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SPORTS

Game Schedule

MEN'S BASKETBALL at Vanderbilt, 8 p.m. Wednesday
WOMEN'S BASKETBALL at College of Charleston, 7 p.m. Wednesday
WOMEN'S TENNIS vs. Davidson, 6 p.m. Wednesday
MEN'S & WOMEN'S SWIMMING vs. Alabama, 4 p.m. Friday

Tough defense helps USC beat Tigers

BY JONATHAN HILLYARD
THE GAMECOCK

The USC men's basketball team (17-2, 4-1 SEC) continued its hot streak in a 61-55 nail-biter against the LSU Tigers (12-4, 2-3) Saturday night. Despite being down by three points with less than four minutes to play, the Gamecocks once again found a way to win.

"Everybody feels that somehow, someday, we're going to get it done," said senior point guard Mike Boynton. "Our slogan for the last few weeks has been, 'Find a way,' and if we aren't shooting well, then we have to find another way to win."

Not shooting well would be an outrageous understatement for the Gamecocks on Saturday. Despite ending up at a modest 38.2 percent from the field, Carolina was a horrific 1-for-23 from behind the 3-point line. The shooting did not affect the defense, however, as USC forced 23 LSU turnovers, recorded 14 steals and held LSU to 39 percent from the field. Carolina would score 25 points off LSU turnovers.

The Gamecocks improved to 4-1 in the conference and continued their second-best conference start in school history. The victory was the fourth win in the last five tries against the Tigers. Carolina also improved its record in the Colonial Center to 22-5 in front of yet another record crowd of 17,927.

"As hard as our team played, our fans were at their very best," USC head coach Dave Odom said. "I talked to a guy who has worked here 29 years, and he said he's never heard our crowd at the old building and certainly not in this one like it was tonight. It was a wonderful night for Gamecocks everywhere."

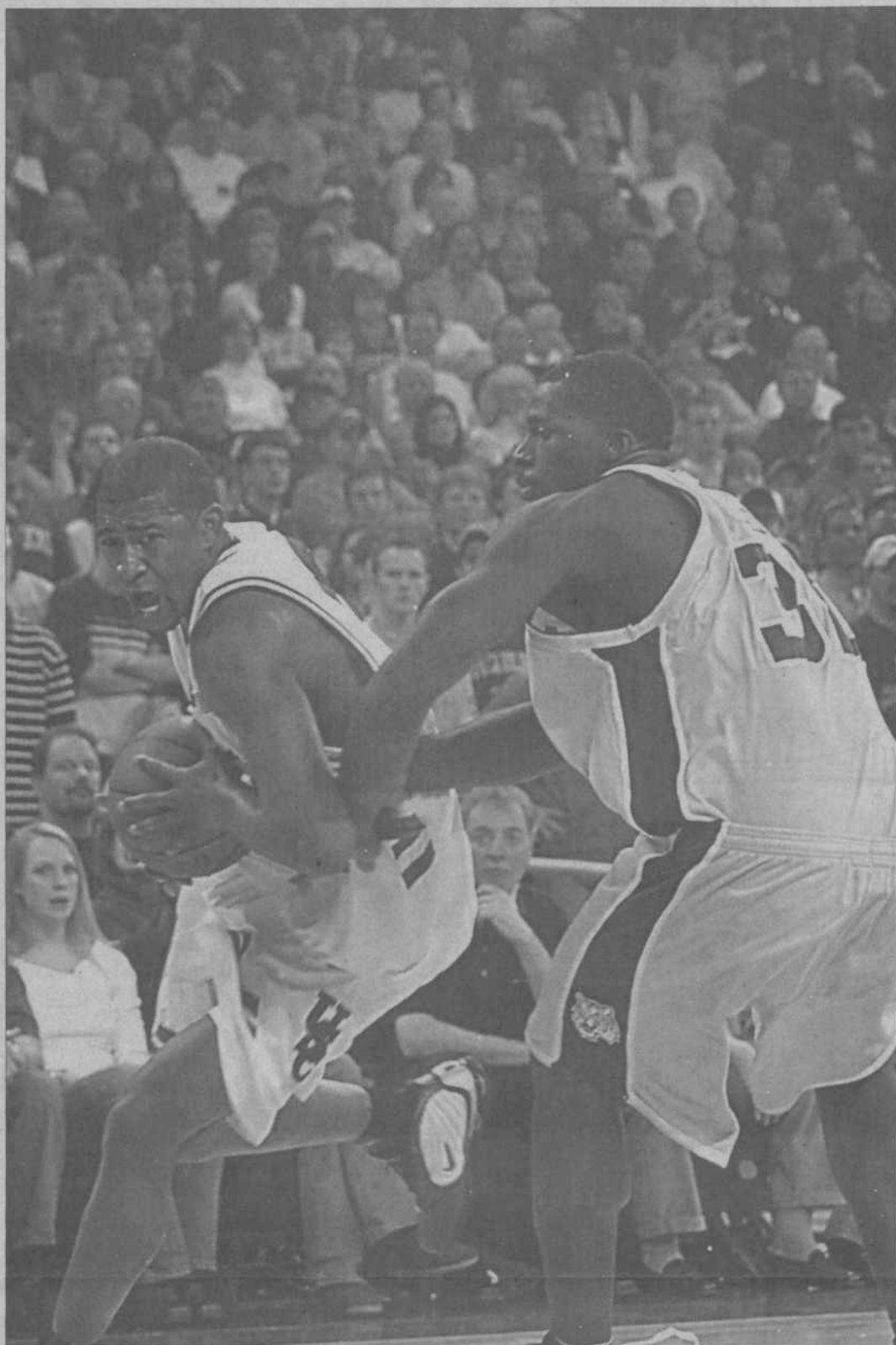
USC got a heavy dose of pre-season All-SEC forward Jaime Lloreda, who was LSU's offense with 19 points and 16 rebounds. For the Gamecocks, despite poor shooting, four players finished in double figures. USC forwards

Rolando Howell and Renaldo Balkman scored 12 and 11 points, respectively, while guard Josh Gonner added a very quiet 10 points. The night was highlighted by the play and passion of junior forward Carlos Powell, who scored 12 points off of 5-of-12 from the field, one of which was Carolina's only 3-pointer of the night. He also recorded four steals in what was a game-saving defensive performance by the USC defense. Powell's 12 points continues his streak of having scored in double figures in every game this season, and he has now scored in 55 straight games.

"Carlos has really worked hard and defined himself as a high-level player," Odom said. "He was the best of the best tonight."

The Gamecocks had a solid first half of play and held a 10-point advantage midway through the first half. USC maintained the lead with good defense, forcing 13 first half turnovers on nine steals while only turning the ball over four times. The momentum would take a 180-degree turn at the end of the half, however, as LSU mounted a 7-0 run to go into the half only trailing Carolina by three. They would continue the run in the second half, outscoring the Gamecocks 8-2 in the opening minutes of the second half and building a quick lead. But in a recurring theme, the momentum would shift back to the Gamecocks as they went on a 10-2 run to regain the lead. The leadership of Powell would then prevail as he finally broke the spell, hitting USC's first three-pointer with 1:35 to go. Gonner would steal the inbound pass and score to put the crowd in chaos and give Carolina the lead for good.

USC will now take its four game SEC winning streak to Nashville, Tenn., to take on the Vanderbilt Commodores (13-3, 2-3). Vanderbilt is coming off a loss on the road to Arkansas but hasn't lost in its last 11 games at Memorial Gym in Nashville. Tip-off is scheduled for Wednesday at 8 p.m.



Carlos Powell drives past an LSU player in Carolina's victory over the Tigers on Saturday night. Powell had 12 points, four steals and hit the only 3-pointer of the game for USC.

PHOTO BY DAVID STAGG/THE GAMECOCK

Wildcats' scratch keeps women on losing streak

BY JOEL WALLACE
THE GAMECOCK

After wrapping Columbia in his icy grip, Old Man Winter's work wasn't complete until he blew into the Colonial Center around half-time to ice the hot-shooting USC women's basketball team (8-9, 0-5 SEC), which lost to the Kentucky Wildcats 75-61 Sunday afternoon.

After going 7-of-11 on 3-pointers in the first half, the Gamecocks found themselves up 38-29 heading into the locker room against the Wildcats. When the teams took the floor for the second half, it was an entirely different story. Kentucky made its next four 3-point attempts, while USC shot only 2-of-11 from beyond the arc in the second half.

"We struggled at the beginning of the second half," USC head coach Susan Walvius said. "You win games in the first five minutes

of that half. It is the most critical time of the game, and we didn't come out with enough intensity. We need more fight and focus from our upper-class players. They need to show us direction and how to focus."

The Wildcats evened their overall record to 9-9 while picking up their first SEC win under first-year head coach Mickie DeMoss.

"It is great to get our first SEC win," DeMoss said. "We attacked their zones in the second half, and that really got us going. I'm proud of this team."

All five of the Wildcats' starters posted double-figures in scoring, with Danyelle Payne leading the way with 18 points.

"They came at us in the transition game at the beginning of the second half," Walvius said. "We would make a mistake and drop our heads, and they would just

beat us down the floor. They were very aggressive."

Freshman guard Lauren Simms led the Gamecocks with 18 points, going 7-20 from the field while picking up three steals. Guard Kelly Morrone also had an impressive performance Sunday, scoring 14 points while shooting 4-5 from 3-point range.

"Confidence is the most important thing to turning a losing streak around," Morrone said. "There is a lot of basketball left, so we still have time to get the job done."

Walvius reflected her players' optimism, reaffirming her faith in their ability to get back on track and break the Gamecocks' eight-game losing streak.

"I believe in this team," Walvius said. "We just need to work harder on defense. If I am

♦ BASKETBALL, SEE PAGE 11



Guard Cristina Ciocan pushes the ball up the court. Ciocan scored seven points in the loss to Kentucky on Sunday.

PHOTO BY MARK SCHILLING/THE GAMECOCK

Athletics department awarded for Team Gamecocks program

BY WES WOLFE
THE GAMECOCK

The USC Athletics Department was awarded the Helping Hands and Hearts Award by Home Works of South Carolina last week for its work to build and repair homes for people in financial need.

The award was given "to recognize the tireless efforts provided blitz after blitz to not only make repairs to homes of the elderly but to more importantly convey hope," Hank Chardos, director of Home Works, said. "The student-athletes have set a standard, an ethic of hard work and

service to those in need in the community."

The award was presented on Jan. 18 to USC Athletics Director Mike McGee and CHAMPS/Life Skills coordinator Collin Crick at the Home Works Board of Directors meeting.

"We've worked with Hank Chardos for four semesters now with Home Works to repair homes around the community," Crick said.

Team Gamecocks, the athletics department's community service program and a part of the CHAMPS/Life Skills program, is comprised primarily of Carolina student-athletes who are in-

involved in projects like re-roofing homes for homeowners in need, which they did on the Home Works Day of Service in October. According to uscsports.com, Team Gamecocks has also participated in collecting food for the Harvest Hope Food Bank, visiting veterans and children in hospitals and working with various after-school programs.

The CHAMPS program was designed by the NCAA to help the lives of student-athletes in college. CHAMPS, Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success, covers five main areas

♦ AWARD, SEE PAGE 11

Fans can make the difference

BY BEN SINCLAIR
THE GAMECOCK

For the first time since USC was the 2001 NIT runner-up, Gamecock basketball fans have a reason to support their team. The team is off to a mind-boggling 17-2 start, and all is well in Gamecock country.

The bad news is that this team is not a lock for the NCAA Tournament. The good news is that filling up the Colonial Center can be a large part of the reason Carolina gets in or not.

While 17-2 looks good on any resume, there are still important

games left to play. The Gamecocks need to at least split the next two games at Ole Miss and the once-ranked Vanderbilt. If there is any knock on this team, it is that it has trouble winning on the road. Winning the 2003 Guardians Classic and beating Auburn in overtime will not silence all the critics. Unfortunately, some of those critics select at-large bids for the NCAA Tournament.

The Gamecocks sit at 59th in the latest RPI rating, college basketball's version of the BCS. This is in large part because of a schedule some experts claim could be the worst in the country. However, as Richmond beat Kansas on Kansas's home court, Georgia defeated Kentucky and Georgia Tech, and N.C. State defeated Georgia Tech and Virginia, the computer is starting to see that this South Carolina team is better than many originally thought.

On ESPN.com, basketball expert Joe Lunardi's Bracketology page currently lists South Carolina as a No. 9 seed. Assuming this projection is correct, there are only about 10 teams between USC making the tournament and not making it.

Translation: One bad week, and this team is on the outside looking in.

This is where the fans come in. Gamecock fans have certainly done their part the last two home games by breaking Colonial Center attendance records in home game victories against Tennessee and LSU. This young and energetic team feeds off the crowd. They seem to elevate their game as the crowd gets louder. This team has looked impressive in games against Tennessee and N.C. State and lackluster in poorly attended games like Yale and Gardner-Webb.

I expect the game against Kentucky will set a new attendance record, but the team could use over 17,000 from here on out. While it sounds too early to be talking about the NCAA Tournament, there are just five basketball home games left. Mississippi State, Kentucky and Vanderbilt remain, and they have all been ranked this season. Games against Georgia and Alabama may not be as attractive, but they may be crucial in determining where this team finishes in the conference.

Great fan support may not only provide the basketball team a boost on the court, but it may help on Selection Sunday as well.

The NCAA Tournament is a business out to make as much money as possible. College football teams with large fan support get boosted to bowls they have no business being in. Likewise, teams with poor fan support usually get left out in the cold in smaller bowl games.

If one agrees this happens in college football, certainly it must occur to some extent in college basketball as well. USC has not been known nationally as a basketball school since the glory days under Frank McGuire in the 1970s. Based on the RPI and Bracketology rankings, one can easily determine that there are not a lot of Gamecocks outside of Columbia. However, breaking attendance records the last two games proves that excitement exists, and Gamecock fans

♦ SINCLAIR, SEE PAGE 11



PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

USC student-athletes re-roof a house in Columbia last semester as a part of the Team Gamecocks community service program.