

CONTACT US

Story ideas? Questions? Comments?
E-mail us at gamecocksports@hotmail.com



SPORTS

GAME SCHEDULE

BASEBALL at Kentucky, 6 p.m. Friday
SOFTBALL at No. 15 Alabama, 1 p.m. Saturday
BASEBALL at Kentucky, 1 p.m. Saturday

Tigers take season series



FILE PHOTO/THE GAMECOCK

Gary Bell and the USC baseball team have now fallen to Clemson three times this season. The Tigers now lead the all-time series, which dates back to the 19th century, 152-103-2.

USC struggles, can't even series against Clemson

BY JAMES STARNES
THE GAMECOCK

Clemson pitcher Matt Henrie improved to 9-1 Wednesday as the No. 1 Clemson Tigers beat the No. 5 Gamecocks 4-1 in the last meeting of the season between the two Palmetto State rivals.

A Sarge Frye Field record crowd of 6,811 saw Henrie pitch seven innings, scatter six hits, strike out seven and only allow one run en route to clinching the season series for the Tigers 3-1.

Kyle Frank drove in the first three runs of the game on three hits to give Clemson (36-5) a 3-0 lead after five innings.

Carolina (31-10), who had its lone rally killed in the fourth inning with a double play and a controversial call by the first base umpire, could never string anything together.

"Every time we threatened, (Henrie) threw the pitch he needed to get us out," USC head coach Ray Tanner said.

The Gamecocks never sent more than four batters to the plate in any inning until the seventh, when All-American candidate Drew Meyer drove in the Gamecocks' only run. Meyer also stole another base, his 26th in 32 attempts.

Clemson got an insurance run in peculiar fashion. Frank and Khalil Greene both got base hits in the eighth, and Michael Johnson was intentionally walked to load the bases with no outs.

Jarrod Schmidt then hit a liner to center field, where Justin Harris appeared to make the play

for the Gamecocks. Frank tagged up and scored from third base while the other two base runners held their spots. But, apparently, Harris had not caught the ball; he actually trapped it on one bounce off the outfield grass.

So Harris threw the ball back in to the infield, where Meyer tagged the two runners to give Carolina the double play. Clemson head coach Jack Leggett argued that his players could not see the umpire's call, but after much confusion and a lengthy delay, the call stood.

Kevin Melillo, trying to give the Gamecocks one more chance, reached base in the ninth. He never got past first base, though, as Meyer flied out deep to right to end the game.

Patrick Hogan recorded his second save for the Tigers after throwing a scoreless eighth and ninth innings.

Carolina starter Steve Bondurant (5-2) pitched well in defeat and did a decent job of holding the robust Clemson batting order in check. He struck out five in five innings and allowed three earned runs on five hits.

With the victory, the Tigers extended their all-time series lead to 152-103-2 in a rivalry that dates back to 1899. Clemson won the first two meetings this season: 9-7 in Columbia and 11-10 in Clemson.

The Gamecocks won the third meeting at Clemson 8-6. Carolina has won six of the last 10 series games, however.

Carolina prepares to travel to Kentucky this weekend for a three-game set with the last-place Wildcats. They begin play Friday at 6 p.m., and then play Saturday at 2 p.m. and Sunday at 1:30 p.m.

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

Softball team ready to face Crimson Tide



USC at No. 15 Alabama

1 p.m. Saturday (doubleheader)
1 p.m. Sunday
UA Softball Complex

Lady Gamecocks travel to 'Bama after losing Florida series

BY MATT ROTHENBERG
THE GAMECOCK

The Lady Gamecocks softball team hits the road again this weekend as it travels to Tuscaloosa for a three-game series with the 15th-ranked Alabama Crimson Tide.

USC is looking to rebound after losing two of three games to Florida last weekend.

The Tide (41-13, 20-4 SEC) swept Mississippi State over the weekend as it continues to jostle with LSU for first place in the SEC Western Division.

Both Carolina (35-14, 16-8) and Alabama have already clinched spots in the SEC Tournament next month in Chattanooga, Tenn., but this is a crucial series for both teams as far as seeding goes.

The Tide has proved that it is one of the elite squads in the conference with its timely hitting and solid pitching. The team's mix of youth and veterans is impressive, and the younger players have been performing well.

Offensively, Alabama has the current SEC Player of the Week, Jackie McClain. McClain, a sophomore, hit .500 against Mississippi State and scored key runs in the series.



PHOTO BY COREY DAVIS/THE GAMECOCK

The USC softball team will be looking to lock down a good seed this weekend for the upcoming SEC Tournament in Chattanooga, Tenn.

She has a team-leading .408 batting average and is also first on the team in hits, home runs, doubles, RBIs, slugging percentage and on-base percentage.

Freshmen outfielders Ashley Courtney and Jackie Wilkins provide some pop for the Tide. Courtney is hitting .397 on the season with a team-leading four triples, and she's also tied for the team lead in RBIs with McClain. Wilkins owns a .333 batting average, and she has scored 41 runs.

Senior infielder Suzanne Olcott leads Alabama with 13 stolen bases.

On the mound, senior Shelley Laird is the unquestioned ace for the Tide. Earlier this season, she became the third SEC pitcher to notch 1,000 career strikeouts, following LSU's Britni Sneed and USC's Megan Matthews.

Laird is 23-7 this season with a 1.39 ERA and 250 strikeouts. She also has four saves to her credit.

Erin Wright seems poised to take over for Laird next season. The No. 2 pitcher has an 11-3 record, 100 strikeouts and a 2.35 ERA this year.

Freshman Jennifer Wright (7-3, 3.22) has also seen plenty of innings this season.

The Lady Gamecocks need to perfect their defensive play this weekend, as errors cost them two possible wins last weekend.

Kim Evans continues to lead USC in hitting with a .331 average. Her three stolen bases and 45 hits are team highs as well. Sophomore Amber Curtis is not far behind Evans, batting .316.

She also leads the team in doubles (10), home runs (five) and

RBIs (27). Senior Adrianna Baggetta has a .303 batting average and a .420 on-base percentage.

After notching her sixth career no-hitter last Sunday against Florida, Matthews will look to shut down the Crimson Tide hitters this weekend. She has a 19-6 record, a 1.20 ERA and 176 strikeouts this season.

The Lady Gamecocks will also counter with sophomore Stacey Johnson, whose 10-6 record, 83 strikeouts and 1.40 ERA place her just behind Matthews. Aleca Johnson (6-1, 1.67) has a team-leading five saves.

Saturday's doubleheader, as well as Sunday's game, begins at 1 p.m. at the UA Softball Complex.

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

China to get half of Yao's NBA contract

BY MARTIN FACKLER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SHANGHAI, CHINA — Yao Ming will have a big partner in his NBA career — the Chinese government.

Under regulations issued by the China Basketball Association, the 7-foot-5 Yao would be forced to hand over half of his income to China's government and sports authorities.

The regulations also include complicated procedures for Chinese professional players seeking to play overseas, according to Wednesday's Shanghai Morning Post.

The newspaper criticized the regulations as "complicating and confusing Yao Ming's NBA prospects."

Yao, a center, is considered a probable lottery pick and possible top-three selection in the June 26 NBA draft.

Yao's current team, the Shanghai Sharks, finally gave him permission Friday to enter the NBA draft after blocking him for years.

"I've already had many frustrations," the newspaper quoted Yao as saying. "A few more won't break me."

The Yangzi Evening News, a Hangzhou-based newspaper, reported Thursday that the new regulations would not affect Yao's plans.

It quoted China Basketball Association assistant director Hu Jia as saying his organization "has always supported Yao Ming's joining the NBA draft."

As a high draft pick, Yao would likely receive at least \$2 million in his first year and even bigger contracts in years to follow.

That's a big jump for a 22-year-old Yao, whose parents now ride to his games on bicycles.

But Chinese professional players like Yao will only be allowed to keep half of all earnings under the new regulations, which cover endorsements as well as salaries.

The rules state that players overseas must give 30 percent of earnings to the China Basketball Association — China's state-run equivalent of the NBA.

Government agencies will take another 20 percent, the Shanghai Morning Post said.

It is unclear whether this must be handed over before or after paying U.S. taxes.

It also was unclear whether these regulations were new or merely formalized existing practices.

Thursday's Beijing Times reported athletes overseas already pay half their income to the government. Two Chinese players are already in the NBA — Dallas Mavericks forward Wang Zhizhi and Denver Nuggets center Menk Bateer.

Beijing routinely requires other citizens — from engineers to concert pianists — to turn over large chunks of what they earn abroad.

The newly issued regulations also require professional players to be ready to return to China at any time, ostensibly to join the national team. They can also be punished for revealing the national team's plays and strategies.

Violators will be banned from the national team and from all domestic play in China for at least one year, the Shanghai Morning Post said.