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CROSS COUNTRY in NCAA Championships (Terre Haute, Ind.),
10 a.m. Monday
WOMEN'S BASKETBALL vs. Oregon in Paradise Jam
(Virgin Islands), 7:30 p.m. Thursday

Third-down problems plague USC to end

Clemson ends Carolina's season with close victory in Death Valley

BY JACOB JORDAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLEMSON — USC football head coach Lou Holtz says a couple of key plays led to his team's 27-20 loss to Clemson on Saturday.

And both third-down plays — one a deflected pass that slipped through a receiver's hands, the other a missed tackle — describe how the season has gone for the Gamecocks (5-7).

Carolina took the lead 20-13 late in the third quarter, and it looked like the Gamecocks were going to be able to hold Clemson (7-5) to a field goal on the Tigers' next drive.

But faced with third-and-10 from the Gamecocks' 11, Clemson quarterback Charlie Whitehurst avoided a blitz by Carolina's quarterback-turned-safety Corey Jenkins, rolled left and held the ball high as he crossed the goal line for the tying touchdown.

"We came with the blitz and had 'em," Holtz said.

USC safety Rashad Faison said Jenkins, who joined the defense two games ago, has not had the time to gel with the unit. Faison wasn't questioning his coaches' decision, but he said "stuff like that came back to haunt us all year."

Whitehurst said he also thought Jenkins had him but spun away instinctively. "Then I didn't think I would make it all the way, but I guess I did," Whitehurst said.

There was no doubt that USC,

which ended its season on a five-game losing skid, had lost momentum and its bowl hopes were slipping away.

"We've never been able to stop people after we've scored all year. Every time we score, they seem to come back and score," Holtz said.

Holtz said he was frustrated after leading Carolina to back-to-back Outback Bowl wins and a school-best 17-7 record the two previous seasons.

But Whitehurst deserves credit, too. The redshirt freshman looked more like a seasoned veteran as he led the Tigers to the game-winning score on their next possession — a six-play, 58-yard drive capped by Bernard Rambert's 2-yard run.

Whitehurst finished with 287 passing yards and no interceptions, and Rambert added two rushing touchdowns.

The Gamecocks had one last chance. After driving to Clemson's 35-yard line midway through the fourth quarter, freshman receiver Troy Williamson wasn't able to hold on to a third-down pass deflected by Rodney Thomas. The pass would have given USC a first down and some hope at a comeback.

"The linebacker kind of tipped it, and I lost focus of it," Williamson said. "Then it just hit me in my face."

Holtz said: "In the end, it was whoever had the ball last. And we dropped that pass."

The Gamecocks set up for a 47-yard field-goal attempt, but hardly anyone was fooled when Carolina ran a fake because the team's longest field goal this year was 38 yards.

Freshman kicker Josh Brown



Whitehurst

GAME 12

THE QUOTE

"We knew we had some problems, and we never got them fixed all year."

LOU HOLTZ
USC HEAD COACH

THE PLAY

The Gamecocks held a 20-13 lead going into the final quarter, but when Clemson quarterback Charlie Whitehurst converted a third-and-10 into an 11-yard touchdown run, their lead and momentum were gone. The redshirt freshman looked to be going down for a sack on the play, but he eluded the blitz and rolled out for the score.

THE STAT

27

Whitehurst was in a comfort zone Saturday, completing 27 of 38 passes against an injury-riddled Carolina secondary. Third-and-long was no problem, especially in the second half, when the Tigers signal-caller picked apart the Gamecocks at will.

took the snap, and his wobbly pass was easily broken up.

The Gamecocks would never get the ball back. Clemson held on for the final six minutes and sealed the win, the Tigers' fifth in the past

♦ FOOTBALL, SEE PAGE 8

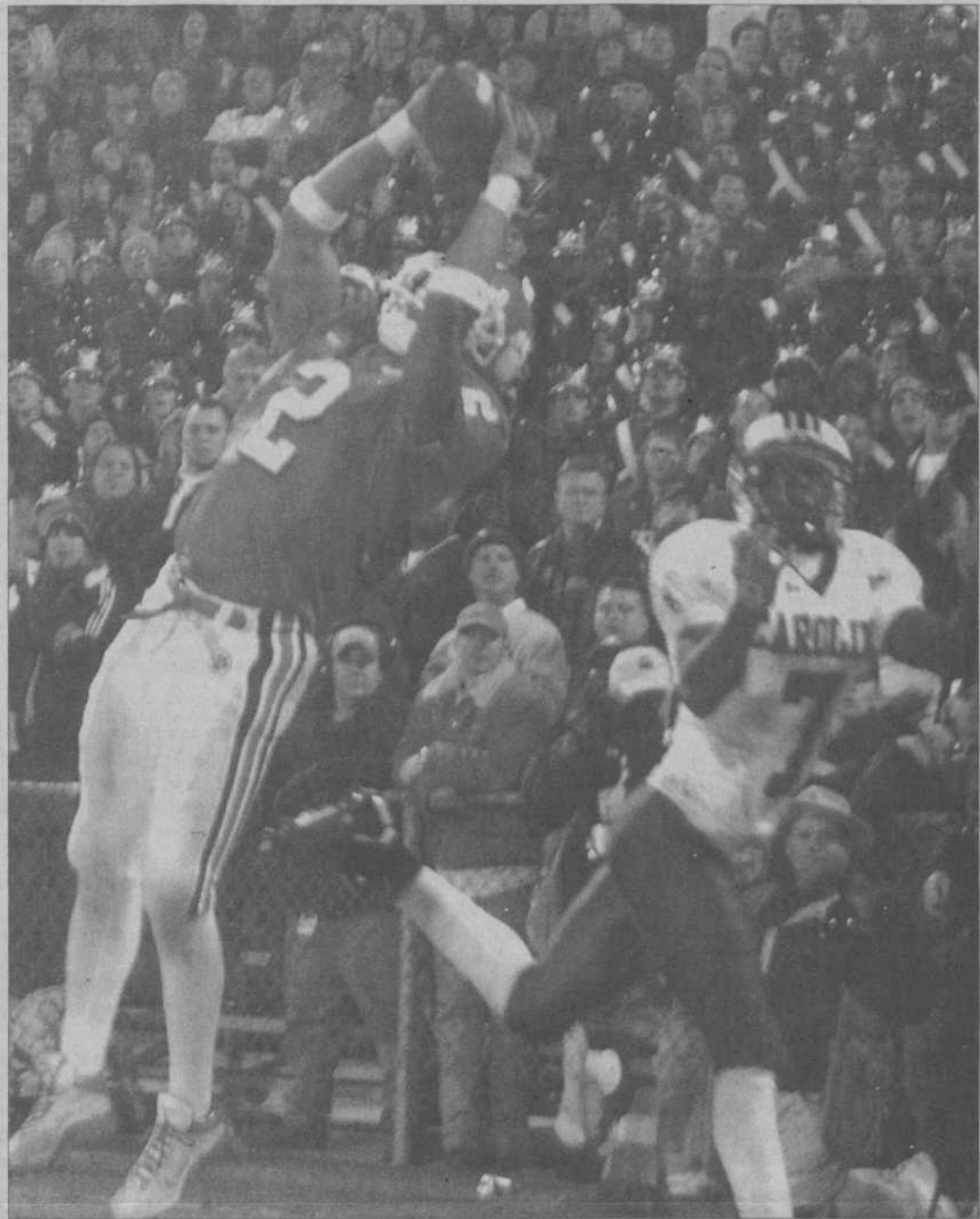


PHOTO BY CANDI HAUGLUM/THE GAMECOCK

Clemson cornerback Brian Mance picks off a Dondrial Pinkins pass in the second quarter of the Tigers' 27-20 win over USC on Saturday. The interception came on a third-down play.

OPENING UP THE HOOPS SEASON IN STYLE

Women start new arena off on right foot

Gamecocks top 2 in-state rivals over weekend

BY MATT ROTHENBERG
THE GAMECOCK

Armed with a brand-new arena, thousands of boisterous fans and a seven-game losing streak against its in-state rival, the USC women's basketball team wrote a new chapter in its history Friday night.

The Gamecocks, led by 23 points from both Jocelyn Penn and Cristina Ciocan, made short work of the Clemson Tigers. The 72-58 win, before 17,712 fans at the Carolina Center — the largest crowd for a basketball game in the state of South Carolina — gave USC its first victory against the

Tigers since 1994.

"Clemson's a really good basketball team, and that's one of the reasons we wanted to open with Clemson," USC head coach Susan Walvius said. "We're taking it one game at a time, and we're really excited we got (the win) for our fans. The fans were fantastic and certainly pulled us through this one."

"In past years, we've played not to lose, and we didn't do that today. Our postseason experience helped us, and I knew we could handle the big crowd; I knew we could handle the pressure of this game better because we had the experience in this position."

Carolina and Clemson battled it out for the first five minutes, but a trio of 3-pointers — one from

♦ WOMEN, SEE PAGE 8



PHOTO BY CANDI HAUGLUM/THE GAMECOCK

Point guard Cristina Ciocan scored a career-high 23 points Friday and led the USC women's basketball team to a convincing victory over Clemson in the first-ever game in the Carolina Center.

Men eke out opener win

	ETSU (0-1)	66
	USC (1-0)	71

BY JASON NOLL
THE GAMECOCK

The men's basketball team, in its first game in the new Carolina Center, fought to a come-from-behind 71-66 victory over East Tennessee State in Sunday's season opener.

"We're very pleased with this basketball game," USC head coach Dave Odom said.

The team started the season with a bang, winning the opening tip and following it up with a dunk by junior forward Kerbrell Brown. But things went downhill quickly for the Gamecocks.

The Bucs went on a 16-1 run, and USC struggled to put the ball into the hoop. After the opening

basket, the Gamecocks didn't score another field goal until nearly six minutes later, when Carlos Powell came off the bench and cut the deficit to 16-5.

Center Tony Kitchings, who also came off the bench, converted a three-point play to give the team some momentum, and then Powell scored on a turnover to bring the crowd of 14,922 to its feet.

USC continued to whittle away at the Bucs' lead before a three-point play by Powell tied the game at 19. The Gamecocks went on to lead at halftime, 41-34, with Powell being the hero of the half with nine points and five steals.

"He ignited us, and gave us the juice and energy we needed to come back," Odom said of the sophomore forward from Florence.

ETSU reclaimed the lead in the second half after Sam Oatman's basket put the Bucs up 47-45. ETSU led by as much as six points before stellar play from

♦ MEN, SEE PAGE 8

Volleyball upset in first round of SEC Tournament

	Alabama (19-13)	3
	USC (21-6)	0

BY KYLE ALMOND
THE GAMECOCK

Considering how the SEC regular season went, it was almost a given that the top two seeds of the conference tournament — No. 1

Florida and No. 2 USC — would be the teams to meet in the final Sunday.

Florida, with a 16-0 SEC record had gone virtually unchallenged this season in conference play. And the Gamecocks had only lost two SEC matches — both to the Gators.

But the seventh-seeded Alabama Crimson Tide pulled off a first-round shocker Friday, upsetting USC with a three-game sweep in Fayetteville, Ark. Game scores were 30-24, 30-20 and 30-23.

"Alabama played well today, and we helped them out some," USC head coach Kim Christopher said after the loss. "We didn't follow our scouting report."

Carolina (21-6) had easily swept the Tide (19-13) twice already this season, but the roles were reversed Friday. The Gamecocks could muster only a .167 hitting percentage, and they trailed 61-44 in digs.

"Alabama had everything to play for," Christopher said. "That made their season. They deserved

it; they totally outplayed us."

While Carolina slipped, Florida dominated its end of the bracket and lived up to the top seed, winning its fifth consecutive SEC Tournament title.

In the final, the Gators defeated Arkansas, the tournament hosts that swept Alabama in the second round.



Christopher

"We worked awfully hard leading up to this match because we knew how good Arkansas would be in their gym," said Florida head coach Mary Wise, who garnered her fifth straight SEC Coach of the Year award Thursday.

With the win over Arkansas, the third-ranked Gators are 29-1. Their only loss this season came at the hands of top-ranked Southern California.

Florida's Aury Cruz was named SEC Player of the Year, and she joined teammates Benavia

Jenkins and Nicole McCray on the All-SEC First Team. Rounding out the First Team were Arkansas' Libby Windell and USC's Niece Curry and Megan Hosp.

Gamecocks Berna Dwyer and Cally Plummer were named Second Team All-SEC.

Despite the early tournament flameout, the Gamecocks, ranked No. 18 in the nation, are assured a spot in the NCAA Tournament, which begins Dec. 6. The tourna-

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