



SPORTS

Game Schedule
MEN'S GOLF in Palmetto Collegiate at Aiken
SOFTBALL vs. Arkansas, 1 p.m. Tuesday
BASEBALL vs. Davidson, 7 p.m. Tuesday
WOMEN'S SWIMMING in NCAA Championships
 at College Station, Texas, Thursday
MEN'S BASKETBALL vs. Memphis in NCAA Tournament, Thursday

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'Wrestlemania' deserves respect as legitimate sporting event

Every year around this time, World Wrestling Entertainment presents one of the greatest sports/entertainment spectacles and, for the most part, it gets ignored by the general public because it's deemed "fake" by some.

Of course, I'm talking about "Wrestlemania," which has now been going strong for 20 long years. WWE Wrestlemania XX will be shown on pay-per-view Sunday at 4 p.m. PST.

It all kicked off in 1985, on the strength of Vince McMahon Jr.'s promoting genius, MTV's rock 'n' wrestling connection and the popularity of Hulkamania.

The WWF brought in Mr. T of "A-Team" fame to team with the Hulkster against the formidable duo of "Rowdy" Roddy Piper and "Mr. Wonderful" Paul Orndorff to main-event the inaugural show at Madison Square Garden.

Twenty years is a pretty long run, especially considering that when the first Wrestlemania took place, the WWF didn't even know if there would even be a second one.

The primary reason wrestling always gets dissed publicly? Because it's fake or scripted.

The primary reason so many people are "closet fans?" Because it's good!

First and foremost, let's get some things straight. Movies are scripted, "Friends" is scripted and, as far as I'm concerned, most of the reality TV shows America is currently addicted to are scripted, too.

Oh yeah, I went there.

Let's not treat "scripted" like it's a dirty word. Casual wrestling viewers and non-viewers alike simply do not understand wrestling the way the hardcore fans do. Compare it to how an art critic looks at a painting, fascinated by its intricate brushstrokes, while I would stand there looking at it, saying, "I don't get it."

Yeah, it's like that. The true art of wrestling is to make it look like you are doing the highest possible amount of damage to your opponent while, at the same time, protecting your opponent from getting hurt in the ring.

Anyone who thinks wrestling is "fake" needs to just take one look at Mick Foley, who is coming out of retirement this weekend at Wrestlemania XX — or better yet, read his first book, "Have a Nice Day: A Tale of Blood and Sweatsocks."

Foley lost his right ear in the ring while attempting to execute the "hangman" maneuver during a match several years ago in Germany.

Foley also suffered a concussion and severe damage to his head in his match against The Rock at the 1999 Royal Rumble pay-per-view, documented in the film "Beyond the Mat."

The Rock and Foley competed in an "I Quit" match, where The Rock handcuffed Foley's arms behind his back and then hammered him with eight-to-10 unprotected chair shots to the head.

Wrestling is no longer dominated by large, immobile monsters like it was 20 years ago. Today's wrestlers are smaller and quicker, capable of moves in the ring that you just didn't see even a decade ago.

Guys like Rey Mysterio Jr., Chris Jericho, Eddie Guerrero, Kurt Engel and Chris Benoit have redefined the word "wrestler" over the past couple of years.

Engel, as he reminds fans on an almost-weekly basis, won an Olympic gold medal while competing for the United States as a wrestler in the 1996 Olympics. He's a legitimate athlete, and so are the other guys.

At Wrestlemania XII in Anaheim in 1996, an event I attended in person, Shawn Michaels and Bret Hart competed in an "iron man" match, where they wrestled each other for more than 62 minutes for the WWF World Heavyweight Title, before Michaels emerged victorious. So wrestling is scripted. So what?

Hart and Michaels went into the ring in front of a huge worldwide TV audience and strung together move after move, sequence after sequence, for more than an hour. There were no second or third takes like in sitcoms or in the movies. They had to go in front of the cameras and the crowd one time and do everything right the first time.

That's pressure. That's why wrestling deserves the respect that, for the most part, has eluded it since it became common knowledge that the in-ring action was not actually competition.



PHOTO BY JOHNNY HAYNES/THE GAMECOCK

Renaldo Balkman and head coach Dave Odom pause during the SEC Tournament.

Odom, Balkman recognized by SEC

BY JONATHAN HILLYARD

THE GAMECOCK

Two Gamecocks were rewarded for their great season last week when the SEC coaches voted USC head coach Dave Odom as Coach of the Year and forward Renaldo Balkman to the SEC's All-Freshman team.

Odom responded humbly to his fourth conference coach of the year award by deferring most of the credit to his supporting cast.

"I can think of no award of this nature — no coaching accolade — more closely tied to the loyalty and hard work of a head coaches staff, the commitment and determined performance of his team and the support of their university and fans than this one," Odom said. "I am delighted to share this award with all those who love and care about Gamecock basketball."

The 17-year head coach won the award in the ACC three times during his tenure at Wake Forest. He earned those awards in 1991, 1994 and 1995, and in 1995 was also named the National Coach of the Year. The head Gamecock was the first coach at USC to win the award since Eddie Fogler did it in 1997.

The SEC's coaches apparently took notice of the superb coaching job Odom did with a team that finished fifth in the SEC East last year and was predicted to finish last in the SEC this year. His year overshadowed that of Mississippi State's Rick Stansbury, whose Bulldogs are ranked in the top five and took the regular season SEC title.

"This year has been absolutely wonderful for me," Odom said at last Wednesday's SEC Tournament media day. "I have seen this team grow, and I have been lucky enough in my coaching career to have never had a bad

staff, and this is the very best."

Balkman became the first Gamecock since Chuck Eidson in 2000 to be named to the SEC's All-Freshman team. The Tampa, Fla., native has served as the energy boost for the Gamecocks this year and has lovingly been nicknamed "The Plastic Man" by Carolina faithful.

The 6-foot, 7-inch, 198-pound freshman almost didn't make it to USC at all. Academic issues nearly prevented him from enrolling in the fall until he was finally accepted to the university and cleared to play in late October.

"South Carolina is the only place I wanted to be," Balkman said after being cleared in the fall. "I was determined to see this through, and it has been worth the effort."

Balkman is averaging 7.1 points per game and 4.7 rebounds per game this season.

The Associated Press named junior forward Carlos Powell to its All-Southeastern Conference third team. The Florence native led the Gamecocks in scoring this season.

Also being honored by the coaches at last week's SEC tournament was Mississippi State's Lawrence Roberts, who is in his first season since transferring away from a tragedy-stricken Baylor program. Roberts was a unanimous first team All-SEC selection.

In other awards, the SEC Defensive Player of the Year went to Georgia's Rashad Wright; Freshman of the Year went to LSU's Brandon Bass; Vanderbilt's Scott Hundley was named SEC Sixth Man of the Year and MSU's Shane Power earned the first Scholar-Athlete of the Year.

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

Women's tennis team annihilates 2 in-state opponents, Harvard

 BY WES WOLFE
 THE GAMECOCK

It was a mixed spring break for the No. 46 USC women's tennis team (9-4, 2-2 SEC), which dropped matches to No. 19 Kentucky and No. 4 Vanderbilt but was able to beat in-state rivals Winthrop and College of Charleston, along with No. 15 Harvard.

Kentucky-5 USC-2

The Wildcats (12-6, 3-1 SEC) came out and took the doubles point early, with Aibika Kalsariva and Lara Maurer beating Laura Ganzer and Christyn Lucas 8-2, while Sarah Foster and Joelle Schwenk took out the pairing of Magda Wojdylo and Fallon Koon for the other win for UK, 8-6.

Koon filled in for Danielle Wiggins, who moved up to 54th in the singles rankings last week. Carolina received some solace in the doubles matches, though, as the team of Miranda Gutierrez and Ayako Suzuki beat Kentucky's Christine Simpson and Liis Sober, 8-3.

The Gamecocks only managed two wins against the Wildcats in singles play, with Gutierrez beating Schwenk and Koon recording a win against Sober. Ganzer fell victim to No. 25 Kalsariva, Lucas lost to Maurer and Justine Walsh's match was awarded to Simpson after Kentucky netted its necessary four points.

USC-3 Vandy-4

The Gamecocks had a legitimate shot against the highly ranked Commodores (12-2, 4-1 SEC), but fell short by one point. The one point, won in doubles competition, made the difference as Carolina and Vanderbilt split the singles matches, 3-3.

The two losses in doubles play came honestly, though, since one team is ranked third in the nation and the other is 27th.

"The girls are playing really well, and they are getting better each match that we play," USC head coach Arlo Elkins said. "We have five combined freshman and sophomores in our lineup and one junior who is playing her first dual match action in two years, so I am very pleased with our progress. If we keep this up, we are going to be a tough team to beat by the end of the season."

Two of the wins came over ranked opponents, as Wiggins took out No. 27 Audra Falk 7-6, 6-2 and Lucas got past No. 80 Amanda Fish 6-4, 7-5.

Also, Koon notched USC's other win by beating Annie Menees in three sets. However, Vandy's talent across the board proved to be too much for Carolina,

♦ TENNIS, SEE PAGE 14

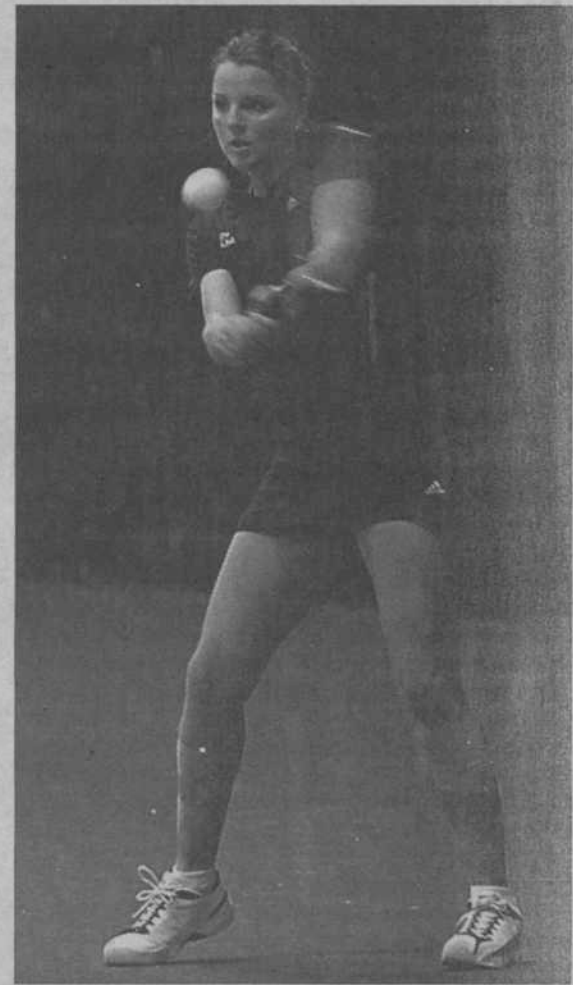


PHOTO BY MARK SCHILLING/THE GAMECOCK

Freshman Laura Ganzer in action for USC.

Baseball team stays perfect in 7-game spring break campaign

 BY STEPHEN DEMEDIS
 THE GAMECOCK

While much of the student body was away this past week, the USC men's baseball team (17-0) was busy taking on No. 18 Clemson, Yale and Delaware State while trying to maintain its undefeated record and No. 3 national ranking.

USC-5 Clemson-2

In the first of four games between the two in-state rivals, Carolina soundly defeated the Tigers (6-7) by a score of 5-2. The Gamecocks came out hot and scored three runs in the first inning off of Clemson starter Jason Berken. Bryan Triplett increased the lead with a two-run home run in the bottom of the fifth inning. USC starter Billy Buckner got in the win and

moved to 3-0 on the season. Buckner and reliever Chad Blackwell combined to set a team record for most strikeouts recorded in a game with 18. Buckner carried the load with 16 strikeouts before giving way to Blackwell.

Clemson-7 USC-8

On the road this time, the Gamecocks had a challenge putting Clemson away and took an extra inning to do so. USC won the game in the 10th, 8-7. The lead went back and forth between the two teams before the game went into extra innings. Trailing by two in the eighth, centerfielder Michael Campbell doubled to right, scoring two runners to tie the game at seven. After a scoreless ninth, sophomore Steven Tolleson opened the 10th with a game-winning home run. Also homering for Carolina were ju-

nior Steve Pearce and senior captain Landon Powell who scored his third of the year. Blackwell came on in relief in the sixth inning and got the win.

USC-6 Yale-1

USC returned to Columbia for a two-game series against the Yale Bulldogs (2-5). Carolina's ace pitcher Matt Campbell moved to 3-0 on the year as he stymied Yale's bats, allowing just one hit and striking out 11. On the season, Campbell has been extremely impressive. The junior has struck out 32 and has not allowed an earned run or given up a walk. Campbell held Yale scoreless through eight innings before giving way to reliever Cliff Donald, who gave up one run before earning the save. Although it was the first game in which Carolina's offense failed to produce

a home run, Pearce again provided the offense with a team-leading two RBIs. The game was over in less than two hours.

USC-9 Yale-2

In the final game, the Gamecock offense came to life in a 9-2 victory. Michael Campbell led the way with a three-run home run and an RBI single. Junior Jason Fletcher got the win, striking out five and allowing just one earned run. Powell went 3-for-4, extending his hitting streak to 10 games, but Triplett went 0-for-5, ending his streak at 13 games. Leading the way for Yale was outfielder Marc Sawyer, who had three hits and an RBI.

USC-4 DESU-2

Carolina's record moved to 15-0 with a

win Friday night over the Hornets (11-11) by a score of 4-2. The Gamecocks scored all four runs on home runs in the third inning and relied on four pitchers to get the job done on the mound. Campbell led off the third inning with a solo shot and after a single, Triplett and Pearce hit back-to-back shots to increase the lead.

USC-7 DESU-0

In the second game of the series, Carolina shut out Delaware State 7-0. Junior pitcher Aaron Rawl struck out seven on the way to his fourth win of the year. The Gamecocks scattered their runs through the game, bringing in most with clutch-hit doubles. USC scored four runs in the fourth inning, thanks to five

♦ BASEBALL, SEE PAGE 14