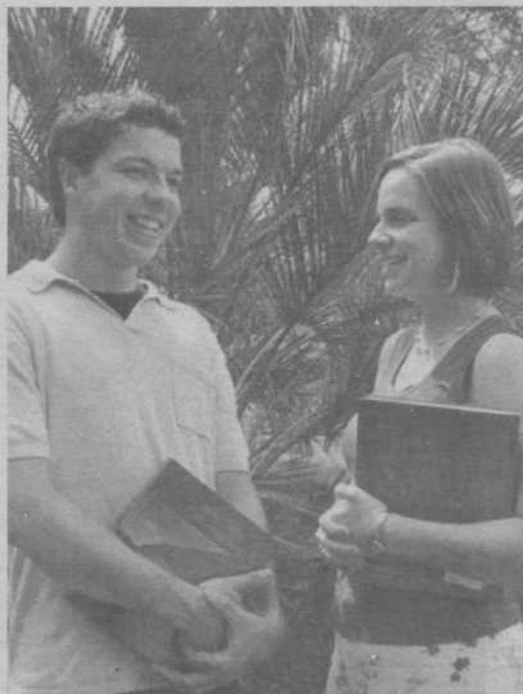




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GAME 11



Florida at USC

Saturday, Nov. 15
Columbia, S.C.

BY SHAWN ROURK

THE GAMECOCK

Going into the final SEC game of the season, the Gamecocks will have a tough test against perennial SEC powerhouse Florida. The Gators are coming off an 8-5 run in the SEC last year.

Last season, Florida embarrassed the Gamecocks 28-7 in The Swamp. This season, Lou Holtz and company face the Gators at Williams-Brice Stadium.

Florida's defensive front lost many of its starters from last season's squad, which was already pretty weak. It finished last season ranked sixth in the SEC in total defense.

One of the weapons the Gators will be using to turn their defense around this year is Todd McCullough, who is listed as one of the 90 players on the Butkus Award Watch List. The 6-foot-5, 225-pound Linebacker started four games last year and is expected to carry the linebacker core of the defense.

One of the major returning players Florida is counting on to help its secondary is senior Gus Scott. The 5 foot-10, 200-pound strong safety was named second-team All-SEC last year by the AP and the Sporting News after finishing with 44 solo tackles, eight tackles for a loss and two sacks.

Another player the Gators are counting on to power their secondary is cornerback Keiwan Ratliff, who was chosen first-team

All-SEC last year. The senior has been known to come up with the big play when Florida needs it.

With Rex Grossman leading the team last year, the Gators were ranked first in the SEC in total offense. With Grossman skipping out on his senior year to go professional, a three-way battle for starting quarterback has begun between Ingle Martin, Gavin Dickey and Chris Leak. None of the contenders have had much playing time.

"There's no one who just came out and took it over from the beginning. We felt like the two excellent prospects out of high school have been able to pick up on the system," Florida head coach Ron Zook said.

No matter which quarterback gets the starting nod, he will have two experienced targets in running back Ran Carthon and tight end Ben Troupe to hand off and pass to in the arsenal.

Team unity has been the one point Zook has pushed ever since taking over the program from Steve Spurrier, who glorified the quarterback position for many years.

"The past 12 years at Florida have made that a unique and exciting position with lots of expectations, but it takes the entire football team. That's

what we've talked to guys a lot about this year — being a team. We have to be a team for a lot of reasons," Zook said.

One of the more interesting matchups of this game will be between USC offensive coordinator Skip Holtz and newly acquired Florida defensive coordinator Charlie Strong. Both know each other's systems very well from working together at USC for the past few seasons, and it will be interesting to see how they react to each other's play calling as the game progresses.

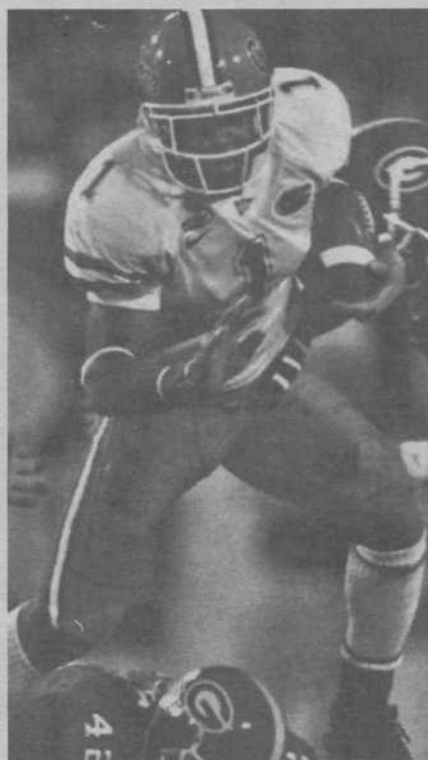


PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

Keiwan Ratliff played both ways last season as a cornerback and wide receiver for the Florida Gators. Ratliff was selected to the AP All-SEC first team in 2002.