

No. 24 softball team prepares to face LSU in Baton Rouge

Tigers lead SEC West; USC looks for revenge

BY MATT ROTHENBERG
THE GAMECOCK

The 24th-ranked USC softball team travels to Baton Rouge this weekend for a three-game series against the fourth-ranked LSU Tigers.

The Tigers (21-7, 6-2 SEC) should pose a tall order for Carolina, but the Lady Gamecocks (21-8, 4-2 SEC) will surely have revenge on their minds. Last spring, USC dropped the SEC championship game to LSU 1-0.

LSU currently sits atop the SEC Western Division, and the Tigers were the preseason favorite to win the SEC regular season championship.

In just her first season at LSU, coach Yvette Girouard was voted SEC Coach of the Year last year and led her squad to a third-place finish at the Women's College World Series. Her team has a great blend of youth and experience, with a bevy of all-around talent.

The Tigers start with 2001 First-Team All-American and SEC Pitcher of the Week Britni

Sneed. A senior from Houston, Sneed is undoubtedly the team's ace, with an 11-4 record and 1.40 ERA. She has also accumulated 163 strikeouts already on the year.

2001 Second-Team All-American Kristin Schmidt is a strong second option, with a 7-3 record, 1.36 ERA and 95 strikeouts.

Girouard also has a threatening lineup at her disposal. Senior outfielder Trina Peel leads the team in hitting (.411) as well as in triples and stolen bases. First baseman Christy Connor, with her team-leading seven doubles and four home runs, hits for power. Megann Steege (.333), Aleshia Perry (.321) and Julie Wiese (.304) are also having productive seasons so far.

Joyce Compton's Carolina team is going to have to bring its A-game to top the Tigers. On the mound, Compton has two main weapons: Megan Matthews and Stacey Johnson.

Matthews is 12-2 with a 1.03 ERA this season, but more notably, she has eight shutouts and 109 strikeouts. Johnson has lacked Matthews' consistency, but she still provides productive outings; her 6-4 record is countered by a 1.65 ERA and 60 strikeouts.

In relief, Aleca Johnson has been performing quite well. She



No. 24 USC at No. 4 LSU

2 p.m. Saturday
11 a.m. Sunday
Tiger Park

is 3-1 with two saves this season, and she has combined with Stacey Johnson for two shutouts.

USC also has a potent lineup. Outfielder Melissa Sandel leads the team with a .361 average, and she is among the team leaders in other offensive categories. SEC Player of the Week Amber Curtis has been on fire recently, and she leads the Lady Gamecocks in home runs (five) and RBI (21). Senior Adrianna Baggetta hit well last week and is second on the team in hitting with a .346 average. Debralee Troesh and Kim Evans are also consistent at the plate and in the top five on the team in batting average.

Saturday's doubleheader begins at 2 p.m., while Sunday's game starts at 11 a.m.

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Baseball

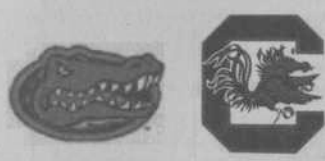
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Justin Harris, Meyer, Garriss Gonce, Dyson, Landon Powell, Jon Coutlangus, and Buscher all had multi-hit games.

This Gamecocks victory increases their lead in the all-time series with Wofford to 52-21-1. USC was 3-0 against the Terriers last year.

Wednesday night's game was the first of three meetings between the teams this season. The next game will be April 3 in Columbia, and the last will be May 1 in Spartanburg.

This weekend, the Gamecocks will play host to possibly the



No. 6 Florida at No. 4 USC

7 p.m. Friday
4 p.m. Saturday
1:30 p.m. Sunday
Sarge Frye Field

biggest series of the SEC schedule, as the No. 6 Florida Gators (20-3) come to town.

Florida is on a seven-game win streak and, at 3-0, is the only undefeated team in the SEC Eastern Division. The Gators feature a

SEC East Standings

Florida	3-0	9-1
Georgia	2-1	6-4
USC	2-1	9-1
Vanderbilt	2-1	8-2
Kentucky	1-2	6-4
Tennessee	0-3	6-4

high-powered offense that has scored in double digits 15 times already this year. The first game of the series will be Friday at 6 p.m., followed by games on Saturday at 3 p.m. and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.

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Men's tennis tops Georgia Tech

USC's 19th-ranked men's tennis team improved to 10-3 on the year with a 5-2 victory over Georgia Tech on Wednesday at the Sam Daniel Tennis Center.

With the victory, the Gamecocks upped their non-conference record to 7-0 on the year.

USC claimed an early lead in the contest by taking two of three doubles matches and a 1-0 lead heading into singles play. The teams of Seth Rose/Carl Wermee and Ben Atkinson/David Nelson locked up wins to claim the point for Carolina.

The Gamecocks continued their dominance in singles play. Angelo Niculescu, Marcus Westman, Wermee and Rodrigo Pacheco all claimed USC victories.

Westman, a sophomore from Sweden, improved to 13-0 in dual match play with his victory over Joao Menano at the No. 3 position.

Carolina will be back in action Sunday when it plays host to in-state rivals College of Charleston and The Citadel beginning at 11:00 a.m.

Men's golf team ready for next event

The USC men's golf team is

BRIEFLY

one of 15 teams competing this weekend in the 2002 EZ-GO Invitational in Statesboro, Ga.

This year's field consists of 10 of the top 20 teams in the nation, including defending SEC champion Georgia.

Last year, USC finished in eighth place with a three-round score of 880.

Senior John Bloomfield led the Gamecocks with an 11th-place finish.

Competing in this weekend's event for the Gamecocks is Brent Delahoussaye, Martin Rominger, Johan Kok, Nash Elliot and Matt Giffin.

The teams will play 36 holes on Saturday and 18 on Sunday.

Carolina wants to rebound from a disappointing 13th-place finish at the Conrad Rehling Invitational last weekend. Delahoussaye tied for 22nd after firing a 217 to lead the Gamecocks.

Tennis players earn national rankings

After claiming wins over four ranked individual opponents last weekend, the USC women's tennis team has three individuals and two doubles pairs ranked in the ITA national poll released Wednesday morning.

Katarina Markovski, who ended the 2000 season ranked 29th in the nation before getting injured, has surged to 57th in this week's poll.

The senior from Valjevo, Yugoslavia, beat then-No. 26 Carolina Mayorga in straight sets last Sunday.

Kathy Boyanovich, by virtue of her win over 55th-ranked

Katie Blaszk has climbed to 98th in the nation, her best ever ranking since coming to USC.

Also in the individual rankings this week is Jennifer Radman, who stands 101st.

The Stoney Creek, Ontario, native is back in the rankings after falling out earlier in the season.

In doubles, Radman and Boyanovich are back in the poll at 35th, while Lynn-Yin Tan and Jodi Kenoyer are ranked 48th.

The Lady Gamecocks are ranked 23rd this week as they prepare to play host to 12th-ranked VCU on Sunday at 1-p.m.

VCU climbed 13 spots in the poll after beating top-ranked Georgia last week 4-3. Georgia, despite the loss, remains in the top spot this week.

Overall, seven SEC teams are in the Top 25, including three of the nation's top four teams.

Cocky

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Cocky took fourth place in the video portion of the National Mascot Competition in January, and he won National Mascot of the Year in 1986 and 1994.

Cocky appreciates Carolina's recent athletic success and cites the 1999 football season as his toughest time as a mascot.

"You want it to happen so bad, and everything was so close," Cocky said. "But it was still 0-11."

This spring marks the current Cocky's last year patrolling the sidelines at USC sporting events, as he is slated to graduate in May.

He said he will miss the opening of USC football games the most; running out onto the field at Williams-Brice Stadium in front of 80,000 faithful Gamecocks fans was a thrill for the mascot.

"It's a huge adrenaline rush; it's awesome," Cocky said.

Cocky thinks his role is to interact with the young and young-at-heart, and he summed up his appeal: "It's the spontaneous part of everything. It's so cool."

The search for the new Cocky begins April 4 at 4 p.m. Tryouts will be held in the Indoor Practice Facility.

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecocksports@hotmail.com

"It's a huge adrenaline rush, it's awesome. ... It's the spontaneous part of everything — it's so cool, I like that."

COCKY
USC MASCOT

If you're going ...

USC is holding auditions to find someone to be everyone's favorite mascots.
WHAT: Tryouts to be Cocky
WHERE: Indoor Practice Facility
WHEN: 4 p.m., April 4

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