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## SPORTS

# Gamecocks face rough road tonight at Florida

BY ELIZABETH BENFIELD  
 THE GAMECOCK

The USC men's basketball team, 20-6 and 7-5 in the SEC, is in Gainesville, Fla. tonight for its second matchup of the season with the Florida Gators, who are 15-8 and 6-6 in the SEC.

"The challenge that lies ahead of us is a huge one," USC head coach Dave Odom said in his weekly teleconference. "Florida went through a couple of games where they had a difficult time."

"You have to respect Billy and his team for playing through that time. They've had some time to get past it, and boy, did they ever do that. I was really impressed with the way they played and the toughness their team showed."

When the teams met in January at the first game of the SEC opener for Carolina, USC lost 65-62.

However, in one of the biggest success stories in the SEC, the Gamecocks have made a comeback. They have the lowest average allowed points per game in the SEC with 61 points. They also lead the league in blocks per game at 5.9 and averaged 4.3 fewer turnovers than their opponents.

The Gators' eight-year head coach Billy Donovan is hoping for his 200th career win in the game against Carolina. Also, a win for Florida would mean a tie for second place with the Gamecocks in the SEC East.

After a two-game losing streak, which took them out of the AP top 25, the Gators defeated Ole Miss last week 81-66. The team again hit over 50 percent from the field for the ninth time this season and only allowed four turnovers in the last 20 minutes of play.

Florida guard Anthony Roberson, averaging 17 points per league play game, is the team's highest scoring player. Roberson scored over 20 points in five of his last nine games.

Along with forward David Lee and guard Matt Walsh, the three have combined their efforts to score an average of 47.9 points per game. Walsh has had double figures in all but one of his 12 SEC games, and Lee has also scored double digits in the past three games.

The Gamecocks' point leader is forward Carlos Powell, with



Powell

13.2 points per game as well as 6.4 rebounds a contest. Another top scorer on the team is junior Josh Gonner, who has scored in double digits in 10 of his SEC games. For conference

games, Gonner is averaging 14.3 points per game. He is also second on the team in steals with 36 for the season.

"We played South Carolina early in the year," Donovan said. "I

think like any season in the league, teams change. Certainly we have changed. South Carolina has changed. I think South Carolina has always been a good, defensively disruptive team. As the season goes on, you get a chance to see things differently. This league is so unforgiving. If you don't play well on a given night, you're going to lose."

Down by two games to Kentucky with four games remaining, USC needs a victory against Florida if it hopes to win the SEC East. Against Arkansas, the team had its worst game yet, losing 82-66 to the Razorbacks.

One shining star of the game, freshman guard Tre Kelley, scored a team high of 18 points, breaking his career high of 16 points that he set a few weeks ago. Of the past six games, Kelley has scored double digits in the past four, and he has hit 22 of his last 26 free throws.

USC is averaging nearly six blocks per game, making its defense a force to be reckoned with. Last season the team had only 92 blocks in 28 games, while this year Carolina has already blocked 154 balls in 26 games. Forward Renaldo Balkman leads the way for the team in that category with 39 blocks.

The game between USC and Florida will start at 7 p.m. at the O'Connell Center in Gainesville.

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Forward Kerbrell Brown holds on to the ball while getting fouled in a game earlier this season against Mississippi State. The Gamecocks travel to play Florida tonight at 7 p.m.

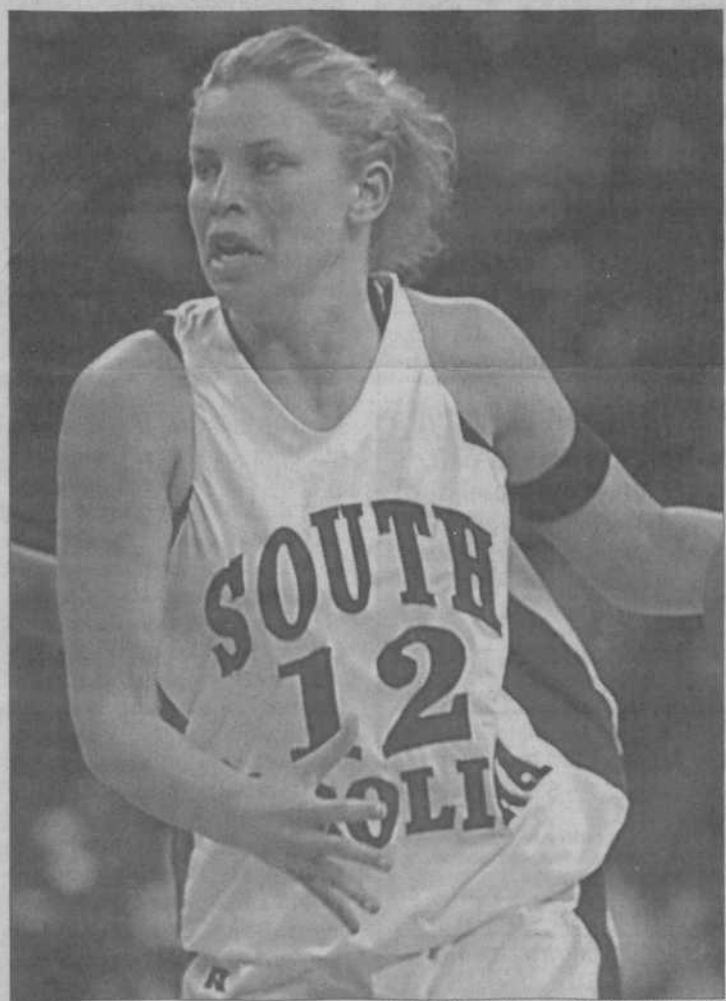


PHOTO BY JOHNNY HAYNES/THE GAMECOCK

Guard Sarah Burgess and the Gamecocks face the Kentucky Wildcats in Lexington, Ky., Thursday at 7 p.m.

## Women's basketball needs Kentucky win to climb out of cellar

BY BRAD MOSELEY  
 THE GAMECOCK

USC women's basketball (10-15, 1-11 SEC) hits the court tomorrow to take on Kentucky (10-15, 2-10) in Lexington, Ky., as the season winds down.

The upcoming game with Kentucky will affect RPI and ultimately give the winner a more favorable placement in the NCAA Tournament. The Gamecocks will need to win out in the SEC tournament to continue their streak of NCAA Tournament appearances, which currently rests at two. Thursday night's battle between the Gamecocks and the Wildcats will be mostly fought for pride.

The season started out with much promise and hope for the Gamecocks who mounted an 8-1 record that has since turned disastrous, with Carolina managing only one win in its 12 conference games. USC has tried to overcome its youthful mistakes with talent and two senior guards, but the SEC's strength from top to bottom

has not given the team a chance to rebound. In numerous occasions the Gamecocks have shown a glimpse of what they might some day become, by achieving double-digit leads against the conference's best teams, only to have their hopes dashed by comebacks.

The Wildcats' season has been almost as disappointing. Despite touting the third-best three-point percentage in the conference, Kentucky has won only two games in the SEC. One of those wins was in Columbia, 75-61, on Jan. 25, and the other came against an Alabama team that has only four SEC wins to its name. The latter was Kentucky's most recent game and Senior Night. Ironically enough, the team was led by freshman Angela Phillips, who scored 14 points in the win.

Sara Potts, a 6-foot junior forward for the Wildcats, leads the team in scoring, averaging 16.5 points per game. Potts also holds

♦ WOMEN, SEE PAGE 16

## February looks bright for muddy sport

February might be the best month for the world's greatest sports fans. No, I'm not referring to University of Maryland students watching basketball and screaming profanities, but rather to those hearty souls who risk life and limb standing in freezing weather to watch skinny guys get muddy.

I'm talking about Belgian cyclocross aficionados. Sure, Belgium may be known for getting smacked around every time Germany decides to invade someone, but it grows its fans the right way.

Cyclocross is a sport that boggles the mind, and it's not simply because it induces an anaerobic

euphoria in its participants that is only a shade away from death. The sport resembles a Le Mans-style race more closely than anything else, with competitors duking it out over grass, hill, mud and more mud for a little over an hour on a closed course less than two miles in length, usually, Belgian NASCAR, plain and simple. However, the organizers are not content simply to let 140-pound whiteys ride around in circles and figure eights, so they introduce two-foot high barriers to the mix, forcing the riders to dismount and jump over. With the barriers usually situated at the foot of a steep hill about 50 yards in length, it makes for some interesting and less-than-graceful situations.

This brings us to a point or two about equipment. Some time in the past 70 years or so, those crazy guys who rode the Tour de France on 40-pound fixed-gear cruisers decided they weren't getting enough

of a thrill. Yes, the same gentlemen content to pound out the miles in July heat wearing wool jerseys, sitting on flank steaks to, ahem, keep from getting "raw," got bored in December. They decided to put little knobbies on their skinny tires and schlep the bikes around in the mud.

Belgian mud isn't like mud in the southern United States. It's darker and far fouler, not to mention pervasive as hell — it gets into every working part of a bike within 20 minutes, rendering moving parts irrelevant. What's the attraction of riding in freezing weather, dressed like the Michelin man, running up a slippery steep hill lugging your bike on your shoulder that now weighs as much as Anna Nicole 'cause you have half of Flanders Fields stuck to it?

The fans. Half of a Williams-Brice crowd, packed in around the course shoulder-to-shoulder and as deep as a Beatles reunion show.

Mind the weather — it's still 15 degrees, windy and you're standing in slush next to a bunch of drunk guys. Like an afternoon game, they've been drinking since early that morning and hitting the good trappist stuff that tastes more like warm champagne than the weak urine-colored stuff that is the provenance of USC frat boys.

They're eating frites, to which most Americans would append the word "French," drenched in mayonnaise, in a scene eerily reminiscent of the state fair. Strangely, the display works — the home team took five of the top 10 in the 'cross World Championships two weeks ago, interrupted only by the occasional Dutch or French rider.

So, remember the Belgians when you're rooting for our baseball or basketball teams in the next month — it's easy to win with fans willing to go numb to watch their boys turn themselves inside out for a little gritty glory.

## SEC News and Notes

### Winston, Freije get weekly recognition

The SEC announced on Wednesday that Alabama forward Kennedy Winston and Vanderbilt forward Matt Freije have been named co-SEC players of the week.

Winston scored a career-high 31 points and pulled down 11 rebounds to lead the Crimson Tide to a huge upset win at Mississippi State on Saturday. He's leading Alabama with 16.1 points per game and hit 13 of his 15 free throws for MSU. The game was the eighth in which Winston scored 20 or more points.

Freije tied his career high with 32 points in a must needed win over Alabama on Wednesday. He also scored 22 points in the Commodores 74-54 win over LSU on Saturday on 9 of 20 shooting. Freije's performance this week moved him into a tie for second on the Vandy all-time scoring list with 1,719 points, just six points shy of first place.

### Divisional races heat up weekend

The division races have heated up as teams make their final push leading into the SEC tournament. On Wednesday, USC and Florida will play for

what could be the No. 2 spot in the SEC; Tennessee travels to Kentucky; Vanderbilt goes to Ole Miss; and Mississippi State plays host to LSU.

On Saturday, Alabama will play host to Ole Miss; Florida travels to Arkansas; USC entertains Georgia; Auburn travels to Tennessee; and Mississippi State will try to win a tough game at Vanderbilt. Kentucky will travel to LSU to take on the Tigers in a Sunday matchup.

### Townsend receives men's track award

The SEC announced yesterday that USC track athlete Fred Townsend has been named Men's Track Athlete of the Week. This is the first time a Gamecock has received the honor this year.

Townsend, a senior from Baton Rouge, La., broke the 55-meter hurdle record for the USC Indoor Facility on Saturday with a NCAA provisional qualifying time of 7.39 seconds. Townsend is a captain for the 2004 USC track team and is ranked seventh in Trackwire's individual rankings.

Last season, Townsend was named to the first team All-America team after finishing ninth in the NCAA Outdoor Championships.

## Boston ace ready for '04 turnaround

BY HOWARD ULMAN  
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Pedro Martinez wants to forget his contract flap, his Game 7 flop and his Don Zimmer flip.

The star pitcher is preparing for another attempt at helping the Boston Red Sox win their first World Series title since 1918. Last year, they lost to the New York Yankees 6-5 in 11 innings in Game 7 of the AL championship series.

"I hope ... we are the team to beat," Martinez said Tuesday, "but I don't want to say it. I want to do it."

For now, he considers the Yankees the team to beat because they went to the World Series. In Game 3 of the ALCS, Martinez pushed New York bench coach Zimmer to the ground during a melee. In Game 7, he gave up three runs in the eighth inning, letting the Yankees tie it 5-5.

Now Martinez enters his seventh year with the Red Sox knowing he could leave next off-season as a free agent. He said no contract talks have been held.

Martinez said he wants to end his career in Boston and will give the team a chance to sign him — even if it's after the season. If that doesn't happen, he should have several suitors.

"Forget about what's going to happen to me. I don't have anything to prove," he said Tuesday, his first day of spring training workouts. "If they don't want to sign me, that's fine. I'm pretty sure I'll probably get a job with somebody else. But if they do, I'll be more than happy to stay here."

Martinez probably won't throw off a mound for about a week. He reported three days after the team's other pitchers; the Red Sox gave him permission to arrive late because of a family medical issue.

"Pedro's got a pretty good history of being a pretty good pitcher," new Red Sox manager Terry Francona said. "He'll be ready to go."

Last season, Martinez went 14-4 with a league-best 2.22 ERA. In his six Red Sox seasons, he is 101-28 with a 2.26 ERA and two AL Cy Young Awards. He also won the 1997 NL Cy Young Award with Montreal.

If Martinez falters this season, the Red Sox will have one of baseball's best pitchers to send to the mound in the next game: Curt Schilling. Boston obtained him in a trade with Arizona, a move that drops Derek Lowe, 38-15 the past three seasons, into the No. 3 starting spot, and Tim Wakefield

♦ MARTINEZ, SEE PAGE 16