Mason had us on the ropes a couple of times. We are

talking about (being) 8-4 or 9-3 if our pitching staff doesn't give us a chance to win. Our pitching staff hasn't let us down, despite us being inconsistent on offense at times."

This past season's Florida Junior College Player of the Year, pitcher Gary Bell, will get his first taste of the Clemson rivalry this weekend and will start Sunday.

CLEMSON SEE PAGE 11

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Gamecocks have trouble pulling out the close games

■ USC to finish regular season Saturday at Mississippi State

BY MICHAEL HANEY
THE GAMECOCK

It's been a grueling basketball campaign this year for Carolina.

The Gamecocks have played many close games and have a few wins to show for it, but most of the games have ended in heartbreaking defeats. Carolina has dropped four of the past five contests, and the four losses were by a combined total of 14 points.

USC is 6-10 in games this season decided by eight points or less.

"Bad luck just happens to some people, and hopefully it will change," Gamecock center Tony Kitchings said after Carolina's latest defeat at the hands of Tennessee in overtime.

The last few grains of sand are falling through the hourglass on the 2000-01 regular season, as Carolina will face Mississippi State in Starkville, Miss., Saturday in its last regular season game of the year.

USC (14-12, 6-9 SEC) will look to head into the SEC Tournament next weekend with some momentum to make a championship run, which, in all likelihood, is its only possibility of playing in the NCAA Tournament.

"We've been having a lot of games

like this," Kitchings said, referring to the tough Tennessee loss. "The last couple seconds, you draw up a play, and the shot can go in or go out. Hopefully, we got all the bad out of the way and can go into the SEC Tournament like we did last year and win it all."

Senior co-captain David Ross also said he thinks the team can make a run at any time.

"Even though we've been close and haven't been able to get a 'W' each game, this team comes and gives all it's got," he said. "There's not a team in this conference that's better than we are. There's not a team in this conference we can't beat on any given night."

The Gamecocks will face a team in their same situation on Saturday. The Bulldogs are 15-11 overall, 6-9 in the league, and are also trying to make a run for a bid to the NCAA Tournament. Mississippi State has won three of the past four contests and is tied for fourth place in the SEC Western Division with Auburn.

Mississippi State brings the country's sixth toughest schedule into Saturday's contest. The Bulldogs will depend on senior All-SEC candidates Tang Hamilton and Antonio Jackson, who lead the team with respective scoring averages of 13 and 12.8 points per game.



USC at Miss. St.

■ **LOCATION:** Humphrey Coliseum, Starkville, Miss.

■ **TIME:** 3 p.m. Saturday

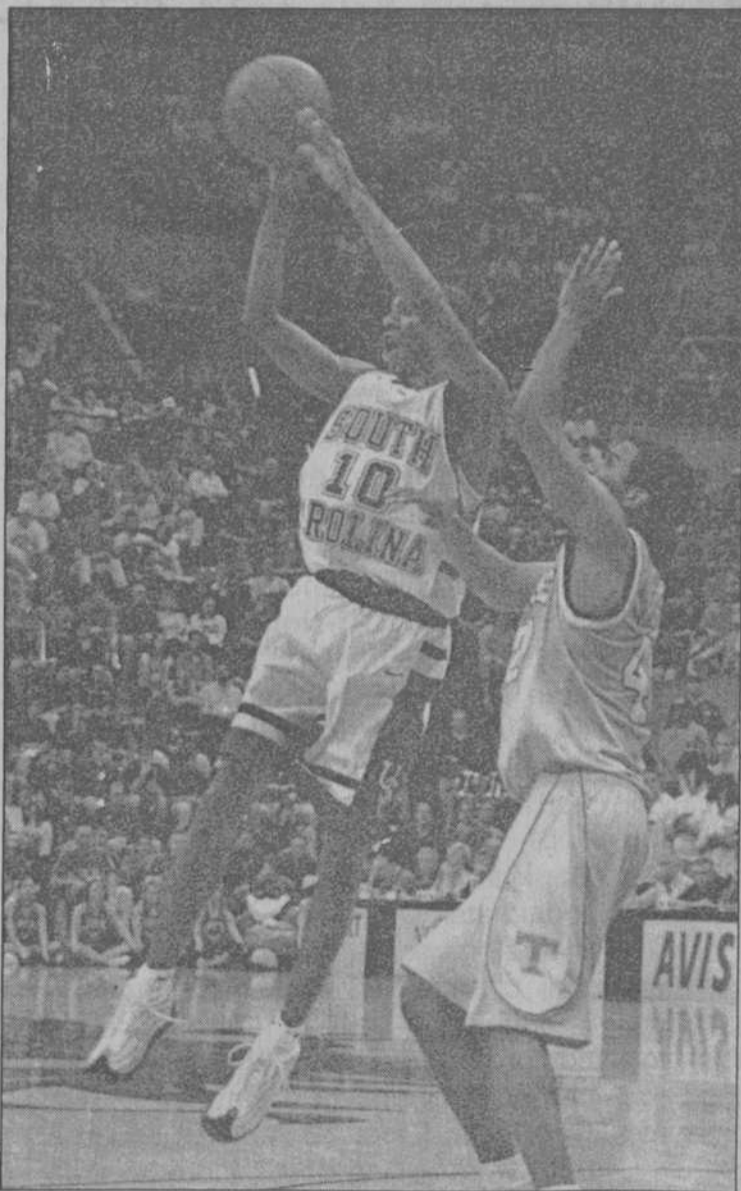
■ **RADIO:** WVOC 540 AM

■ **RECORDS:** USC (14-12, 6-9 SEC), Miss. St. (15-11, 6-9)

This past season, Carolina defeated the Bulldogs 68-67 in Columbia. The win snapped a nine-game USC losing streak. Antonio Grant had a game-high 16 points.

Tip-off for Saturday's game is set for 3 p.m. at Humphrey Coliseum. Mississippi State leads the overall series 5-4.

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



Travis Lynn/The Gamecock

Jamel Bradley scored a team-high 23 points against Tennessee Tuesday night, but Carolina lost in overtime, 68-67.

Softball splits two with VT

■ Johnson's pitching crucial to USC's 2-1 win in second game

BY DARRAH DENSMORE
THE GAMECOCK

Following a lengthy road trip that saw it play 17 games in three tournaments, the Lady Gamecocks softball team returned home and split a doubleheader with Virginia Tech on Wednesday afternoon at Beckham Field.

The split runs Carolina's record to 12-8-1. Virginia Tech is now 6-7.

Carolina lost the opener 4-1 in nine innings, but rallied to win 2-1 in the nightcap behind a strong pitching performance from Stacey Johnson (6-3).

The first game saw both pitchers dominate early, as Carolina's Megan Matthews (6-5), the reigning SEC Pitcher of the Week, struck out five Hokies in the first 4 2/3 innings. She then ran into some two-out trouble, as Tech's Mary Lowzinski doubled and scored on a single by Bronwyn Blair to give VT the early lead at 1-0. After another hit by Carmen Farmer, Matthews squeezed out of the threat by forcing Clarisa Crowell to fly out.

The Gamecocks tied the game in the bottom of the sixth with a two-out double by Debralee Troesh and a single by Joyce McMillin, scoring Nancy Crane, who pinch ran for Troesh. That would be all Carolina could muster against Crowell (2-2), who scattered seven hits in nine innings of work. Her counterpart Matthews would finish with 11 strikeouts, but it would not be enough to claim her 7th victory of the year.

Tech won the game in the top of the ninth inning, when errors by Baggetta and Matthews led to three Hokie runs. The normally sure-handed Gamecocks committed four errors in the game. USC entered the contest with 25 errors, and a fielding percentage of .954.

Johnson grounded out to end the game, but she would turn out to be one

SOFTBALL SEE PAGE 11

Former Gamecocks come up big in World Cup qualifier

■ Substitutes Wolff and Mathis team up to clobber Mexico, 2-0

BY KYLE ALMOND
THE GAMECOCK

Two former Gamecocks paid big dividends for the U.S. National Soccer Team Wednesday night.

Josh Wolff scored a goal and an assist and Clint Mathis added an assist in the United States' 2-0 defeat of Mexico, their first World Cup qualifying match of this year.

Things looked bleak for the United States in the first half, when star players Brian McBride and Claudio Reyna went down with injuries, but Wolff and Mathis, who played together at USC in

the late 1990s, replaced the two and teamed up for the game's opening goal in the 47th minute.

Mathis, who replaced Reyna in center midfield, led Wolff with a long ball down the middle of the field after stealing a Mexico pass shortly after halftime. The Mexican defenders were caught off guard, and a streaking Wolff raced behind them. It came down to a foot race between Wolff and Mexico goalkeeper Jorge Campos, and the former Gamecock won out. He beat Campos to the ball, dribbled around him and slid the ball into the back of the net to give



WOLFF



MATHIS

the U.S. a 1-0 lead.

"I wasn't sure if [Campos] was able to get to it. He might have hesitated a bit," Wolff said. "I was able to touch the ball and scoot it past him."

Wolff's goal revived an American offense that sputtered in the first half. The United States failed to register a single shot on goal the entire first 45 minutes of the game, which was held at Columbus Crew Stadium in Columbus, Ohio.

Wolff's efforts also put away any chance of a Mexican comeback late in the game. Dribbling deep

in the Mexican third in the waning minutes, Wolff slipped by a pair of defenders in the corner, dribbled into the box and centered the ball to midfielder Earnie Stewart, who put the ball away for an insurance goal in the 87th minute.

U.S. head coach Bruce Arena was impressed with the way Wolff responded as a substitute.

"We talked to Josh the last couple of days, and we really emphasized to him that his speed could make a difference in this game," Arena said. "Josh is very good at running off the ball, and I thought he was a factor as soon as he stepped on the field today. I was pleased with his performance, and hopefully he can continue to fill a void we've

SOCCER SEE PAGE 11