

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S TRACK at the Millrose Games

in New York City

SOFTBALL at Charlotte, Noon Saturday

MEN'S BASKETBALL at Kentucky, 1 p.m. Saturday

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S SWIMMING vs. Georgia, 1 p.m. Saturday

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SPORTS

Football recruiting period ends with strong showing by Carolina

BY JONATHAN HILLYARD
THE GAMECOCK

USC head coach Lou Holtz and his staff did something in recruiting in the past week that his football team has not been able to do in recent years — finish strong.

"We'll see what happens, but we have the potential to be awfully good," Holtz said Wednesday. "We did a good job of balancing our needs at various positions."

A long, drawn-out process came to a close on Wednesday when 28 high school recruits signed their letter of intent to attend USC and play for the Gamecocks. Carolina did a fairly good job of putting a metaphorical fence around the state, as 15 of USC's recruits are from the Palmetto state. Those signees included five of Rivals.com's South Carolina Top 15, headlined by defensive tackle Dorian Capers and defensive back C.J. Barber. Other big pickups for the Gamecocks were Gaffney's wide receiver Sidney Rice and All-American defensive tackle from Marshville, N.C., Marque Hall.

How do the Gamecocks stack up against their rivals?

Recruiting in the Southeast is

always a fierce battle, and this year was no exception. Perennial powers proved to be the class of the bunch and the rich definitely got richer on signing day.

SOUTH CAROLINA — 5-STAR: 0, 4-STAR: 3, 3-STAR: 11

USC's class is led by four-star Marshville, N.C. native Hall. Rivals.com rates Hall the 12th best defensive tackle in the nation. In addition to Hall, USC also signed Shrine Bowl MVP defensive tackle Matt Raysor from Bamberg. Two-sport phenom Rice will play receiver for the Gamecocks and hails from Gaffney.

GEORGIA BULLDOGS — 5-STAR: 1, 4-STAR: 11, 3-STAR: 8

Despite losing a little momentum on signing day when Florida essentially stole two top recruits away, the Bulldogs finished strong, signing Brandon Miller, the best defensive end in the country from Colquitt, Ga. The Bulldogs were also able to win recruiting wars for Rivals 100 prospects such as linebacker Josh Johnson and running back Thomas Brown.

FLORIDA — 5-STAR: 1, 4-STAR: 11, 3-STAR: 10

In what is becoming a trend, head coach Ron Zook ended his

recruiting season in a tremendous fashion again, signing All-American defensive end Derrick Harvey from Greenbelt, Md. the day before signing day. The Gators will also add dual-threat quarterback Cornelius Ingram, a four-star quarterback from Hawthorne, Fla., and Kyle Jackson, the second rated safety in the country from Neptune Beach, Fla.

TENNESSEE — 5-STAR: 2, 4-STAR: 8, 3-STAR: 8

The Vols kept the trend in the SEC going, signing two five-star prospects, both out of a junior college. Jesse Mahelona is a five-star defensive tackle from Costa Mesa, Calif. and Albert Toeania is a five-star offensive lineman from San Francisco, Calif. Tennessee also signed S.C. native Robert Ayers over USC and Florida.

ARKANSAS — 5-STAR: 0, 4-STAR: 3, 3-STAR: 13

Keeping coach Houston Nutt away from Nebraska turned out to be beneficial for the Razorbacks, as they pulled in what has been ranked as high as the 22nd best recruiting class in the country. Their class is highlighted by four-star running back Peyton Hillis from Conway, Ark., along with Fayetteville native,

four-star wide receiver Cedric Logan.

KENTUCKY — 5-STAR: 0, 4-STAR: 1, 3-STAR: 10

Kentucky shored up its offensive line by signing four-star Mayfield, Ky. native Micah Jones. The signing day switch of USC commitment Joe Joe Brown, who will now play for Kentucky, also pleasantly surprised the Wildcats.

VANDERBILT — 5-STAR: 0, 4-STAR: 0, 3-STAR: 2

Vanderbilt head coach Bobby Johnson wrapped up a disappointing recruiting class on Wednesday. The Commodores did sign a pair of three-star offensive linemen in Brad Allen from Venice, Fla. and Hamilton Holliday from Marietta, Ga.

CLEMSON — 5-STAR: 0, 4-STAR: 1, 3-STAR: 7

The Tigers had a disappointing signing day, despite signing in-state stars such as four-star offensive lineman Corey Lambert from Greenville, three-star defensive back Michael Hamlin from Lamar and three-star defensive tackle Dorrel Scott from Columbia.

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Throwing a strike

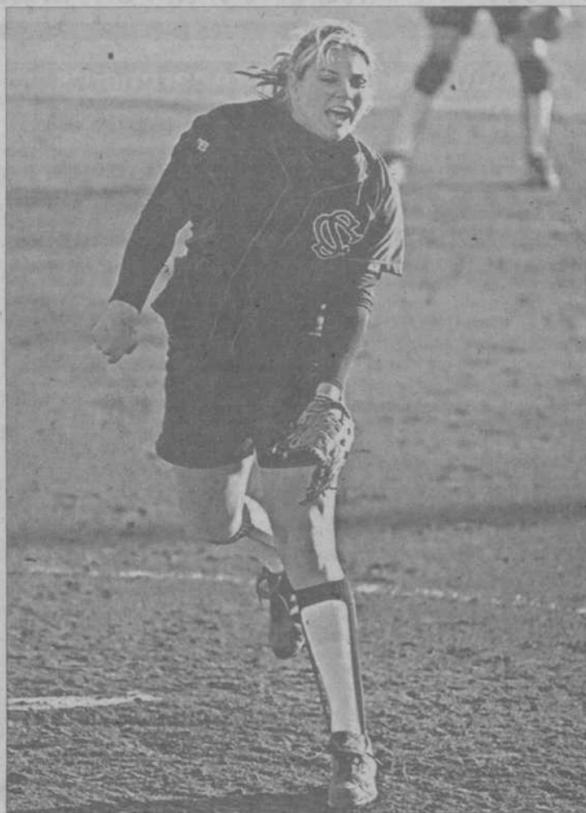


PHOTO BY JOHNNY HAYNES/THE GAMECOCK

USC Pitcher Stacey Johnson hurls the ball in a game last season. The USC softball team will open its season on the road Saturday against Charlotte. Carolina was picked to finish fourth in the SEC East by the media this year.

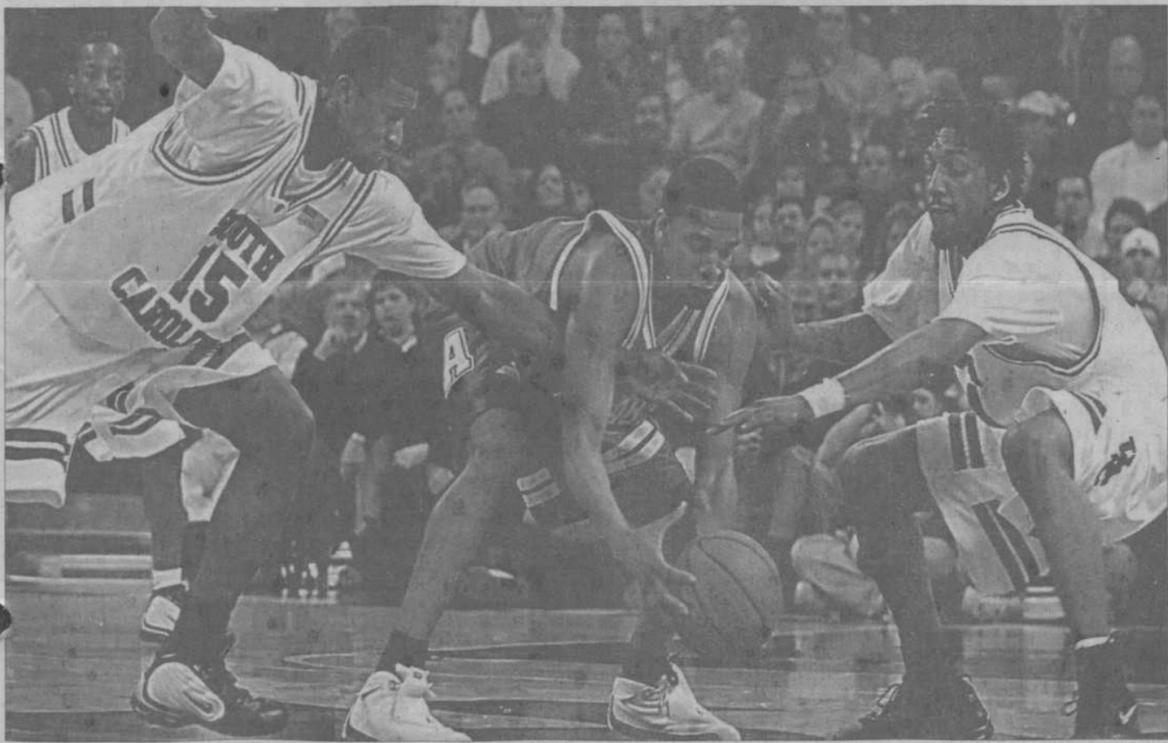


PHOTO BY MARK SCHILLING/THE GAMECOCK

Forwards Carlos Powell and Renaldo Balkman fight for control of the ball with an Alabama player. USC had to take it to overtime to defeat the Crimson Tide on Wednesday. The Gamecocks will take their 6-2 SEC record to No. 9 Kentucky on Saturday.

Men's basketball continues surprising season after squeaking by Bama in OT

USC faces off against No. 9 ranked Wildcats

BY JONATHAN HILLYARD
THE GAMECOCK

The USC men's basketball team once again "found a way" to win on Wednesday night, beating the Alabama Crimson Tide in overtime, 90-82.

Carolina was able to inch-out Alabama by shooting exceptionally well, hitting 56.1 percent from the field and 56 percent from 3-point range. Despite the good shooting, the difference was once again the USC defense, forcing 16 turnovers and turning them into 23 points for the Gamecocks. USC survived an absolute clinic of the 3-point shot by Alabama, who hit 16 shots from behind the arc.

At the 12:18 mark the Gamecocks had a 58-43 lead only to see the Crimson Tide go eight for their last 10 three-point shots to take a 71-68 lead with 32 seconds to go in the game.

Then, in the key play of the game, guard Mike Boynton drove the ball down court, passed the ball to senior forward Kerbrell Brown, who would hit his fourth out of five 3-point shots to tie the game with 21 seconds to go. The Gamecock defense once again

came up with a big stop, sending the game into overtime, despite Alabama shooting 68 percent from three in the second half.

"That was impressive shooting, just simply impressive," USC head coach Dave Odom said.

USC would dominate overtime, going on a 10-0 run that left the game all but won. Brown, the star of the game for Carolina, added five points in overtime to give him a total of 16 points and seven rebounds. Guard Josh Gonner put up a relatively quiet 22 points. Forward Carlos Powell kept his double-digits streak alive, scoring 13 points, while Boynton and forward Renaldo Balkman added 13 and 12 points, respectively, to give USC five players in double figures. Balkman's play in the first half was essential and gave the team a huge emotional boost.

"Personally, I think that Renaldo's energy changed the game," Boynton said. "He brings a different aspect to the floor. He's just all over the place."

The victory improves the Gamecocks to 19-3 (6-2, SEC) and keeps them at the top of the SEC's Eastern Division.

Carolina's success in the SEC will be tested immediately,

though, as the team travels to Lexington, Ky., to take on SEC East co-leader Kentucky.

The Wildcats enter the game with a 15-3 record (5-2, SEC) and are coming off a big win over the Florida Gators 68-65 in Gainesville, Fla. on Tuesday. The win marked the fifth consecutive one over the Gators. The Wildcats were upset last Saturday by the Vanderbilt Commodores in Nashville, Tenn., a team that USC defeated by a tip-in last Wednesday.

The SEC season has been somewhat of a disappointing one for UK, as its two losses are two more than in its previous 22 conference games. The Cats are fortunate to be in the spot they are in now, as

three of their conference wins have come by three points or less.

"We've been in this situation before and have a lot of fight in us," Kentucky guard Cliff Hawkins said after Tuesday's win. "We don't quit."

Carolina now begins the second half of its SEC schedule, which includes games against No. 9 Kentucky twice, No. 7 Mississippi State, Vanderbilt and a trip to No. 21 Florida.

"It's not going to get any easier," Boynton said with determination in his eyes when asked

about the second half of the season.

The first test is Saturday when USC finds out if it can hang with the big boys in the SEC in front of 22,000-plus fans.

Tipoff for the USC-UK contest is at 1 p.m. and will be televised on J-P Sports.

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecocksports@gwm.sc.edu

USC drops 7th SEC game in Rebels' win

BY JOEL WALLACE
THE GAMECOCK

The USC women's basketball team made a valiant attempt to erase a 22-point margin and pick up an SEC victory Thursday night against Ole Miss, but in the end, the price was too much. Armintie Price, that is.

Price played like a rebel with a cause, with 23 points and 11 rebounds while hitting 8-of-9 shots from the field. Price filled out her box score nicely by contributing a pair of steals and three assists.

"We dug ourselves into an early hole, and at the end they had four offensive rebounds in the final minute," USC head coach Susan Walvius said. "Even though we outscored them 33-23 in the second half, we shot 28 percent from the floor. Some of it is confidence. It's disappointing for us and our fans, but we are capable of winning."

The Gamecocks, who never led during the game, fell behind early and were forced to fire away from beyond the arc to try to catch up. USC hit 12 of a season-high 39 three-point attempts while connecting on only eight of 25 other field goal attempts and 13 free throws.

Ole Miss, on the other hand, took advantage by dominating in the post, shooting 50 percent overall and out-rebounding the Gamecocks 44-40.

Senior guard Kelly Morrone sparked the Gamecocks comeback bid with 22 points and 10 rebounds, hitting 7-of-12 shots from behind the arc.

"I always think we can come back and win a game," Morrone said. "Tonight we were down by 24 points and pulled it to two points so that makes us know we are a good basketball team and

makes you think what could happen if we put together a solid 40 minutes of basketball."

The Gamecocks cut the Rebels' lead to 16 at halftime, and it continued to dwindle until USC had a chance to pull even while down by two.

"USC made their move before the half and that is where the momentum really swung," Ole Miss head coach Carol Ross said. "They nailed some big shots. We broke down defensively, and they made us pay."

Halfway through its SEC schedule, the team still has yet to win a conference game. However, all is not lost as the remaining games are still important when determining seeding for the SEC Tournament. The Gamecocks still have a shot at making the NCAA Tournament if they can win out in the conference tourney.

"We have been here before and it is frustrating to lose, but we are very proud of our comeback," senior guard Cristina Ciocan said. "We have to stay focus for the entire game and start the game strong and finish it strong but mainly we have to play a solid 40 minutes."

Ciocan finished with 13 points, seven rebounds and five steals. She needs only 57 points to become the 25th Gamecock with 1,000 career points. Just last week, Ciocan became USC's all-time assists leader in the game against the College of Charleston.

The Gamecocks don't have time to worry about what could have been, as they now face the daunting task of taking on top-ranked Tennessee on Sunday in Knoxville, Tenn., at 3 p.m.

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MEN'S BASKETBALL CHALLENGE

THE CHALLENGE: Every week, The Gamecock's readers and staff test their sports knowledge with game predictions.

Wes Wolfe
Sports editor
(14-16)

Jonathan Hillyard
Asst. Sports editor
(12-18)

Adam Beam
Editor in chief
(15-15)

Shawn Rourke
Design director
(16-14)

Meg Moore
The Mix editor
(13-17)

Jordan Leonard
Reader of the week
(15-15)

Elon at UNC-Greensboro	UNCG	UNCG	Elon	UNCG	Elon	Elon
18 Syracuse at 23 Providence	Providence	Providence	Providence	Syracuse	Syracuse	Syracuse
12 Arizona at 2 Stanford	Stanford	Stanford	Arizona	Stanford	Arizona	Stanford
17 UNC at 16 Wake Forest	Wake	Wake	UNC	UNC	UNC	UNC
15 Ga. Tech at Tennessee	Ga. Tech	Ga. Tech	Ga. Tech	Ga. Tech	Ga. Tech	Tennessee
Vanderbilt at 21 Florida	Florida	Florida	Florida	Florida	Florida	Florida
Ole Miss at 7 Miss. St.	Miss. St.	Miss. St.	Miss. St.	Miss. St.	Ole Miss	Miss. St.
Georgia at Auburn	Georgia	Auburn	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia	Auburn
Arkansas at LSU	LSU	LSU	LSU	LSU	Arkansas	LSU
25 USC at 9 Kentucky	USC	USC	USC	Kentucky	Kentucky	USC
	47-45	62-61	60-58	57-50	82-70	64-59

WANT TO BE READER OF THE WEEK? E-mail selections for next week's games to gamecocksports@gwm.sc.edu.