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SPORTS

WOMEN'S SOCCER vs. Auburn, 7 p.m. Friday
VOLLEYBALL vs. Ole Miss, 7 p.m. Friday
EQUESTRIAN vs. Georgia, Friday
MEN'S GOLF vs. Carpet Capital Classic
in Dalton, Ga., Friday
MEN'S SOCCER at Clemson, 2 p.m. Sunday

Basketball lands commitment



PHOTO BY JOHNNY HAYNES/THE GAMECOCK

USC head coach Dave Odom nailed down his first recruit for the 2004 class after Jared Gaither committed to the Gamecocks.

6-foot-9-inch center from Maryland announces intention to attend USC

BY BRAD SENKIW
THE GAMECOCK

Although the 2004-2005 season is far off for USC men's basketball head coach Dave Odom, his team got a bit larger Monday with a verbal commitment from center Jared Gaither of Greenbelt, Md.

Gaither, a 6-foot-9-inch, 290-pound big man from Eleanor Roosevelt High School, announced early to Odom that his intentions were to attend Carolina and be the first to join the 2004 Gamecock recruiting class.

The high-school senior averaged 10 points, 12 rebounds and four blocked shots as a junior last season. His high school coach, Glenn Farello, said Gaither's greatest asset is something most big men don't possess.

"Offensively, the best skill he has is his passing," Farello said about Gaither's three and a half assists per game. "He's actually the best big-man passer I've ever seen at the high-school level."

While Gaither is still a young big man trying to understand the game and grow as a player, Farello said once Odom gets a hold of him, his offensive game should come along quite well.

"As far as his upside goes, he's got a tremendous work ethic. The

biggest thing Jared has going for him right now is he's a defensive presence down low. He's a warrior on the boards, and he'll battle."

Gaither is also very intelligent on the court, according to Farello. His teammates call him "assistant coach Gaither" because of his ability to understand the game and help the players comprehend it, as well.

Roosevelt High School won the championship two seasons ago behind Gaither and lost last year in the regional finals in the state playoffs. Gaither was an important part of both teams, especially last season, when the team was made up of four freshmen and three sophomores, Farello said.

Gaither, whose brother played college basketball at West Virginia a few years ago, is also a defensive tackle and tight end on his high school football team. Gaither doesn't expect to take any football scholarships or plan on being a two-sport athlete at USC.

As far as the recruiting process, Gaither decided to make his decision early, before the spring signing period. After visiting USC during the UVA-USC football weekend, Farello said when Gaither returned he "was real excited and got very comfortable

with the coaching staff."

According to Farello, the Gamecocks have been recruiting Gaither very hard since the summer and battled with several other schools during the early recruiting time. Although 30 schools from the Big East, ACC and several other conferences had shown interest last spring, St. Bonaventure, George Mason, Providence and Houston were a few schools that had put a scholarship offer on the table.

Farello said he was pleased with the decision by his senior, thinking that if he had waited until the spring to decide, USC would have still been his best opportunity.

"He wasn't looking for anyone to promise him anything," Farello said. "He wants to come in and earn his time and go from there. He understands what's expected of him at the next level, and he understands the challenge of it."

Under NCAA rules and regulations, Odom isn't allowed to discuss the commitment of any recruits until signing day in the spring. But, Farello said Gaither "couldn't be in better hands" under Odom.

"I think he'll really develop down there and will be a great asset to the team and help coach Odom get that program where it ought to be and where he wants it to be," Farello said.

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

Bye week gives me time for love affair



TYLER JONES
GAMECOCKSPORTS@HOTMAIL.COM

Other sports deserve undying attention, too.

I saw the pass float off the arm of Casey Clausen, and I knew the worst had happened. The seat that I had poured myself into hours earlier was discarded, and I dolefully limped out onto the buzzing streets of Charleston.

The pangs of sorrow in my chest were the first waves of heartbreak from a truly courageous effort by good guys in garnet and white. I knew it was heartbreak from experience — the way life turns into slow-motion, the loss of appetite and the dismal instant-replay effect of the moment during which everything went wrong.

I was certainly glad to be in the company of friends and not in that gauntlet of orange known as Neyland Stadium. I knew that the burning of my agonized soul would go away, but I could not deny the intensity I felt after this particular loss. It was like seeing the love of your life kneading the naked, doughy belly of Phil Fulmer in your own bed. I was lovesick, and the valorous vixens of Charleston could do nothing to cure my ruptured ventricles.

And then something strange happened. I realized that heartbreak cannot truly occur unless one is in love. This callused cynic had fallen head over heels in love with the team that had frustrated him to endless links. I was the loudest, most ardent Gamecock fan in that bar. I had threatened several Tennessee fans with a Heinz ketchup bottle and promised to take their firstborn if they continued their cacophonous rendition of "Rocky Top."

I turned to one of my friends and said, "I am in love with this football team, and my heart is broken." The response I received was nothing converse to my epiphany: "Tyler, you're just now realizing this? You know this team better than it knows itself. It's kind of creepy."

Which brings me to my point: I need an open date as much as the team. I need a chance to get in touch with my other obsessive sports personalities, such as my golf, baseball and basketball voices that have grown silent. And what a weekend to do it.

I must confess I am not much of a fan of the ridiculously long, 162-game preseason that Bud Selig and the boys of MLB endorse, but now there is an October season that will get my attention — at least this weekend. My money is with the Yankees, although I wouldn't put an emotional, give-it-to-Barry-fest, complete with 500-foot home runs and drowning fans in McCovey cove to bed quite yet.

As for the dimpled white ball, the gentlemen of the PGA Tour will be in Woodstock, Ga., for the World Golf Championships and a chance at a purse of \$1 million. The race for player of the year is up for grabs between Eldrick Woods, Vijay Singh, Davis Love III and the Canadian, Mike Weir. Like the Yanks, Tiger is a sporting phenomenon that is tough to bet against, but DL3 is a Georgia boy playing in his backyard.

By Sunday, the NBA will have a full week of training camp under its belt. That's right sports fans, LeBron is practicing as we speak and you-know-who is catching passes from Shaq and then kicking it out to Gary Payton for three.

So, while my heart mends from Saturday's misfortune, I will start dating other sports and hope that just getting out will have me ready for next Thursday night, when a corpulent quarterback named J-Lo will squeeze himself into Williams-Brice Stadium for a Thursday night thrashing, with ESPN providing the pictures.

Jones is a graduate student in the College of Mass Communications and Information Studies.

SEC FOOTBALL NEWS AND NOTES

SEC honors week's best performances

The SEC has named Arkansas' Cedric Cobbs, Florida's Johnny Lamar and Tennessee's Dustin Colquitt as week six's players of the week.

Cobbs won the offensive honor by rushing for a career-high 198 yards on 36 carries and one touchdown in the Razorbacks' exciting 34-31 win at Alabama last Saturday. The fifth-year senior from Little Rock, Ark., scored a touchdown that started the Arkansas comeback, as he racked up 64 yards in the fourth quarter. Cobbs is currently leading the SEC in rushing with 140.5 yards per game.

The SEC Defensive Player of the Week was given to Lamar, who had seven tackles, two for a loss, and an interception off Kentucky's Jared Lorenzen that set up the winning touchdown in Florida's 24-21 victory on Saturday.

Colquitt won the Special Teams Player of the Week for the second time this season as a punter in Tennessee's 23-20 overtime win against USC. Colquitt averaged 51.7 yards a punt and placed the Gamecocks

inside the 20-yard line four times. His 49.7 yard average is second in the nation and first in the conference.

4 big games make up this week's slate

The SEC will feature four conference games in week six, including Alabama at Georgia and Auburn at Tennessee.

The Crimson Tide and the Bulldogs will square off at Sanford Stadium as the CBS game of the week at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday. Both teams are coming off losses in their last games as Georgia had the week off after losing at LSU. Alabama leads the overall record 35-23-4, although Georgia beat the Crimson Tide 27-24 last season in Tuscaloosa, Ala., for the first time since 1913.

The Tigers are looking for its second SEC win of the season at home against Tennessee when the two teams face off at 7:45 p.m. on ESPN. UT hopes to even up the overall series, which stands at 22-21-3 in Auburn's favor. The Vols dominated in the last meeting in 1995 with a 24-0 win in

Knoxville, Tenn. Tennessee has won four out of the past six meetings, including four straight over the Tigers.

Ole Miss is visiting Florida this week, while the only other game is Vanderbilt at Mississippi State. The other eight remaining SEC schools have the week off.

Jefferson Pilot hits highest ratings yet

Jefferson Pilot Sports, the exclusive syndicated-television partner of the Southeastern Conference, attracted a record-setting ratings delivery with the telecast of the Florida Gators at the Kentucky Wildcats football game last Saturday.

The game, which saw the Gators come from behind to win in the last minutes, delivered an average 6.7 Household Rating (the rating is an average of all markets in the Jefferson Pilot Sports region that are measured overnight by Nielsen Ratings Service), winning the time period in each market. Charlotte, N.C., (WAXN-TV) recorded a 4.0 rating, the station's highest-rated SEC broadcast ever.

BRIEFLY

USC's CARES wins NCAA yearly award

The USC athletics department's CARES program, or Carolina Academic Resource and Enrichment Services, was named the CHAMPS Program of Excellence for 2002-2003 by the NCAA Division I-A Athletic Directors' Association on Monday in Dallas, Texas.

The CHAMPS program began in 1991 as an effort by the Division I-A Athletic Directors' Association to give student-athletes an educational and training program to help them become well-rounded individuals. The CHAMPS program is comprised of a commitment to academic excellence, athletic excellence, personal development, career development and service.

USC senior associate athletics director Tom Perry won the Dr. Gene Hooks Award for being NCAA Division I-A CHAMPS Administrator of the Year. Perry was recognized by the Division I-A Athletic Directors' Association for his five years heading USC's CARES program. Before arriving at Carolina, Perry was the associate athletics director and director of Student-Athlete Support Services at Syracuse University for six years.

USC baseball tops national recruiting

According to Collegiate Baseball, USC tied North Carolina for having the best baseball recruiting class in the nation this year. This marks Carolina's fourth consecutive top 10 recruiting class and the first time the Gamecocks have claimed the top spot. USC claimed seven commitments from junior college transfers and 12 incoming college freshmen. Carolina claimed Josh McDonald and Heath Rollins from Lexington High School, while also gaining a commitment from South Aiken catcher Phil Disher. Also, eight of the 19 recruits are from Florida, and five are from North Carolina, plus commitments of players from Wisconsin, Georgia and New York.

Among the commitments were the Florida Junior College Player of the Year, two Junior College All-Americans and eight all-state high school players.

Women's golf takes 11th at tournament

The USC women's golf team tied for 11th place Sunday at the Mason Rudolph Championships in Franklin, Tenn. This was the team's second competition of the season. Georgia won the tournament with UCLA placing second and Vanderbilt taking third. Arizona's Erica Blasberg won the individual title.

Carolina team captain Adrienne Gautreaux led the Gamecocks posting a three-over score and tying for 12th place. Redshirt sophomore Laura McCaslin tied for 23rd place, while senior Marci Robinson tied for 50th and junior Tiffany Catafygioti tied for 61st. Sophomore Erica Battle took 76th place. Senior Kory Thompson, playing as an individual, tied for 46th place.

Football looks to improve in bye week

The USC football team has the week off from gameplay but is still practicing hard, according to USC head coach Lou Holtz. His goal for the week is to see the team improve and said they are already off to a good start.

"We want to come out of this open date a much better football team and I think we can," Holtz said.

The team will get some time off with no practices scheduled for Friday and Saturday of this week.

After the Tennessee game, Carolina came out nursing a few injuries. Defensive end George Gause sprained his right knee and will undergo intensive rehabilitation during the off week. Although Gause is getting around on crutches, Holtz thinks Gause should heal quickly and said he could be back on the field for the game against Kentucky.

Running back Demetris Summers finished the game against the Vols a little injured with a pulled groin. Summers hasn't missed any practice time because of the injury and is expected to be ready for Kentucky. Daccus Turman has also been slowed this week with a back strain and was limited in Monday's practice.

Holtz said Tuesday that linebacker Ricardo Hurley's ankle is improving and Lance Laury will be hampered all year with his knee injury.

Stealing a win



PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

Florida's Johnny Lamar celebrates the 24-21 win over Kentucky last Saturday. Lamar was named SEC Defensive Player of the Week with his seven tackles and one interception.