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SPORTS

MEN'S SOCCER vs. Elon, 7 p.m. Wednesday
VOLLEYBALL vs. Kentucky, 7 p.m. Wednesday
FOOTBALL vs. Kentucky, 7:45 p.m. Thursday
WOMEN'S SOCCER at Georgia, 7 p.m. Friday
MEN'S AND WOMEN'S SWIMMING at Charleston, Friday
MEN'S TENNIS at Georgia Tech Invitational, Friday

USC looks to tame the Wildcats



Kentucky at USC

7:45 p.m. Thursday
Columbia
TV: ESPN

BY BRAD SENKIW
THE GAMECOCK

The USC football team (3-2, 0-2 SEC) will play host to its third Thursday-night ESPN game in school history when the Kentucky Wildcats (2-3, 0-2) come to town tomorrow evening. The Gamecocks' most recent Thursday home game came in 1993 against the same team, when Kentucky knocked off Carolina 21-17.

The USC players were given the opportunity to play the game and voted to do so because of the excitement the ESPN game can bring.

"The Thursday night game is probably one of the most-watched games like Monday night football," USC quarterback Dondrial Pinkins said. "Everybody in the nation will be watching. There's a lot of things to play for."

Carolina is 7-6-1 against the Wildcats, including three straight wins. The Gamecocks won last year's contest 16-12 when USC's Troy Williamson caught four receptions for 101 yards in Lexington.

Both teams have had extra time to prepare for the matchup, as both are coming off heartbreaking losses two weeks ago. The Wildcats lost to Florida after leading 21-3 in the fourth quarter. The Gators rallied to beat Kentucky in Lexington 24-21 after Taylor Begley missed a 49-yard field goal at the end of the game that would

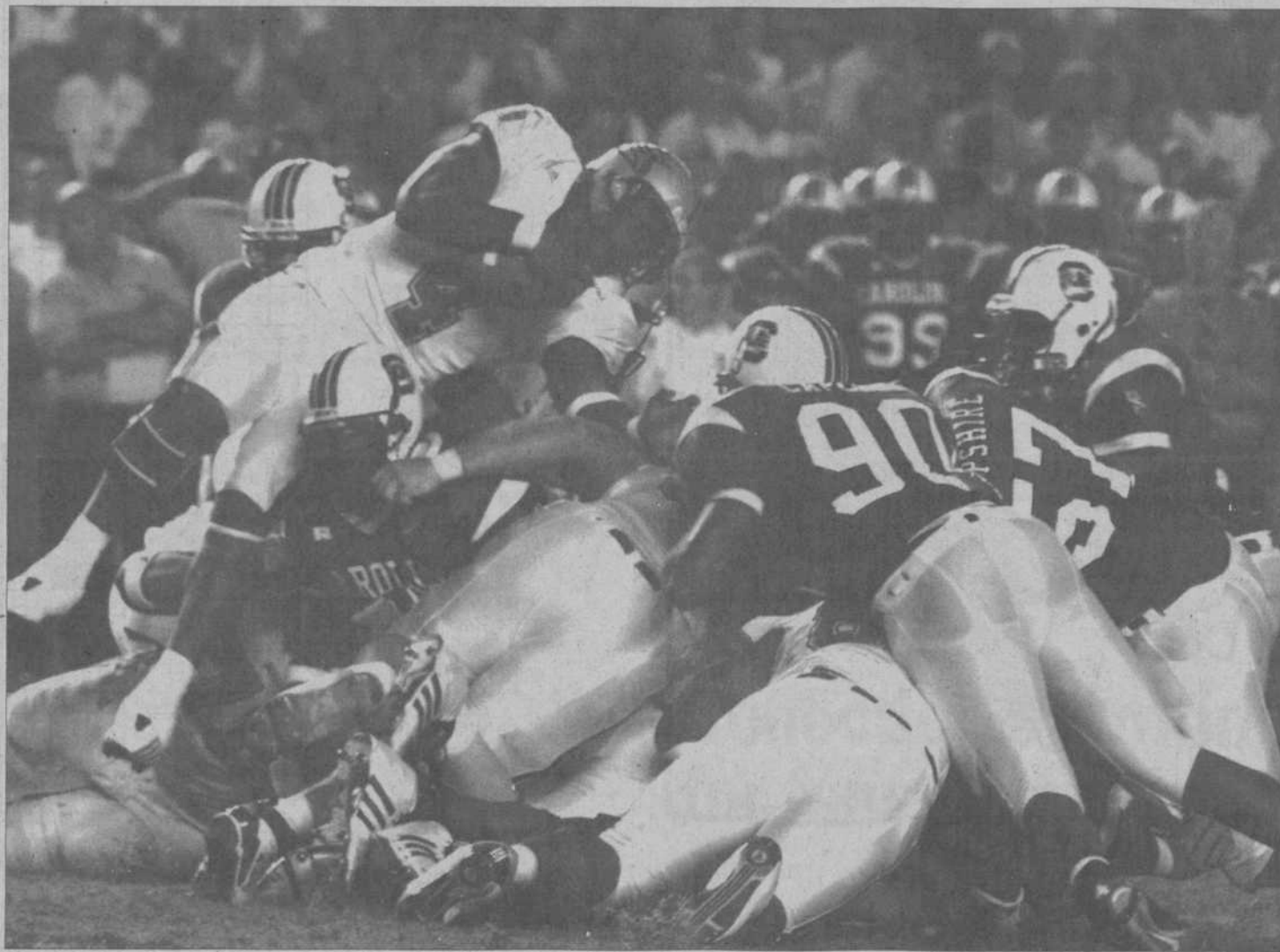


PHOTO BY JOHNNY HAYNES/THE GAMECOCK

USC's defense stops UAB quarterback Darrell Hackney during Carolina's most recent home game. The Gamecock defense hopes to overcome injuries and stop Kentucky quarterback Jared Lorenzen Thursday night. The game will be on ESPN at 7:45 p.m.

have sent it into overtime. Quarterback Jared Lorenzen went 18-for-27 for 179 yards and two crucial interceptions, one that set up the go-ahead score for the Gators late in the fourth quarter.

The Gamecocks are looking to bounce back after a tough loss to Tennessee in Knoxville, when the Vols scored an overtime touchdown to secure the win. Carolina has had 10 days to prepare for

Kentucky, and the players were given last Friday and Saturday off.

Holtz said he wasn't pleased with how the defense is coming along, but he hopes his team will be ready to go after its first SEC victory.

The Wildcats are looking for their first conference win of the season and are led offensively by four-year starter Lorenzen and special-teams playmaker and

receiver Derek Abney.

Although Abney doesn't have a special-teams score this season, he does hold several NCAA, SEC and school records for kickoff and punt returns. Abney has made his presence known this year by catching 15 receptions for 209 yards and three touchdowns.

"He's a very dangerous threat," USC head coach Lou Holtz said. "They run him on reverses, they

run him on screens, and it presents a lot of problems to you."

Kentucky ranks last in the SEC in total offense with just 311 yards per game, but it is first in red-zone scoring and averages 26.6 points per contest.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Wildcats rank in the bottom third in the conference in pass and rush defense but lead the league in sacks with 16. Also, free

safety Muhammad Abdullah leads the SEC in interceptions with four.

When evaluating Kentucky's defensive pressure, play of the safeties, offensive line and kicking game, Holtz said "it's easy to see why they have played very well. They should be 4-1 at the worst and possibly 5-0 at this stage."

Unfortunately for the Gamecock defense, the team is still dealing with several big injuries, although Holtz had hoped several players would come back healthier after the time off. Defensive end George Gause, who was listed as questionable after the Tennessee game after injuring his knee, is not expected to return for Thursday's game, and no timetable is set for Gause's return to the field.

"George Gause's injury and trying to get that thing adjusted is difficult," Holtz said. "Had I known or suspected or been more aware of George Gause's injury a week ago, we would have made a permanent switch there. But we don't have a permanent switch there, and I'm concerned about it."

Carolina is also having trouble as linebacker Lance Laury continues to struggle with an injured knee, while Ricardo Hurley, who returned against Georgia after an ankle problem, is being forced to learn a new position after Jeremiah Garrison moved to Hurley's position early in the season. Both Hurley and Garrison are being hampered by nagging injuries.

USC's all-time record on Thursday night is 2-1 with a 29-10 win against West Virginia in 1990 and a defeat of Mississippi State 16-14 in 2001. Thursday's game is scheduled to begin at 7:45 p.m. at Williams-Brice Stadium.

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Volleyball to square off with Kentucky

BY WES WOLFE
THE GAMECOCK

Coming off two wins at home, the USC volleyball team (9-7, 3-1 SEC) will finish out its home stand tonight against the Kentucky Wildcats (10-6, 2-2 SEC).

The Gamecocks came up big against Ole Miss and Mississippi State in their last two matches, beating each team 3-0. Carolina's other SEC win was against LSU in Baton Rouge, La., and USC's only loss came to Arkansas while on the road.

Ironically, Kentucky has faced the same SEC competition as Carolina. The Wildcats lost their road matches against LSU and Arkansas but defeated Ole Miss and Mississippi State at home by scores of 3-1.

In Kentucky's Sunday match against Ole Miss, the Wildcats racked up 75 kills. In contrast, USC only had 54 kills against the

Rebels on Friday. Kentucky's Melissa Popp and Sarah Spinner had 21 kills each, while Sissy Canfield hit 19. Spinner, Popp and Canfield also lead the team overall in kills this season.

The Wildcat volleyball team also played well against Mississippi State, with Popp notching 21 kills and Canfield hitting for .520 with 15 kills. Kentucky dominated the Bulldogs in each of the four games, but consistently committed errors that kept Mississippi State in the match.

All in all, Kentucky should have beaten LSU on Sept. 28 but did not finish off the Tigers in the final game because of early errors. In that match, Kentucky won the first and fourth games by six and seven points, respectively. Except the final game, two of the games LSU won were much closer affairs. The Tigers only won the second game by three points and the third game by two points.

The Wildcats' first SEC match, against defending SEC West Champion Arkansas, wasn't as close. Arkansas won its three games by seven, three and 10 points. Though Kentucky clearly stepped up the competition in the middle of the match, Arkansas put it away through mistake-free play. Kentucky's tendency toward errors came into play against Arkansas, costing the Wildcats the final game.

Kentucky, however, still has high-performance players. Spinner, in addition to leading the team in kills this season, did so last year while playing and starting in every match but one.

"With two years under her belt, Sarah's growth and understanding of what her role is has begun to really develop from a defensive and offensive perspective," Kentucky head coach Jona Braden said. "She's become more dependable, and her huge contribution to

this team is her experience and her competitive juices."

Last season, Spinner also recorded 23 kills on two separate occasions and finished second on the team in digs per game.

Canfield is adding to her offensive role by leading the Wildcats in blocks this season, with 62 in the team's 16 matches. The Kentucky senior is also leading her team in hitting percentage for the second consecutive season at .319. Last year, Canfield managed a .526 hitting percentage and 13 kills to lead Kentucky to its first-ever win against Auburn.

The match between USC and Kentucky gets under way at 7 p.m. at the Volleyball Competition Facility. Carolina then travels to Knoxville, Tenn., to take on the Lady Vols of Tennessee on Friday at 7 p.m.

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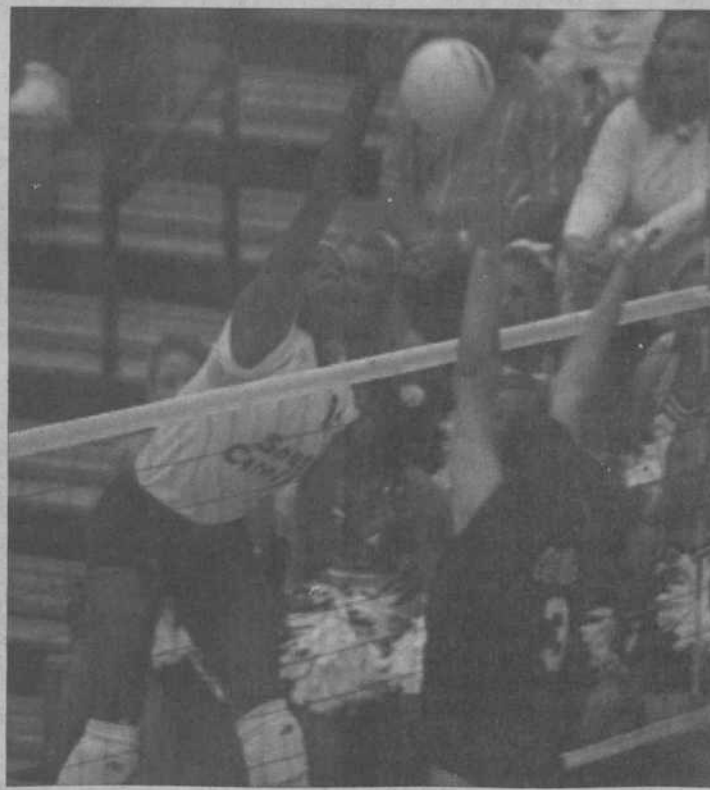


PHOTO BY MARK SCHILLING/THE GAMECOCK

Shonda Cole blasts a kill by an Ole Miss defender last Friday. Cole and the Gamecocks continue SEC play against Kentucky.

Kobe Bryant's trial guaranteed to be O.J.-like media circus



TYLER JONES
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Kobe will probably be acquitted by the spring.

The time has finally come. Somebody cue up "2001" because I am ready for this column. This is the one I have been waiting patiently to write for, oh, about three months.

That's right, it is "Kobe Bryant Time," and I am tired of holding back that 800-pound gorilla that I like to call my opinion.

Batten down the hatches and put the women and children to bed. I don't care what you have to do, but get ready for one weirdo's

take on the biggest trial to hit the media big-top since O.J. Simpson walked out of court a free man on Oct. 3, 1995.

For those of you who have only fuzzy, pre-pubescent memories of that case, which marked a downward slide in American morals, let me say that I was there from Bronco to acquittal. And if this trial is even half the overindulgent carnival that the O.J. trial was, then we're all in for a treat.

Which reminds me: Tomorrow is the official kickoff of the Kobe trial. So, what can we expect out of this preliminary hearing in Eagle County, Colo.? That all depends on what Judge Fred Gannett wants the public to know.

In fact, according to Colorado law, the prosecution only has to

show probable cause in a preliminary trial. Furthermore, there are no legal grounds to require the pre-trial motions to be heard at all.

Luckily, Judge Gannett took a page out of Lance Ito's book and opened up the court to the voyeuristic American public so that we can glue our beady little eyes to any one of about 40 channels that will be covering the hearing live and in living color.

But what about the real trial, where the victim will be cross-examined more carefully than Rush Limbaugh at a McNabb family reunion? Fortunately for us, the state of Colorado has laws in place that mandate what I would like to think of as a fast trial. Translation: We're looking at a verdict in the neighborhood of late spring to early summer, which might coincide with a Lakers championship run.

This, of course, only thickens the drama poup, which we will be consuming on a daily basis until

our brittle psyche's break from intellectual malnourishment. For those of you who suffer from attention-deficiency problems or just happen to be mentally insufficient, I say tune out and watch the race for the Democratic nomination. It will be much easier and safer to follow.

For those of us who are media-addicted freaks with no social life outside of ESPN and CNN, this is a chance for us to weigh in with our all-important predictions, so without any further adieu, drumroll please, maestro.

First off, let's take the time to think about the zoo of picketers and protesters that are sure to set camp outside the courthouse. Someone needs to keep the collage of posters and banners for an art museum display. Modern Socio-Political Sports Art has a nice ring to it.

Secondly, the NBA will enjoy some of the highest ratings they have ever seen. Imagine the Kobe versus LeBron matchup. And let's

not forget the Kobe versus Eagle County District Attorney Mark Hulbert. That one is going to be an ESPN Instant Classic.

Thirdly, look for Kobe to be ultra-religious by the time he hits the stand. There is no better way to gain forgiveness and sympathy than to sign up with Team Jesus.

In the end, Kobe will be found not guilty, but there will be irreparable damage done to his life — and not just in terms of public sentiment. We are talking a major financial train wreck.

Just think about the lost endorsements, legal fees, the civil case to follow the criminal trial, the \$4 million on the forgiveness ring already spent and the impending divorce that involves no prenuptial contract. And that is only if he is innocent of criminal

charges.

What Kobe is guilty of is first-degree stupidity. There is no defense for being a superstar and thinking that a little sex with a teenager won't come back to haunt you. Let's face it, about the only thing as emotionally and mentally unstable as an American-Idol-worshipping, 19-year-old white girl is a Hamas suicide bomber.

And now there are pictures of a gaunt and tattooed Kobe Bryant grazing around Lakers practice with the body language of a condemned man.

Although I could ramble off this page and onto the classifieds, I must close with one point. Regardless of his guilt or innocence, Kobe is certainly about to have a clearer understanding of rape because the media is about to penetrate him unmercifully.

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