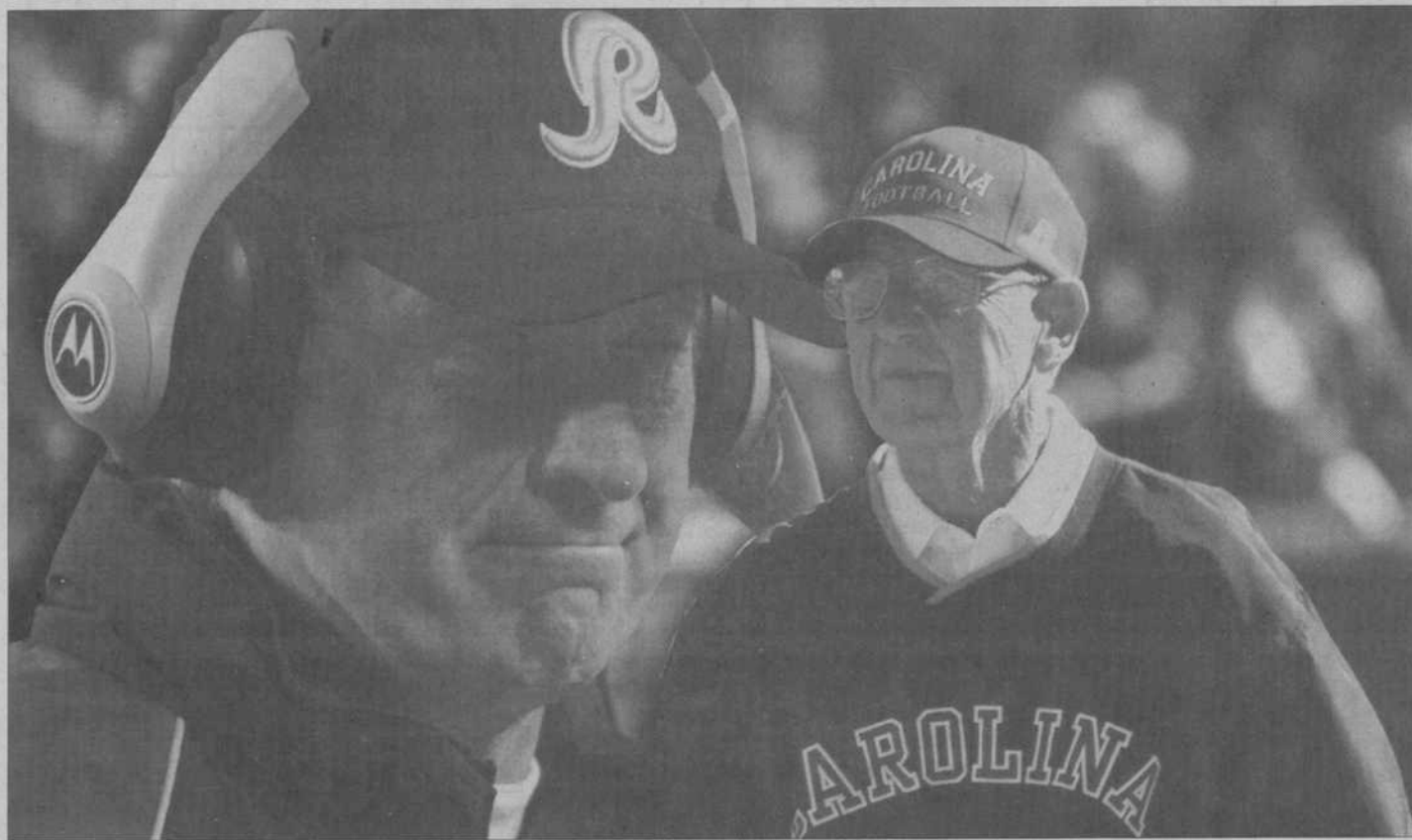


FRIDAY FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Holtz, Spurrier address rumors



GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID STAGG/THE GAMECOCK

USC head coach Lou Holtz, right, has been asked about his retirement and the possibility of being replaced by Steve Spurrier.

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The site also reported that USC Athletic Director Mike McGee would retire in six months to a year.

This is not the first time Holtz's retirement has been brought up. Following USC's game with Tennessee, Holtz said he was "tired" and "irritable," which prompted questions about his future.

Holtz is in his 33rd year as a college football head coach. Prior to coaching at USC, Holtz made stops at William & Mary, North Carolina State, Arkansas, Minnesota and Notre Dame. While at Notre Dame, he won a National Championship and was named national coach of the year.

Holtz has repeatedly said that his goal was to change the USC football culture and turn around a program that

has been infamous for over 100 years for losing. He said Monday he felt the culture had changed, regardless of whether he returns.

While the retirement of the 67-year-old Holtz might not be a surprise, his possible replacement could be Steve Spurrier, former coach at the University of Florida from 1990-2002, has had his name mentioned as the next Gamecock head coach.

Holtz, when asked about Spurrier, spoke very highly of him. He went as far as to say it would be "great for South Carolina" if Spurrier were his replacement.

"I could understand why he would want to come because I think the program is pretty solid. I think it still has to go to the next level," Holtz said. "We're close to competing for the championship, and I thought maybe we could this year, but the loss to Georgia, the loss to Ole Miss, but we

aren't far away." Holtz said he and Spurrier are known golfing buddies and have been friends for a number of years.

ESPN.com reported Wednesday that a USC representative had contacted Spurrier to gauge his interest in the job. Spurrier said that he might be interested, but that the job is not open right now so he would not speculate. He also said that he was only interested in a college job at a state university in the South.

Spurrier is rumored to have purchased a home on Lake Murray. He said he had never heard of Lake Murray before being asked about it.

Spurrier, who has been well noted as an accomplished and addicted golfer, has also been said to have been offered an Augusta National Golf Club membership. The club's president is Hootie Johnson, an alumnus of USC. Spurrier recently pulled his name

out of the running for the opening at his former school and alma mater, Florida. The job came available after head coach Ron Zook was fired after a 38-31 loss at Mississippi State. Zook has lost six home games in just less than three seasons as the Gators' coach, the same amount Spurrier lost in 12 years as Florida's head coach.

Spurrier was also rumored to be the leading candidate for the Miami Dolphins coaching job until the organization announced Tuesday that he was not on their list of potential coaches.

Whether the rumors of Holtz's retirement and his succession by Steve Spurrier are true, the Gamecocks have a very important game this weekend against the Ol' Ball Coach's former team.

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

USC, Florida to square off

By JIM ROCHE
THE GAMECOCK

If there was ever a time for a win against the Gators, now is the time. The Gamecocks (6-3, 4-3 SEC), after their dramatic come-from-behind win against the Arkansas Razorbacks last Saturday, will travel to the treacherous Swamp to attempt to do something no Gamecock team has done since 1939: beat the Florida Gators.

Both teams come into this weekend's game carrying some heavy baggage. The Florida Gators have struggled during the past few weeks. After losing to Mississippi State 38-31, the Gators fired head coach Ron Zook. The following week, the Gators lost to the Georgia Bulldogs for the first time since 1997. Zook, however, will coach for the remainder of the season.

The Gamecocks picked up their sixth win of the season against Arkansas, making them eligible for a bowl bid in late December or early January. But the Gamecocks are banged up. Quarterback Dondrial Pinkins is out with a rotator cuff injury. Running back Cory Boyd and defensive lineman Marque Hall sat out of practice earlier this week with flu-like symptoms but have since returned to practice. Wide receiver Matthew Thomas is limited with a virus.

The Gamecocks will bring the three-way attack quarterback Syvelle Newton, running back Demetris Summers and wide receiver Troy Williamson. The Gamecock defense has remained poised, led by SEC defensive player of the week, free safety Ko Simpson. Simpson is tied in the SEC for most interceptions this year with five. Simpson had four solo tackles, a 57-yard fumble recovery that was run back for a touchdown, and an interception that closed out the game.

"They are a well-coached football

team. They are an athletic team. Defensively, they are a team that plays extremely hard. They might do a few things different than they did last year, and they use a lot of different coverages. Their two freshmen lead the league in interceptions, and their defense plays hard up front and chases the football," Zook said.

The Florida Gators have slipped this season, but they haven't fallen yet. Florida is second in the SEC in team scoring, averaging 33.8 points a game. The Gators are first in passing offense with 21 touchdowns this year. Florida quarterback Chris Leak is as dangerous as it gets. He leads the SEC in passing yards, averaging 265 yards per game. Leak is a powerful thrower in and out of the pocket. Leak is elusive with his feet and can make defenders miss throughout the game. Gator running back Ciatrick Fason leads the SEC in rushing yards with 1,050 and nine rushing touchdowns this season. On defense, Florida linebacker Channing Crowder is third in the SEC in tackles with 69 and has two sacks, but might be held out of the game with a torn ligament in his foot.

USC head coach Lou Holtz could be entering his final three games at the helm of the Gamecocks. Rumors are circulating around Columbia that former Gator head coach Steve Spurrier has expressed interest in USC's program. Florida's defensive coordinator Charlie Strong is a former defensive coordinator for the Gamecocks. The winner of this game will have control of third place in the SEC East. The Gamecocks look to spoil the Gators' homecoming and beat them in the Swamp for the first time in 65 years. The game will start at 7 p.m. Saturday and will broadcast on ESPN2.

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

Zook to skip Gator Growl amid post-firing atmosphere

By BRIAN SHAFFER
and ANDREW ABRAMSON
INDEPENDENT FLORIDA
ALLIGATOR (U. FLORIDA)

(U-WIRE) GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Perhaps expecting a less-than-approving response from the fans, lame duck University of Florida coach Ron Zook will not be attending tonight's Gator Growl.

Traditionally, the head coach introduces the outgoing seniors before a packed crowd at the Swamp.

This year, Zook is opting out. "I don't want anything to happen that would interrupt a special time for them," Zook said. "This is their time, and I would hate for something to happen that would take away from their moment."

It is unclear whether an assistant coach, a player representative or somebody else will introduce the seniors.

While he might be all right with passing on the opportunity to introduce this year's seniors, Zook might not be emotionally past his midseason dismissal. During his weekly news conference, Zook went through some of the Gators' offensive statistics but found time to take a slight shot at his firing.

"Offensively, they have done a pretty nice job," Zook said. "(We have the) number one running back in the SEC, number one quarterback in the SEC, number one receiver in the SEC, number one player in all-purpose yardage in the SEC. (We're) first in the SEC in pass offense, first in total offense, first in first downs — which is a big one — first in third downs, second in scoring and the first staff to be fired."

down the stretch, the Gators must deal with a coaching change at the end of the season.

Still angry about losing Zook, players have approached their coach about transferring after the season.

If Zook has his way, nobody will leave UF.

"A lot of them have talked to me," Zook said. "The thing I've said is that (whatever coaching staff) comes in here is going to be good people. The reason (the players) are going to like them is because our players are good guys, competitors and winners. I've told several of them just give the thing a chance, and it'll be fine."

INJURY UPDATE

Linebacker Travis Harris, who missed the Gators' game against

Vanderbilt with a high ankle sprain, could be back in the lineup for UF's homecoming game against USC. Zook said the senior told him Tuesday morning that he'll be ready to play his last home game as a Gator.

In other linebackers news, Earl Everett should be back after missing last week's game with a head injury. However, Zook said that junior Todd McCullough (ankle) and sophomore Channing Crowder (foot) are "probable to questionable," making their status uncertain.

"I think if there is a way that Channing can play, I think you'll see 55 out there," Zook said.

Running back DeShawn Wynn is battling a groin injury. Zook said that Wynn is still another week away from playing, but he did not rule out a possible Saturday return.

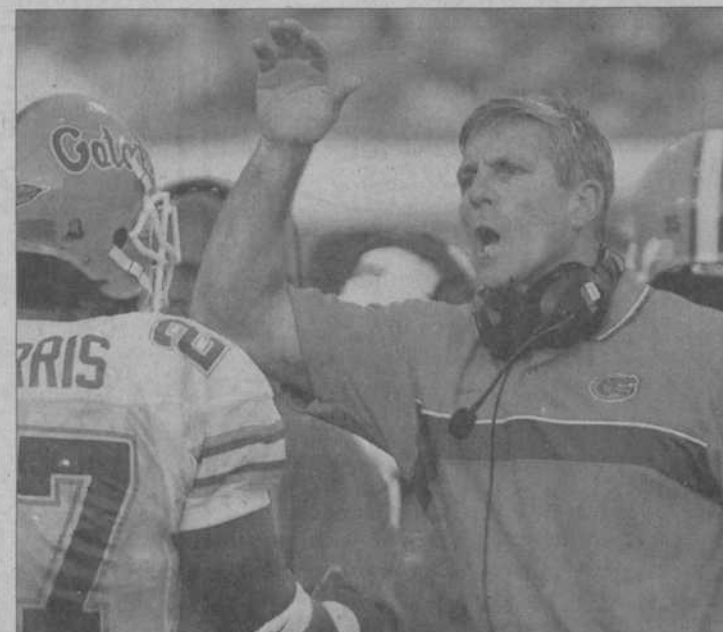


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN SCHOOL
Regardless of how the team fares Florida Gators head coach Ron Zook makes a point to Travis Harris as he leaves the field in the third quarter against Georgia.



CHARLIE DAVENPORT/THE GAMECOCK

Sophomore receiver Noah Whiteside runs after rolling over an Arkansas defender in USC's 35-32 win Saturday. The play occurred on USC's final drive in which Whiteside made two crucial catches.

Whiteside silences critics

■ Receiver's hand in Arkansas win muffles bowl-crazy detractors

By STEPHEN FASTENAU
STAFF WRITER

Hear that? Silence. It is what Noah Whiteside has enjoyed this week from critics who are normally quick to harp on his punt-returning troubles. These days the sophomore is letting his receiving make all the noise and was a major factor in helping USC become bowl eligible.

Whiteside fielded just one punt for 12 yards in last week's win against Arkansas but was instrumental in the Gamecocks' game-winning drive.

USC head coach Lou Holtz praised Whiteside and fellow receiver Troy Williamson for their development as players this season. While Williamson

once seemed the only target of USC quarterbacks, Whiteside has emerged as a secondary threat that keeps defenses honest.

"It's amazing how the offense has taken on a different concept," Holtz said. "Troy Williamson and Noah Whiteside have developed. It's really something."

In the past three games, Whiteside had 10 catches for 91 yards whereas he managed to grab just two balls in the first three games of the season. The low point came with Whiteside being suspended for the Georgia game for a reported housing violation.

Whiteside's punt returns were also once a concern. Holtz showed faith in his young receiver, and instead of replacing him with Demetris Summers as he had once suggested, he left him in to gain valuable experience. Whiteside has gradually become more consistent in his decision-making and is averaging

8.8 yards per return.

Whiteside has 19 catches for 279 yards on the season. While only averaging a little more than two catches a game, some of those catches have been key in some games' outcomes.

In the Gamecocks' win last week, two of Whiteside's three catches came on the final drive. Whiteside had only one catch against Kentucky — a 16-yard grab on third down as USC marched for the winning score.

Despite fumbling once against Mississippi, Whiteside had one of his best games with four catches for 89 yards and had a season-high six catches in a loss to Tennessee.

The way Holtz has talked this week, Whiteside might have the opportunity to make more big plays this week against Florida. Holtz has generally been more aggressive offensively in big games in the past and will likely be the

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