



SPORTS

Game Schedule
SOFTBALL vs. Fresno State in NFCA Leadoff Classic Tournament, noon

BASEBALL vs. Duquesne, 3 p.m.

WOMEN'S TENNIS vs. Arkansas, 2 p.m.

MEN'S BASKETBALL vs. Georgia, 7:30 p.m. Saturday

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL vs. Vanderbilt, 2 p.m. Sunday

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NFL draft shouldn't supersede education

In light of Southern Cal's Mike Williams entering the 2004 NFL Draft early, based on the Maurice Clarrett ruling, I'd like to issue a thank you.

That's right Mike, your premature entry, along with Clarrett's and Larry Fitzgerald's, should make the future brighter for the rest of college football's stars.

Now that these three gentlemen have decided to sail into new waters and showcase very little experience in the pros, we can all watch them struggle. This does not mean that they will never impact their future teams, but it will show how different the NFL is compared to the NBA or MLB.

We've all seen the impact LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony have made to their teams' playoff chances, and Kobe Bryant and Tracy McGrady didn't spend much time figuring out their game. Little can be said about guys shooting early from all-conference in college football to the Pro Bowl in a season or two.

There is a reason for this. The NFL is an entirely different monster because of the complexity of the game. In basketball, if you can jump high and run fast, you have the ability to contribute. In baseball, if you have a strong pitching arm, you can get to the majors pretty quick. But in football, if you don't learn everything you can about the game, you're stuck being an understudy to a 10-year professional while hanging out on the sidelines with a playbook in your hand.

In the pros, the game has evolved from a power and strength game to a quickness and mental sharpness contest. College guys don't get to spend every waking moment either on the field, watching film or in the weight room. They have to attend class and study sessions and find time to enjoy their college experience. The pros are pros for a reason and that's why coming out early doesn't help your game.

This is not to say that leaving after your junior year is a bad idea. Michael Vick pulled it off and Randy Moss had a short collegiate experience, but both those guys are absolute freaks at their respective positions.

Also, before football players get to college, the only chance they get to learn the game is around a dozen times a year in high school. Basketball and baseball have amateur leagues that allow them to mature not physically but mentally. Sports take time to understand because of the amount of memories a brain must handle. These guys make exceptional catches and hit game-winning shots because they've been in those situations before and know how to react mentally.

Football takes the most time, especially once you're in the pros. The systems on both offense and defense can rival nuclear engineering, and I can almost guarantee Florida State's Bobby Bowden doesn't have to adjust his game plan like New England's Bill Belichick does week-to-week.

Understanding these complex strategies and performing at the highest level all in less than a week is a lot to ask, especially for rookies with two years of college experience. Williams, Fitzgerald and Clarrett will have the opportunity to learn this the hard way.

And when we don't see them scoring the winning touchdown or voting for them for the Pro Bowl, this will all make sense. And somewhere, a college football player will head to his adviser for one extra year at a university. At least that's worth dreaming about.

Club Corner

The USC women's rugby team will be in action this weekend, taking on Central Florida and Georgia. The Gamecocks take on UCF Saturday at 9 a.m. and Georgia Sunday at 1 p.m. Both matches will take place on the B/C Field next to the Blatt P.E. Center. The team is also looking for new members, so any women interested in seeing how the game is played or joining the team should show up this weekend, at a match or contact the club president, Liz Skelly, at LIZARD5K1@hotmail.com.

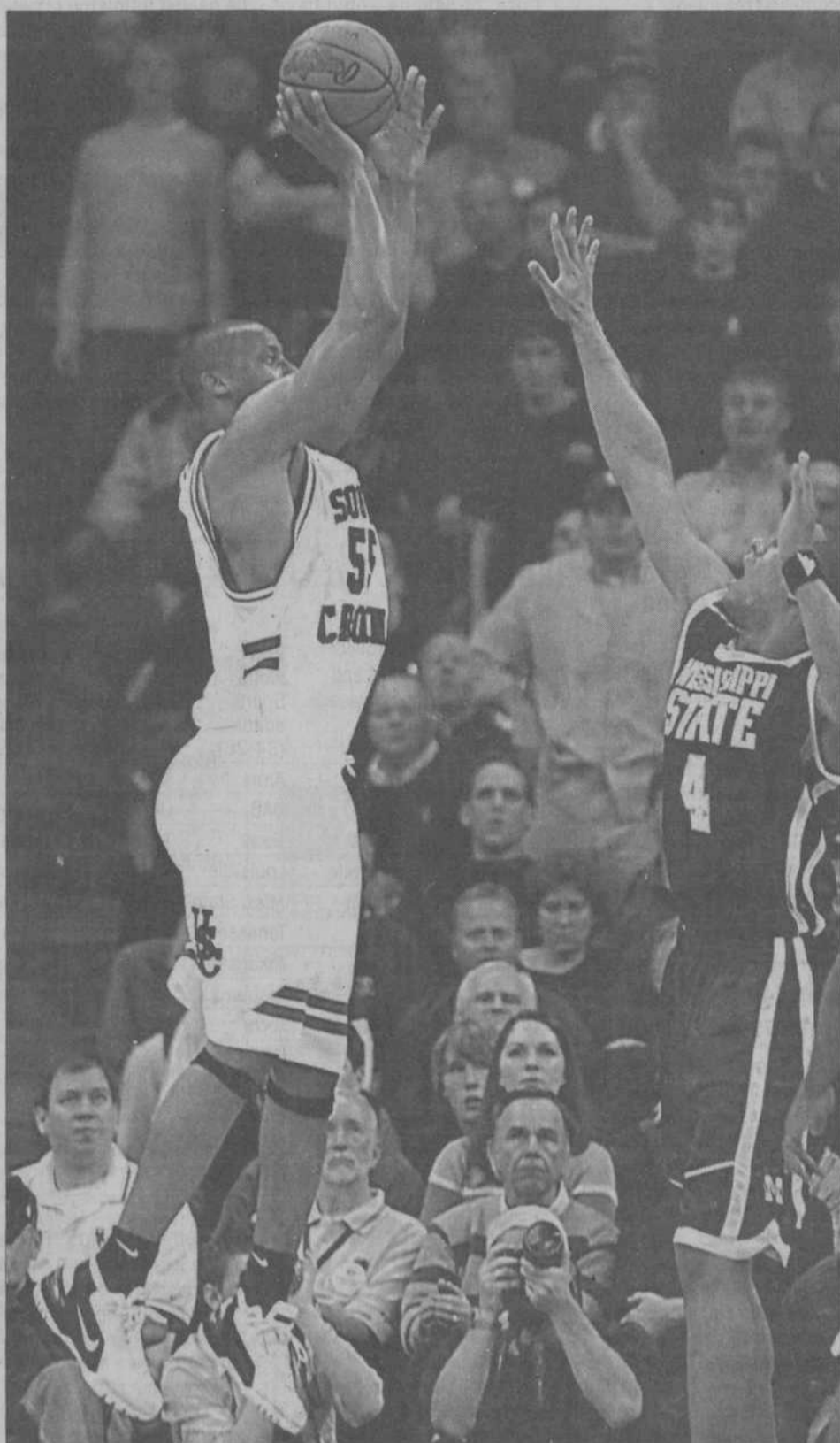


PHOTO BY MARK SCHILLING/THE GAMECOCK

Center Rolando Howell goes up for a shot in USC's loss to Mississippi State.

The TOURNAMENT Push

Gamecocks have hopes of NCAA berth with strong regular season finish

 BY JAY POU
THE GAMECOCK

The USC men's basketball team will take on the Georgia Bulldogs Saturday hoping to stop a late-season skid and make the NCAA tournament for the first time since 1998.

The Gamecocks (20-7, 7-6 SEC) need at least one more regular season victory to be considered for the NCAA tourney, but many experts believe USC will have to finish 9-7 or better in the SEC to make the tournament. The Gamecocks appeared to be a guarantee for the tournament earlier this season after getting off to an 18-2 start, but they have lost a bit of their momentum recently, winning only two of their last seven games.

Georgia (14-10, 6-7) has been having a season that is nearly opposite of USC's. The Bulldogs appeared to be NIT-bound at best after a slow start, but have put themselves in good shape at the end of the season after several huge wins, including victories over Georgia Tech and Florida and a season-sweep of Kentucky. Georgia is on an SEC-best three-game winning streak, posting consecutive victories over Kentucky, Florida and Tennessee.

The Bulldogs are led by senior forward Jonas Hayes, twin brother of former Bulldog Jarvis Hayes who departed last year for the NBA as a first-round draft pick. Jonas, a back-up most of last season, broke into the Bulldogs' starting lineup in their second game this season and hasn't looked back, averaging 14.8 points per game. He was the hero of Georgia's thrilling double-overtime victory over archrival Georgia Tech, exploding for 25 points.

Other major contributors for the Bulldogs include senior guard

Rashad Wright, who is averaging 14.6 points per game, and senior swingman Damien Wilkins, who is averaging 13.5 points per contest. Georgia is led by first-year head coach Dennis Felton, who was an assistant coach on Clemson's staff from 1994-98.

The Gamecocks will be in good shape if Saturday's game goes at all like their first matchup with Georgia this season, a 84-63 blowout that was USC's largest win over the Bulldogs since 1962. Carolina used great defense to keep Georgia's score low and sealed the deal with great shooting, hitting 54.5 percent of their field goals and 36.4 percent of its three-pointers. Forward Kerbrell Brown led the way for USC, scoring 18 points and hitting all three of his three-point attempts. Guard Josh Gonner scored 13 and forward Rolando Howell put up 11 points while grabbing six rebounds.

To defeat Georgia this time around, USC will need a good defensive effort and a solid rebounding performance, something that has been absent in many of the Gamecocks' losses. Carolina big men, center Rolando Howell and forward Brandon Wallace, will have to step up and box out Georgia's strong rebounders, including senior forward Chris Daniels who grabbed nine boards in these teams' first meeting. If the Bulldogs are having success on offense, the Gamecocks will have to rely on their three-point shooting, a category in which they've been solid but inconsistent.

The Gamecocks will hope to grab the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee's attention Saturday at the Colonial Center. Tip-off is set for 7:30 p.m.

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

Baseball trying to build on strong season start

 BY JONATHAN HILLYARD
THE GAMECOCK

After starting the season with sweeps of its first two three-game series against Charleston Southern and UNC-Wilmington, the USC baseball team will look to remain undefeated as they play in this weekend's Gamecock Round Robin at Sarge Frye Field.

"All of the teams that are coming in this weekend — Radford, Duquesne, and George Mason — are friends of mine," USC head coach Ray Tanner said. "It's a chance to kick the season off and a chance to get together and enjoy college baseball."

The round robin will serve as the season opener for Duquesne after reaching the Atlantic 10 championship for the first time in school history last

year. Head coach Mike Wilson led the Dukes to a school record 15 conference wins to finish second in the A-10 West Division. The team finished with a 26-23 record. Six position starters and two starting pitchers return for the Dukes from last year's successful season.

In last year's three-game series against Duquesne, USC swept the Dukes with scores of 12-2, 7-5 and 9-0. In Friday's matchup, junior pitcher Billy Buckner will look to improve on his 1-0 record on the mound for USC. Junior Kevin Melillo will look to match last year's game one performance in which he hit two home runs. Melillo is off to

a great start this season, boasting a batting average of .409 with five home runs and 15 runs batted in.

The Radford Highlanders will look to turn around their season this weekend after starting the season with a three-game losing streak. The Highlanders were swept in a three-game series by the Duke Blue Devils to start the 2004 schedule. The team was picked to finish ninth in the BIG South in the conference's preseason poll.

Last season, Radford shocked the undefeated and sixth-ranked Gamecocks in Columbia in the first game of a three-

game series by a score of 5-4. USC recovered on the weekend and ended up winning the final two contests by scores of 7-1 and 5-1.

Tanner has named junior Aaron Rawl as the starter for Saturday's game. Rawl is 2-0 so far this season with an earned run average of 2.25 and wins over both CSU and UNCW. So far this season USC has scored an amazing 59 runs in two games, a frightening stat for Radford.

In the final game of the weekend, USC will take on the George Mason Patriots, who have started off this season with a red hot 3-0 record. GMU finished last season strong, advancing to the Colonial Athletic Association championship game. USC last faced the Patriots in the

♦ BASEBALL, SEE PAGE 10

Softball team faces tough competition this weekend

 BY STEPHEN COLLINS
THE GAMECOCK

After defeating the College of Charleston 2-0 last Sunday, the No. 23 USC softball team stands at an impressive eight wins and zero losses on the year, and 3-0 in games decided by two runs or less.

This weekend in Columbus, Ga., the team will participate in the ninth annual NFCA Leadoff Classic Tournament. Standing in the Gamecocks' way are the 16th-ranked Fresno State Bulldogs, the Princeton Tigers, and the No. 18 Arizona State Sun Devils.

Fresh off a tournament in California where three games were cancelled because of rain, Fresno State (5-2) is itching for action. Sophomore infielder and 2003 NCAA Second Team All-American Christina Clark leads the potent offense, while junior pitcher and two-time NCAA All-American Jamie Southern is the ace of a strong pitching staff. The Princeton softball

team boasts back-to-back Ivy League titles as well as NCAA Tournament appearances. The team looks to 2004 to gain another conference ring. Very early this season, Princeton will face the team that gave them their first loss of the 2003 Regional Tournament. USC, the No. 2 seed in last year's tournament, trailed 7-2 to Princeton in the seventh inning only to rally and beat the Tigers 8-7, handing Princeton its first loss in the double-elimination tournament.

Already 21 games into the 2004 season, Arizona State (15-6) will travel for the first time this season to participate in the Leadoff Classic. The Sun Devils, under the excellent tutelage of 15-year head coach Linda Wells, and the stellar pitching of Desiree Serrano (8-0), along with an offense that looks to break last year's record of 45 home runs, are certainly a quality opponent.

The Gamecocks will face their opponents in a fixed bracket with the winning

team in the bracket moving on to the Gold Championship, the second place team to the Silver Championship, and the third place team to the Bronze Championship. While all the teams Carolina will face will surely be tough competition, the Gamecocks go into the tournament with confidence. USC allowed only three runs last weekend on its way to winning the Gamecock Invitational.

They pitched three shutouts in the tournament alone, and have amassed five shutouts on the year. Both senior Stacey Johnson and sophomore Melanie Henkes sport ERAs of 0.00, while junior Aleca Johnson trails the two with an impressive ERA of 0.35. The offense is also powerful, with a team batting average of .324 and 16 home runs in only eight games. So far this season, Carolina has outscored opponents 49-6.

USC will first play Fresno State at noon on Friday.

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PHOTO BY JOHNNY HAYNES/THE GAMECOCK

Freshman Chrissy Schoonmaker gets run over as she tries to pick off a College of Charleston base runner. USC wins 5-0.