



- Men's tennis at Arkansas, 1 p.m. Friday
- Women's tennis at Vanderbilt, 1:30 p.m. Friday
- Baseball vs. LSU, 7 p.m. Friday
- Men's golf at Auburn (Billy Hitchcock Invitational), Friday-Sunday

USC welcomes defending champs to Sarge Frye Field

Gamecocks will face No. 4 LSU in a highly anticipated three-game series

BY DARRAH DENSMORE
THE GAMECOCK

After last week's disappointing series against Alabama, the ninth-ranked USC baseball team looks to get back on the winning track in the SEC this weekend as they play host to defending national champion LSU.

The Crimson Tide's sweep marked the first time in almost two years that an opponent has defeated the Gamecocks in three straight games. The last time it happened was May 1999, when Kentucky won all three games in Columbia. Last week was also the first time in school history that Alabama had swept USC.

"I think [the players are] disappointed, but I don't think [the sweep] hurt their confidence any," USC head coach Ray Tanner said.

LSU enters the series having won eight of its last 10 games, not including Wednesday night's exhibition loss to the minor-league New Orleans Zephyrs.

The Tigers have a record of 22-8-1 overall, 8-4 in the SEC. Carolina is 25-7 overall, 7-5 in the SEC. Both teams are in second place in their divisions, trailing Ole Miss and Tennessee, respectively.

This series is critical for each team as it presents an opportunity to play against a highly regarded opponent and to make a run at first place with a series victory or sweep. It will be LSU's first trip to Columbia since 1996.

"We're going to play the team

that's been the best in college baseball for a long, long time," Tanner said. "It is a great situation to put the Alabama weekend behind us if we can do what we're capable of on the field."

2000 National Player of the Year Kip Bouknight (6-1, 4.58 ERA), who has struggled in recent starts against Arkansas, Tennessee and Alabama, will start Friday for the Gamecocks. LSU will start freshman left-hander Lane Mestepey (5-0, 3.25 ERA), who is fresh off a complete-game victory over Kentucky in which he allowed only one earned run on nine hits while striking out five.

Juniors Gary Bell (6-3, 2.82 ERA) and Chris Spigner (5-2, 3.18 ERA), who have started most weekend games for Carolina this season, will likely start on Saturday and Sunday, respectively.

"Last year when we played [LSU], they won two out of three at their place," Spigner said. "It's going to be a big boost if we can win all these, and everyone's going to be playing hard."

It is still uncertain who LSU coach Skip Bertman will send to the mound on the weekend. The likely candidates include senior right-hander Jason Scobie (1-1, 6.21 ERA), junior left-hander Shane Youman (3-1, 4.82 ERA) and junior right-hander Roy Corcoran (4-1, 6.05 ERA).

The Tigers enter Friday's game with a .323 team batting average, the second-best in the SEC. Second baseman Mike Fontenot leads LSU with a .402 average and has 10 doubles, five homers

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Ray Tanner
USC baseball head coach

and 25 RBIs.

Carolina leads the SEC in home runs with 60, while giving up just 12 to opponents. The Gamecocks' leading hitters include junior outfielder Michael Floyd, who leads the team with a .389 average, and senior catcher Tim Whittaker, who leads the SEC in home runs with 13 and is second in RBIs with 45. Bryon Jeffcoat continues to have a solid senior season at second base with a .371 average and eight home runs.

Trey Dyson, a possible starter in the Gamecock outfield and an ever-potent threat as a pinch hitter, looks to regain his form of a year ago against a team that was one of only two SEC opponents to win a series against USC during last year's 56-10 season.

"They took two out of three from us, and ended up taking the whole thing [national title], but we feel like we can play with them," Dyson said. "We feel

like we're one of the top teams in the country. We'll just see what happens. We're going to be ready."

Game time for Friday's opener at Sarge Frye Field is 7 p.m. Saturday's game is set for 4 p.m., and Sunday's series finale is scheduled for 1:30 p.m.

Clemson tickets available Friday

Tickets for the April 18 meeting between USC and Clemson at Sarge Frye Field will go on sale today at the USC Ticket Office on Rosewood Drive for Gamecock Club members, USC faculty and staff, and USC students only.

Students, faculty and staff can pick up their tickets with a valid ID.

The ticket office is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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

TALE OF THE TAPE



No. 9 USC
(25-7, 7-5 SEC)

Head Coach: Ray Tanner

PITCHERS



BOUKNIGHT



BELL

Staff ace **Kip Bouknight** has been up and down this season for USC, but he always shows up for the big games. **Gary Bell** is the team's top southpaw and will start Saturday.

FIELDERS



WHITTAKER

Catcher **Tim Whittaker** brings a big bat to the plate for USC. He leads the SEC in home runs with 13 on the season.



MCBETH



PONTIFF

Marcus McBeth combines speed and power on the diamond. He has 10 home runs and eight stolen bases in 2001.

Wally Pontiff is hitting .383 on the year for LSU at the hot corner. He leads the team in RBIs, with 26.



No. 4 LSU
(22-8-1, 8-4)

Head Coach: Skip Bertman

PITCHERS



MESTEPEY



SCOBIE

Lane Mestepey has stepped in as a freshman and won his first five games. Senior **Jason Scobie** could start Saturday or Sunday for the Tigers.

FIELDERS



FONTENOT

Second baseman **Mike Fontenot** does it all for the defending champs. His batting average is .402, and he has five home runs.



PONTIFF

Wally Pontiff is hitting .383 on the year for LSU at the hot corner. He leads the team in RBIs, with 26.

HISTORY

Overall series: **LSU leads 13-3-1**

Carolina hopes to name coach within a week

BY BROCK VERGAKIS
THE GAMECOCK

While speculation continues about who will be USC's next head basketball coach, officials in the athletics department have said an announcement is expected within seven days.

"We're hopeful we'll be able to have someone in place by this time next week," said Assistant Athletics Director Kerry Tharp.

Tharp said Thursday the athletics department is still considering a handful of candidates, but would not specify how many. Under state law, all public agencies must release the names of three or fewer finalists to the public, which means athletics director Mike McGee must be considering at least four coaching possibilities.

The athletics department has said it would have a coach in place by the groundbreaking of the new 18,000-seat arena in the Vista on April 25.

Gamecock fans who had hoped Kentucky head coach Tubby Smith would come to USC were disappointed when Smith announced a four-year contract extension with the Wildcats on Wednesday.

Other people who are being listed as possible candidates are Wake Forest head coach Dave Odom, former Georgia Tech head coach Bobby Cremins and Winthrop head coach Gregg Marshall. However, Winthrop sports information director Jack Frost said Thursday that no one from USC had contacted Winthrop for permission to speak with Marshall.

Cremins has publicly said he would be interested in the USC coaching job if USC were interested in him, but McGee could still be upset about an incident nearly 10 years ago when Cremins accepted the head coaching job only to retract it later. The *Charleston Post & Courier* reported that McGee met with Cremins to discuss the possibility of him coaching at Carolina, but they

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Kerry Tharp
USC Assistant Director of Athletics

The search continues

Who is definitely out of the running to replace Eddie Fogler as head coach of the men's basketball team?

- Tubby Smith
- Quin Snyder
- Kelvin Sampson
- Buzz Peterson

Who are some of the possibilities?

- Gregg Marshall
- Bobby Cremins
- Dave Odom

didn't have sources who would go on the record.

Wake Forest University spokesman Dean Bucham said USC had not contacted Wake Forest for permission to talk to Odom. Bucham wouldn't comment on whether the Deacons were searching for another coach, but he said that Odom is under contract with Wake Forest University.

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

Gamecocks pummel Furman in rematch

BY CHRIS FOY
THE GAMECOCK

The ninth-ranked USC baseball team bounced off its first three-game sweep in nearly two years by downing in-state rivals Furman 8-2 Wednesday night at Municipal Stadium in Greenville.

The Gamecocks (25-7) lost three games at Alabama this past weekend, the first time they had been swept since May 1999. However, the team redeemed itself Wednesday night against a team that had defeated them once already this season.

USC freshman pitcher David Marchbanks (4-1), a Greenville-area native, avenged his only loss as a Gamecock by pitching the first four innings of the game and giving up only two hits. Marchbanks took the loss in a 5-4 Paladins win March 7.

USC head coach Ray Tanner was

impressed with Marchbanks' play Wednesday night, as well as the season.

"[Marchbanks] has given us quality starts," Tanner said. "We pulled him early because we wanted him ready for the weekend."

Tanner was also pleased that his team picked up the win coming off the series with Alabama. "This is important to us," he said. "We're dealing with young people, and although we had a good record, we lost three games on the road."

"Student athletes are emotional. It's important that you feel good with what you're doing, and that you're able to get some wins. I thought it was important that we bounced back tonight."

Though Marchbanks got the win in his homecoming, the game was in the hands of the Gamecocks' two-sport athlete, Sheldon Brown. Brown, who was an All-American cornerback for the

Gamecock football team this fall, started the game at right field in place of the injured Brennan Dees and had an impressive outing, hitting a home run and a double. He finished 3-for-4 on the evening and scored two runs.

After the game, Brown played down his big night.

"This was just one night; it may have been luck," Brown said. "We'll see this weekend. But this night doesn't mean anything on the grand scale of things. Football is my life. I'm dependent of football, but baseball fills the bill."

Brown wasn't the only player with a big night.

Catcher Tim Whittaker opened up the ninth inning with his SEC-leading 13th home run. The senior backstop had two hits and two runs in the game.

Also coming up big for the Gamecocks was left fielder Michael

USC	8
FURMAN	2

Floyd, who was 3-for-4 with a double and two runs.

Furman (18-14) was led by second baseman Adam Etherington. He went 2-for-4 with a run and a double. Shortstop Derek Norman also had a double and was 3-for-4 in the game.

Rusty Putnam (0-3) took his third loss of the season and was pulled at the end of the third inning after giving up six hits.

USC now leads the overall series against Furman 94-48-2 and remains one game behind SEC East leader Tennessee.

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

Softball team completes sweep of Vols

■ Matthews throws a one-hitter for USC

BY KYLE ALMOND
THE GAMECOCK

Joyce McMillin's RBI double in extra innings completed a three-game sweep for the No. 19 USC softball team, which defeated Tennessee 1-0 Wednesday.

The senior right fielder stroked a Leigh Ann Ellis pitch into the right-center gap with no outs in the bottom of the eighth to bring home Kim Evans from second and give the Gamecocks (26-12-1, 10-4 SEC) their fifth straight win.

On the mound, USC's Megan Matthews (14-8) was as stifling as ever, pitching a one-hitter and striking out five. Wednesday's win was her second shutout in as many days and her 11th on the season.

"She kept us in the game, and that's what we want our pitchers to do," head coach Joyce Compton said. "She's done a great job of that all year."

The Gamecocks could only muster five hits against Ellis (3-8), who kept a pitcher's duel with Matthews alive until McMillin's clutch hit.

"Offensively, we did not swing real well at all today," Compton said. "I don't think we had any decent contact."

"The important thing is, we figured



Aaron Hark/The Gamecock

USC's Amber Curtis slides into second during Wednesday's win.

a way to [win]. We're not going to win a lot of games, real pretty. We're going to win a lot with pitching and defense, and that's what we did today and the first game yesterday."

The Gamecocks also shut out Tennessee (14-26, 4-13) twice Tuesday. Matthews earned another 1-0 victory in game one, and Stacey Johnson pitched a two-hitter in game two for a 4-0 win. Carolina now has four shutouts in its past five games.

"Hopefully, we can start building a

little momentum with these games," Compton said.

Matthews allowed a hit to the first batter she faced, Tennessee leadoff hitter Maura Mollet, but found her groove as the game went on.

"Actually, I started striking out more people in the seventh and eighth inning," the junior right-hander said. "The longer I throw, the better I get."

The Gamecocks had trouble providing Matthews with run support, but McMillin rose to the occasion in the eighth.

USC	1
TENNESSEE	0

"I just knew I had to put the ball in play," McMillin said. "I didn't have the best appearances in my first three at-bats, but I still had a lot of confidence in myself. I knew I could get it done, and when I saw the pitch come in, I just drove it."

Compton was confident that her team's best hitter could come through.

"I always want to see her up in tough situations, even today, when her first two at-bats weren't the prettiest," Compton said of McMillin. "I feel comfortable with her in there because she's been there, she knows what it takes, and she's a good hitter. And good hitters are going to eventually come through."

The SEC East-leading Gamecocks will resume play this Saturday, when they travel to Auburn to take on the Tigers for a three-game series. USC and Auburn will play a doubleheader on Saturday and play game three Sunday. Game one will start at 1 p.m. Saturday.

Tennessee, who lost its sixth straight game Wednesday, hopes to get back on the winning track at home this Friday in the Lady Vol Spring Invitational.

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