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SPORTS

Volleyball at Georgia, 7 p.m., Friday
Women's Soccer at Ole Miss, 8 p.m., Friday
Women's Swimming at SMU Classic in Dallas, Friday
Football vs. Vanderbilt, 7 p.m., Saturday

USC looks to command Commodores



Vanderbilt at USC

7 p.m. Saturday
Columbia
TV: Pay-per-view

BY JAY POU
THE GAMECOCK

The USC football team (4-3, 1-3 SEC) will look to get back on the winning track in Saturday's Homecoming game against Vanderbilt (1-7, 0-4).

Carolina will be seeking its second conference win after a disappointing loss to No. 9 LSU last week in Columbia. Saturday's game will be the third of three straight home games for the Gamecocks.

Vanderbilt comes to town still stinging from a 27-8 loss to No. 4 Georgia in a game that the Commodores led at halftime. The Vandy defense was stifling in that game, sacking Bulldog quarterback David Greene six times and intercepting one of his passes. The young defensive unit, which starts nine sophomores and two juniors, allowed Georgia's league-leading offense only 64 yards in the first half, including only eight in the second quarter.

USC offensive coordinator Skip Holtz has his eye on the Vanderbilt defense after LSU's defense devastated his offensive

squad.

"Vanderbilt puts a lot of pressure on your quarterback," Holtz said. "Defensively, they run a similar scheme to LSU. They play extremely hard."

The Commodores' offensive attack has the potential to cause some damage as well. Despite his youth, sophomore quarterback Jay Cutler already owns several school records. Vanderbilt has a wealth of talent at the tailback position, with 2002's SEC offensive freshman of the year riding the bench behind junior Norval McKenzie. Vandy is also the least-penalized team in the SEC so far this season.

USC head coach Lou Holtz has been impressed with Vanderbilt's balanced offensive attack.

"Cutler is only a sophomore but will be one of the best in the conference," Holtz said. "He runs very well and had over 80 yards against Georgia. He is big and strong and physical and, most importantly, very durable."

"They run the option and throw the ball a lot as well. Their offensive line is very well-coached and very physical," Holtz said.

The Gamecock defense, first in the SEC in allowed passing yards, will be helped by the return of starting defensive end George Gause and starting safety Jamacia Jackson, both of whom returned to practice this week after missing the LSU game. The defense will need their help to improve on last week's performance, when it allowed LSU's two freshmen tailbacks to run for a combined 263 rushing yards.

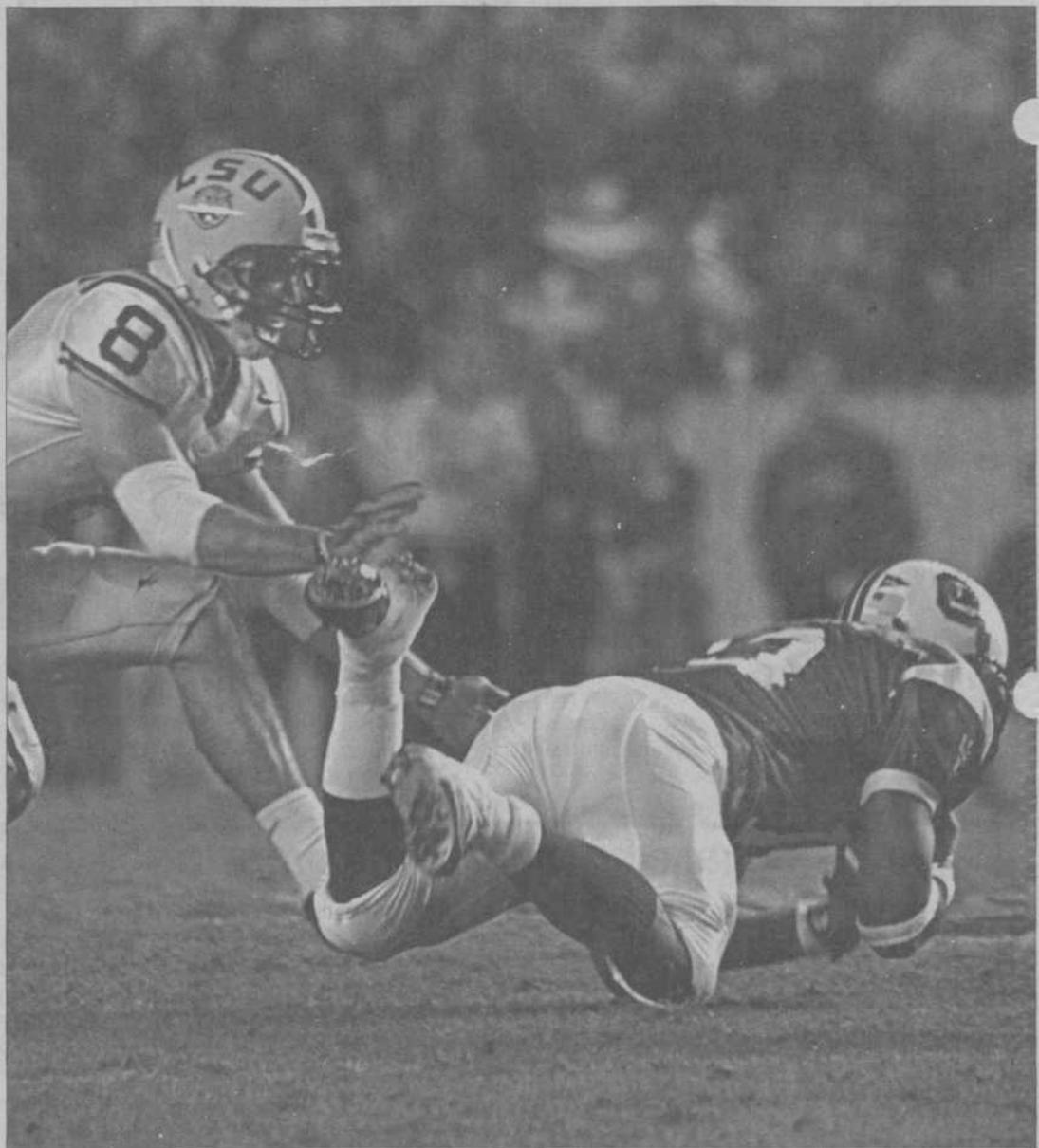
USC's offense will also look to improve over last week's meager seven points and zero rushing yards. Quarterback Dondrial Pinkins is coming off a career passing game against LSU after passing for 254 yards and one touchdown. The offense should also see some relief from injuries this week, with left tackle Travelle Wharton's ankle improving and tailback Demetris Summers recovering from a groin injury.

In last year's game, Carolina had to come from behind for a hard-fought 20-14 victory over the Commodores in Nashville. The Gamecocks last met Vandy in Columbia in 2001, when they handed the Commodores a 46-14 thrashing.

Saturday night's game will also be a homecoming for Vanderbilt head coach Bobby Johnson, who is from Columbia. USC will be looking for its fourth-straight Homecoming win since a 1999 Homecoming loss to the Commodores. Vanderbilt will be trying to snap an SEC losing streak of 21 consecutive games. A win for the Gamecocks would put them one win away from their third bowl berth in four years.

Kickoff is set for 7 p.m. at Williams-Brice Stadium. The game will be available on pay-per-view in Columbia, breaking a streak of three straight nationally televised contests for the Gamecocks.

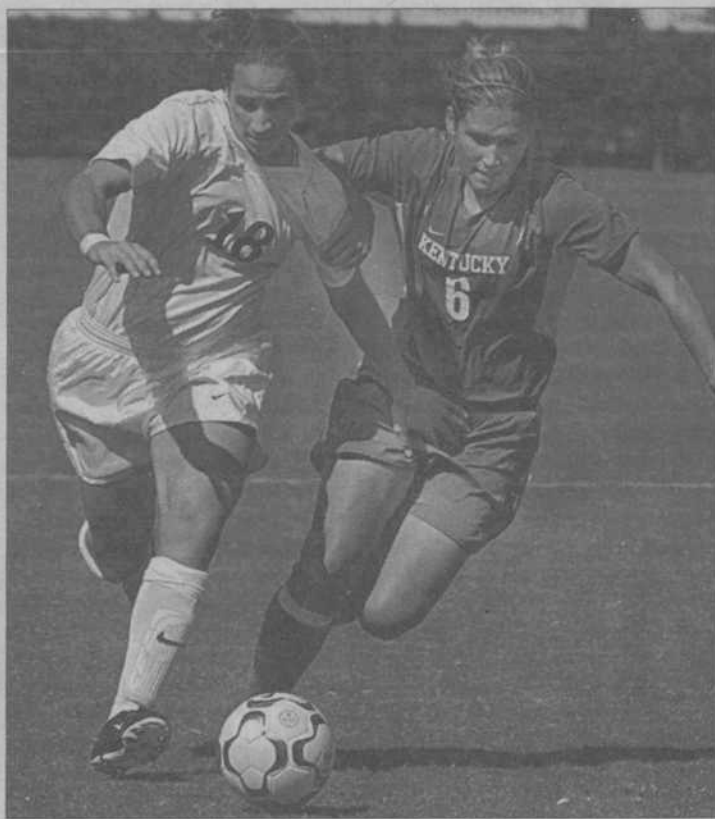
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USC's Syvelle Newton makes a catch against LSU. Newton has been a surprise at receiver since moving from quarterback. The Gamecocks will need his big plays against Vanderbilt on Saturday.

PHOTO BY JOHNNY HAYNES/THE GAMECOCK

Women's soccer hits road for important games



USC's Sarah Lentz and the Gamecocks have a big weekend ahead.

PHOTO BY JOHNNY HAYNES/THE GAMECOCK

BY BRAD SENKIV
THE GAMECOCK

With three games left in the season, the USC women's soccer team (9-6-2, 2-3-1 SEC) needs two big wins on the road this weekend at Ole Miss and Mississippi State if it wants SEC Tournament berth. The conference takes only the top eight teams for the post-season, and the Gamecocks are seventh. Ole Miss (13-3, 4-2), Friday's opponent, is second in the western division, while the Bulldogs (7-7-2, 1-4-1), who the Gamecocks battle Sunday, are near the bottom of the conference.

"It's important this weekend to play our game and do the things we do well," USC head coach Shelley Smith said. "When we've played well, we have had a lot of success this year. We need to be disciplined and as a group be organized and work hard moving



Smith

off the ball and connecting passes."

When Carolina travels to face the Rebels, the team will face a tough Ole Miss squad that is coming off a 2-1 loss to 17th-ranked Auburn at home. Before that loss, the Rebels had posted a nine-game winning streak at home after defeating Alabama 3-1 last Friday.

Ole Miss leads the conference in shots, points, goals and assists as well as giving up the least amount of goals this season.

The Rebels are tied with Auburn for the best winning percentage in the West, and with four victories, they have more conference wins than any other division team.

USC will look to slow down midfielder Kristal Menard, who is tied for first in the SEC for assists with eight and is tops on her team with seven goals. Goalkeeper Brittany Gillespie is one of the

best goalkeepers in the SEC, giving up only 10 goals in 16 games and having 59 saves.

Ole Miss also needs this win to stay ahead in the West, and the team needs only one more win to qualify for the postseason.

"We've worked hard all season for the opportunity ahead of us," Ole Miss head

coach Steve Holeman said. "We've done as well as we've ever done up to this point, and we're on track to accomplish our goals. We need to stay focused over this final stretch."

Carolina has won three of its last four meetings with the Rebels, including a 1-0 victory two seasons ago.

The Gamecocks' trip to Mississippi State might not be as difficult, but USC will need the win nonetheless. The Bulldogs have struggled in SEC play but allowed their first two goals at home this season in a 1-0 loss to Auburn and

a 1-1 tie with Alabama this past weekend.

The Tigers scored a goal just over 18 minutes into the game that sealed the win. In the match with the Crimson Tide, midfielder Heidi Ondra scored a goal 10:27 in the first half that answered an Alabama goal a few minutes earlier. What looked like to be an offensive game early turned into a defensive game as no other team managed a score.

Midfielder Heidi Ondra led the team with six goals and points. Carolina will face another dominant goalkeeper in Luisa Marzotto, who is first in the SEC with 78 saves. She has also accumulated five shutouts in 16 games.

The Bulldogs tied the overall series 2-2 with a 2-1 overtime win in 2001.

Friday's game against Ole Miss will begin at 8 p.m. The game against MSU is scheduled to start at 3:30 p.m. Sunday and will be televised live on SEC-TV.

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NCAA clears Balkman to play, attend classes

BY WES WOLFE
THE GAMECOCK

Renaldo Balkman, the 6-foot-7-inch, 195-pound forward from Tampa, Fla., was declared Wednesday academically eligible for NCAA basketball play by the NCAA Membership Services and Clearing House. Balkman started class Wednesday and participated in his first practice as a Gamecock on Thursday.

"I am so happy and relieved that Renaldo Balkman has earned his eligibility and that he stood the course over these difficult days and months," said USC basketball head coach Dave Odom. "He is a deserving young man who has fought hard because he knows what he wants."

The NCAA previously said Balkman was not academically eligible for NCAA play because of his test scores, but USC appealed the decision, which led to

Balkman's acceptance to Carolina on Wednesday. After the long wait, Balkman was happy to be at USC.

"I have been waiting for my eligibility status to be cleared at USC since last spring. South Carolina is the only place I wanted to be," Balkman said. "I was determined to see this through, and it has been worth the effort."

Balkman had a troubled academic history prior to his USC acceptance. The freshman originally was not allowed to play basketball at his first high school, so he transferred to a private academy to get his grades up and get some time on the court. Balkman then transferred to Laurinburg Institute in North Carolina, where he finished his high-school work and prepared to come to USC.

However, the NCAA thought there was something wrong with Balkman's academic record and began an investigation, which ended earlier this week.

"This decision is the culmination of a lot of hard work by a number of people both with USC and outside the university," Odom said. "Thankfully, the decision came in time to get Renaldo enrolled in the university's eight-week classes which began this week."

Odom said the work is not over, though.

"Now the real work begins for Renaldo and for this team," Odom said. "I've asked him to put his struggles behind him and concentrate on being the best student-athlete and person he can be."

Balkman was also happy for the help, but ready to start playing.

"I owe so much to a number of people who helped me through this process," he said.

The men's basketball team opens the regular season at home against Gardner-Webb on Nov. 17.

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BRIEFLY

Women's swimming to compete at SMU

The USC women's swimming and diving team will participate in the SMU Women's Classic this weekend. Teams from Stanford, Florida, Indiana, Washington and host SMU will participate in the Classic. Eight swimmers and one diver will be competing from each team.

Carolina will send its two All-Americans, Jennifer VanAssen and Holly Hodges, along with Ashleigh Bastak, Bronwyn Dedekind, Kendel Fiorentino, Kaelon May, Carolyn McHugh, Haley Skaggs and Heather Skaggs.

Nine events will be held each of the two days of the event. Competition starts at 8:30 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday evenings.

USC baseball to play against alumni

The USC baseball team will square off against former USC

players at Sarge Frye Field in the annual Alumni Game Saturday at 1 p.m. Adam Everett, who was an All-American while at Carolina and is currently with the Houston Astros, will be attending. Eight other former All-Americans will be playing, including Ryan Bordenick, Brian Buscher, Mike Cook, Joe Kucharski, Hank Small, Blake Taylor, Derick Urquhart and Mac White.

There will also be 14 players who are currently playing or have played professional baseball. Those players include Gary Bell, Steven Bondurant, Garrett Carter, D.T. Cromer, Rob DeBoer, Brennan Dees, Trey Dyson, Justin Harris, Chris Hernandez, Bryon Jeffcoat, Tripp Kelly, J.J. Pearsall, Patrick Sexton and Jeff Twitty.

Track banquet set to honor USA stars

The USC track and field team will host a banquet Friday that will feature Team USA

track stars Allen Johnson and Chryste Gaines.

In August, Johnson became the first-ever hurdler to win four World Championships. Johnson is also a volunteer assistant for Carolina and a 1996 Olympic gold medalist.

Gaines has won three World Championships as a member of the Team USA 4x100 relay team.

Equestrian team travels to Auburn

The USC equestrian team will face the Auburn Tigers this weekend in Carolina's fourth competition of the year and its second head-to-head contest. The Gamecocks have won both IHSA events, but had a close loss to Georgia in the only varsity contest of the year.

This is Auburn's first competition of the year. Activities will start at Auburn on Saturday. USC's next competition will be at Judson College in Autaugaville, Ala., for an IHSA event. Judson participated in the S.C. IHSA on Sept. 27.