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USC baseball

No. 7 Carolina sinks Seahawks

BY JONATHAN HILLYARD
 THE GAMECOCK

The No. 7 USC baseball team reminded the Gamecock faithful this weekend that it is still top dog, sweeping the University of North Carolina-Wilmington Seahawks in a three game series. The 7-4, 20-3 and 12-0 wins improved the Gamecocks record to 6-0 for the season.

"I thought we played great baseball all weekend," USC head coach Ray Tanner said. "We played about as good as we could probably play. I was glad to see that we were so consistent throughout the weekend."

USC-7 UNCW-4

Getting the call from Tanner in game one of the three-game series was junior pitcher Billy Buckner, who was starting his first game as a Gamecock. Buckner started the

game showing the home crowd why he was an All-American at Young Harris College in 2002, as he retired the first nine Seahawk batters in a row. Buckner pitched seven and one-third innings, striking out seven batters to record a win in his first start.

"(Buckner) almost looked unhittable in the early going," Tanner said. "He battled hard for us and gave us a chance to win."

At the plate, Carolina continued their early season dominance hitting three home runs in the contest and racking up 10 hits for the third time in the young season. Juniors Kevin Melillo and Brendan Winn, along with freshman Tommy King, hit home runs for USC. King's home run was the first of his collegiate career. Melillo and King's home runs were back to back, marking the second time this season USC has hit consecutive

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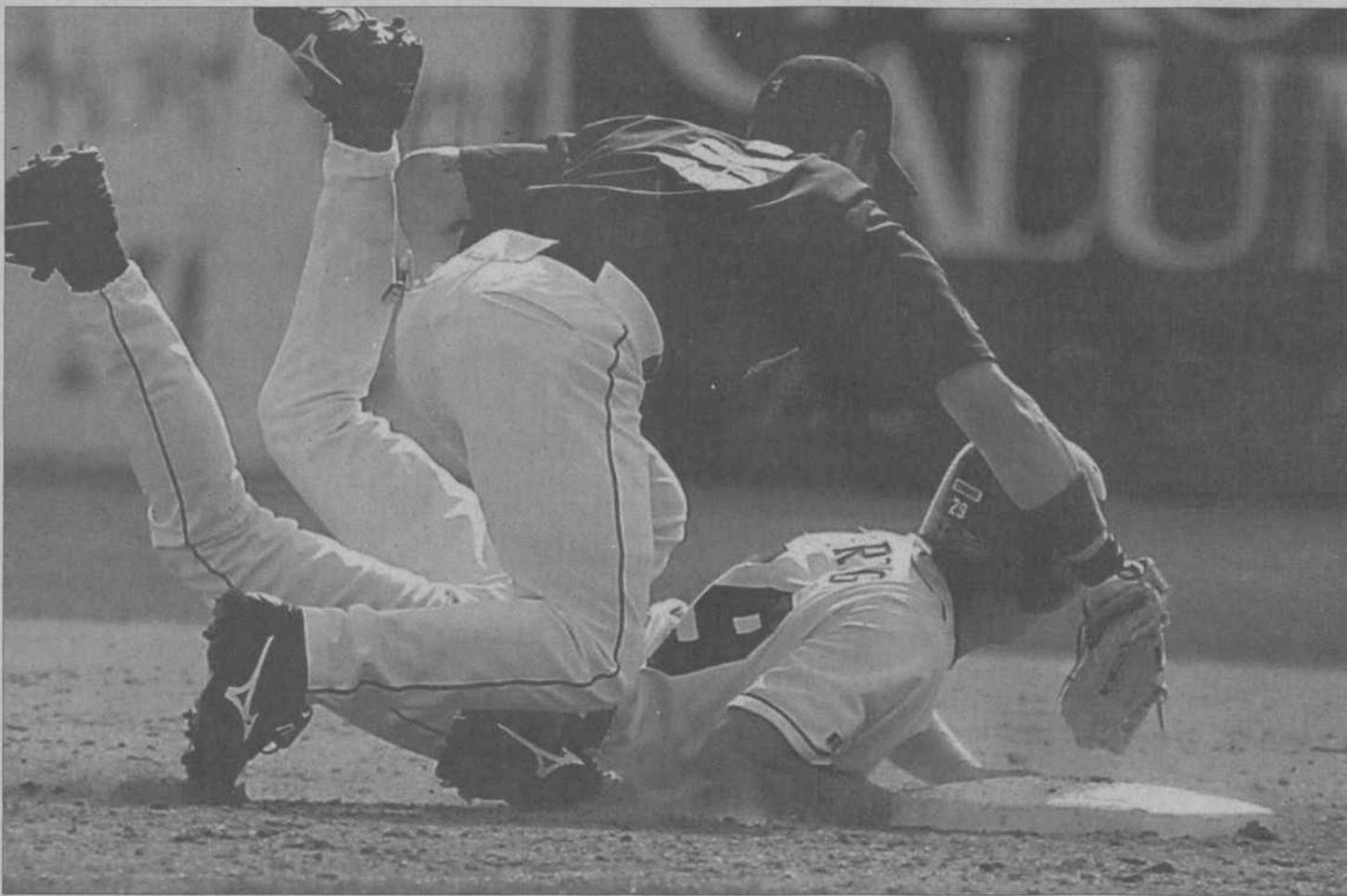


PHOTO BY MARK SCHILLING/THE GAMECOCK

Outfielder Davy Gregg slides in safely in one of USC's three games against UNC-Wilmington last weekend. Carolina won the series.

Arkansas hands USC biggest loss

BY STEPHEN DEMEDIS
 THE GAMECOCK

In its worst outing of the season, the No. 25 USC men's basketball team (20-6, 7-5 SEC) fell to the Arkansas Razorbacks (12-12, 4-9) 82-66. It was the most points allowed by the Gamecocks, whose defense is ranked first in the SEC, in regulation this season.

Carolina, hoping to play off an impressive win over Vanderbilt a week ago, came out lethargic.

"It was the worst we've played all year, but you have to give Arkansas credit," USC head coach Dave Odom said. "They made us play that way. When you make mistakes early, you have to adjust, and we didn't."

Arkansas took the lead early and kept it for most of the game, thanks to shooting nearly 50 percent from the floor. Whenever Carolina came close to evening the score, the Razorbacks would answer with a three-pointer, or USC's backcourt would turn the ball over, killing any momentum. Starting guards Mike Boynton and Josh Gonner combined for nine turnovers. Carolina gave the ball up 18 times, resulting in 19 points.

Despite a size advantage, the Gamecocks were out-rebounded

by the Razorbacks 30-39. Most of Arkansas's points came off offensive rebounds and put-backs. Carolina's two starters in the paint, senior center Rolando Howell and freshman forward Brandon Wallace, combined for four total rebounds.

Sophomore Kendrick Davis, in his first start, led the Razorback scorers with 19 points, but it was Ronnie Brewer who sealed the win for Arkansas. The freshman from Fayetteville went 6-of-10 from the floor for 17 points and grabbed five rebounds. Brewer was also a force on defense, forcing four steals and blocking three shots.

"I thought he was a factor in every aspect," Odom said. "He's one you have to allow for."

One Carolina highlight was the play of guard Tre Kelley. The freshman from Washington, D.C. scored a team-high 18 points, including three key threes as the Gamecocks tried to mount a comeback. A week ago, Kelley posted a then-career high of 16 points.

Despite the freshman's effort off the bench, the Gamecocks lacked the energy they had in past games. "We looked like a team that had nothing to play for, and they looked like a team that had something to play for, everything to



PHOTO BY MARK SCHILLING/THE GAMECOCK

Forward Renaldo Balkman plays defense in USC's loss to Mississippi State on Feb. 11.

play for," Kelley said.

This lack of energy and sloppiness in play has been characteristic of the Gamecocks when playing on one week's rest, as was the case Saturday. The team is 1-2 after a week's rest with the other loss coming against Temple and the win, a narrow victory over LSU at home.

With the loss, Carolina falls two games out of first place behind Kentucky. And with four games remaining, each against SEC East opponents, time is running out for the Gamecocks. While a spot in the NCAA Tournament appears to be a lock,

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Don't crown Yankees yet

Ever since the New York Yankees picked up Alex Rodriguez on Valentine's Day, the general consensus has seemed to be that the Yankees are already



BEN SINCLAIR
 Fourth-year print journalism student

World Series Champions. Before we start sizing A-Rod's finger for a World Series ring, let's think of just a few of the obstacles that stand in the way of the first Yankee championship in four years. First of all, teams with superstars always seem to underachieve; look no further than the Seattle Mariners. Their best seasons in team history were after they dumped Alex Rodriguez and Ken Griffey Jr. In fact, Rodriguez and Griffey have not been to the playoffs since leaving Seattle. The Mariners won 91 games in A-Rod's last season, 116 the year after his departure.

Speaking of underachieving, just this summer the Los Angeles Lakers were being crowned media champions of the NBA when they acquired Gary Payton and Karl Malone in the off-season to complement the services of Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal. One alleged rape by Bryant, foot surgery for O'Neal and an injury to Malone, and the Lakers currently rest in fifth place in the Western Conference, just one

win ahead of the Memphis Grizzlies. I would dare not bet the house on them winning a championship at this point. A similar meltdown could occur with the Yankees.

The Yankees are incredibly short of pitching. With just one injury or collapse under the pressure of playing in New York, George Steinbrenner might be trading the naming rights to his next grandchild for a pitcher by midseason. While Mike Mussina and Kevin Brown are capable starters, Brown has had several season-ending injuries over the last four seasons. The Yankees might slug their way to several victories this year, but they have to do it with a pitching staff that includes Javier Vasquez, Jose Contreras and John Lieber. This is not the rotation championships are made of.

There are some staffs in the National League that command attention as well. The Houston Astros now have Roger Clemens and Andy Pettite, half of the Yankees' pitching staff from last season. As we learned from the Arizona Diamondbacks' playoff run from 2001 with Schilling and Randy Johnson, it only takes two dominant pitchers to bring home a championship. Clemens and Pettite are as capable as any two pitchers in the game.

The beloved and cursed Chicago Cubs hope having a staff like Mark Prior, Kerry Wood

♦ SINCLAIR, SEE PAGE 15

Softball grabs 4 wins at home invitational

BY JOEL WALLACE
 THE GAMECOCK

The USC women's softball team (8-0) turned in several impressive performances over the last weekend during the Gamecock Invitational. In four games, Carolina recorded three shutouts, seven home runs and, most importantly, four wins.

USC-5 MTSU-0

USC started off the Gamecock Invitational on Saturday with a bang, and junior Meghan Cornett provided the fireworks. Cornett, Carolina's first baseman, pillaged the Lady Raiders' (4-2) pitching staff with a pair of home runs that posted four of the Gamecocks' runs. The win pushed USC to 5-0 on the season, while Middle Tennessee fell to 2-1.

USC's third baseman Samantha Jennings hit her fourth homer of the season, a solo shot, in the first inning to put the Gamecocks on the board. That was all senior pitcher Stacey Johnson (2-0) would need, as she recorded her second complete game in as many decisions, giving up two hits and striking out six.

In the second inning, Cornett



PHOTO BY JOHNNY HAYNES/THE GAMECOCK

Shortstop Amber Curtis makes a play at Sunday's game.

took over, notching her first home run of the season to put the Gamecocks ahead 2-0. With one out and two runners on in the sixth, Cornett connected again, leaving the score 5-0.

Her two home runs gave her 12 in her career at Carolina, placing her sixth on the school's all-time list.

USC-4 CofC-0

The Gamecocks didn't let up against the Cougars (5-2) later that

afternoon, recording their fourth shutout this season while climbing to 6-0. Another pair of Gamecocks tallied home runs, with sophomore catcher Ashley Smith and freshman pinch hitter McKenna Hughes doing the damage this time around.

Carolina pitcher Aleca Johnson (3-0) hurled a complete game once again while striking out a season-high eight batters and scattering four hits.

Brittany Shepherd took the loss for the Cougars, giving up four

runs on nine hits in six innings.

Smith drove in Carolina's first run in the opening inning with a double. The score remained 1-0 until Smith slapped her fourth home run of the season to left field, putting the Gamecocks up 2-0 in the fifth.

The very next inning, Hughes hit her first career home run as a Gamecock to make the score 3-0.

Later on in the sixth inning, USC scored its final run of the game, when shortstop Amber Curtis drove in second baseman Chrissy Schoonmaker with a two-out single.

USC-11 RU-3

For the first time during this year's Gamecock Invitational, Carolina's pitching was less than perfect, but the offense picked up the slack with a lopsided victory over Radford (2-5) on Sunday. Jennings was the hero this time around, hitting a walk-off, three-run homer to cap off a six-run fifth inning that sealed the Highlanders' fate and secured the Gamecocks a spot in the championship game.

♦ SOFTBALL, SEE PAGE 15

Lady Bulldogs stomp Gamecock basketball

BY WES WOLFE
 THE GAMECOCK

The USC women's basketball team (10-15, 1-11 SEC) wasn't able to stop the No. 18 Georgia Lady Bulldogs (17-7, 6-5) on Sunday, losing 73-50.

Freshman guard Lauren Simms led Carolina in scoring with 12 points and five rebounds, going 4-of-10 from the floor and 4-of-5 from the free throw line. Another freshman, forward Iva Sliskovic, led the team in rebounds with nine, while chipping in eight points and three assists in 31 minutes of action.

Overall, though, the Gamecocks shot horribly from the field, hitting only 34 percent of their shots. The first half was exceptionally bad and saw Carolina go 7-of-25 from the field, including 0-of-6 from the three-point land.

Georgia, on the other hand, put on a command performance.

Five players, four starters and the first player off the bench, scored in double figures. Three players, center Christi Thomas, guard Alexis Kendrick and center Alexis Pierce, led the Lady Bulldogs with 14 points. Thomas notched a double-double, getting 13 rebounds to go along with the points. She also managed four steals on the afternoon.

The Gamecocks put themselves in a hole in the first half, scoring an anemic 16 points. Carolina's only lead in the game came at the 17:52 mark in the first half, when Sliskovic hit a jump shot to put USC ahead 4-2. The Gamecocks' last chance against the Bulldogs occurred when sophomore forward Olga Gritsaeva tied USC with Georgia at 10-10. Following her free throws, UGA outscored USC by 28-6 in a run that closed out the

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