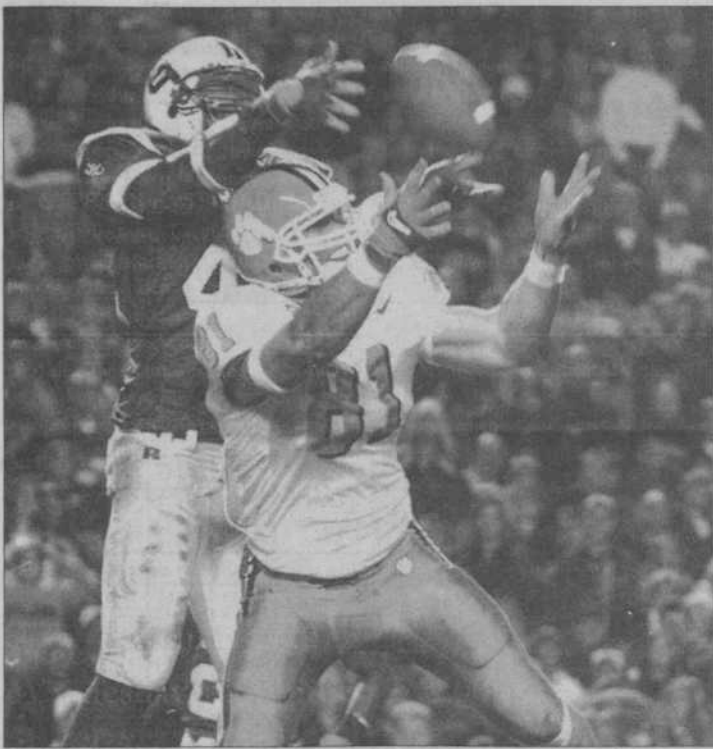




## Countdown to **Clemson** 3 days



FILE PHOTO/THE GAMECOCK

A Clemson receiver catches a touchdown against USC in their 63-17 win over the Gamecocks last season. Clemson and USC have reversed roles in many aspects over the course of the last year.

### Tigers fail to meet lofty expectations

By **STEPHEN FASTENAU**  
STAFF WRITER

Clemson head coach Tommy Bowden and his team are facing a tough situation this weekend against USC. At 5-5, The Tigers must win to ensure bowl eligibility, a mark Bowden has reached in each of his five previous seasons.

Bowden's job has not been in question as it was last season because he signed a contract extension in the offseason that will keep him at Clemson through 2010. However, the Tigers have fallen well short of expectations this year after being ranked No. 15 nationally in the preseason. Clemson started 1-4 with losses to nationally ranked Florida State and Virginia and, after reeling off four consecutive wins, fell last week to Duke.

"We're sitting here with five wins," Bowden said. "That's not the objective. It's not the preseason goal."

One of the main reasons for the Tigers' plight can be attributed to offensive woes. Quarterback Charlie Whitehurst entered the season as a fringe Heisman Trophy candidate but has not shown any of the flash he did last season. He's thrown 16 interceptions and seven touchdowns this season and has the worst quarterback rating in the ACC.

"We've struggled more offensively than since I've been head coach in eight years," Bowden said. "We've played good teams, but everybody's playing good teams."

Saturday's loss to Duke surprised Bowden and 10,000 Tiger fans who attended the game. Clemson fans saw the Duke game as an automatic ticket to a bowl. As the final seconds ticked off the clock, Bowden was left searching for answers.

"After the game, after the loss, usually

I hurt for the players because of the amount of time and effort they put into this, but getting into the car going home I had a unique feeling," Bowden said. "I felt that I had let a bunch of people down."

Down is the direction Bowden's program has gone after last season when they finished with five straight wins and a No. 22 ranking. Other than their strength of schedule, the Tigers have been victimized primarily by turnovers, none more glaring than Whitehurst's interception last week that led to the Blue Devil's winning drive.

"One of the things, the difficulties we've had are turnovers," Bowden said. "After four games, I think we were leading the nation with 14 giveaways. I never envisioned that."

If nothing else, the Tigers will have recent history on their side. Clemson has won the past two times it has played the Gamecocks when facing

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## Clemson, USC reverse roles

By **JONATHAN HILLYARD**  
SPORTS EDITOR

It seems like only yesterday that the Gamecock football team was preparing to face a Clemson squad coming off a huge upset over Florida State and a blowout win over Duke. USC was coming off a heartbreaking loss to Florida and needed one final win to reach postseason play. One year later, the Carolina program is going to its first bowl game since 2001, and Clemson is the one who needs one last win.

"For ourselves, the last time we lost like this, we did not respond well,"

Clemson head coach Tommy Bowden said Sunday. "How the loss will affect them, I am anxious to see."

A year ago, Bowden was wondering whether he would be returning for an eighth season as head coach in the upstate. Many Tiger boosters were calling for the coach's head after an embarrassing loss to Wake Forest. Now, it is the USC head man's future in question. Ironically, the man looking over Lou Holtz's shoulder is the very same one said to be a candidate for Bowden's job a year ago — Steve Spurrier.

Holtz has been asked in recent weeks about his plans and about

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**TOMMY BOWDEN**  
CLEMSON HEAD COACH

Spurrier. He confirmed Tuesday that he has indeed talked to the Ol' Ball Coach.

"I've talked with Steve," Holtz said.

"We've talked about how to cure a slice. That's about it."

In 2003 Clemson entered its annual game with the Gamecocks with a bowl game secured but fighting for position. A 63-17 win over Carolina boosted them into Atlanta's Peach Bowl, a game they won over the overwhelming favorites, the Tennessee Volunteers.

2004 is a whole new story, one that sees the Gamecocks bowl-eligible and fighting for a berth in, guess what, the Peach Bowl. Should USC defeat Clemson, and Florida and Alabama

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## Holtz's eye on Clemson

◆ *Coach refuses to allow future to affect preparations*

By **STEPHEN FASTENAU**

Staff writer

Lou Holtz began what might be his final week as USC head coach by popping the tab on his Dier Coke and taking a sip at the start of Monday's news conference. Before addressing his future with the team, Holtz said something that came as a surprise to many in the room.

"This Coke is stale, whoever put it up here (on the table). I know I don't deserve a fresh one, but this is stale."

Holtz did speak of something fresh — the memory of last year's 63-17 loss to Clemson. The loss ended a disappointing season in which the team went 5-7 after dropping its final four games and failed to reach a bowl game for the second consecutive season.

"We play them up there, and we play them early (in the day)," Holtz said. "I don't know about our football team, but this one has bothered me for a year."

When asked about his future, Holtz made it clear that his focus this week was on Clemson and did not want the speculation to be a distraction to his team. Rumors escalated before last week's game at Florida that Holtz would retire following the season and that Steve Spurrier would be his likely replacement. USC then suffered its worst defeat of the season.

"I don't want to go down that road, because there's only one thing on my mind right now and only one thing important in this world and that's Clemson," Holtz said.

USC has the opportunity to avenge last year's loss and keep Clemson from becoming bowl-eligible. The Tigers had an opportunity to reach the required six win plateau last week but lost on a last-

second field goal to Duke. It was the Blue Devils' first win against a conference opponent this season and their first against a Division I-A school in 2004. Despite the loss, Holtz does not see it as a reason to take Clemson lightly.

"Duke played well," Holtz said. "Guy kicks a 53-yard field goal — that's crazy. But (Clemson) had won four in a row and beaten N.C. State, Maryland and Miami in a row, and that's pretty impressive."

Last year's loss to the Tigers changed the face of the USC football team this season. Holtz said the primary reason for making widespread changes in his coaching staff this season was that his team had lost so badly. In his 33 years as a head coach, Holtz could not think of an instance where a rivalry game has haunted him as much as it had last year. When asked how badly he wanted to win this week, Holtz tried to keep the game in perspective.

"It's still a game, and it's still not a matter of life and death," Holtz said. "It's still not important when you compare it with somebody's health or somebody's personal, serious problems ... but I've never wanted to win a game as much as I do this one."

The prospect of this being Holtz's final year seems to be more palpable as Holtz continues to reflect on this season and his tenure at USC. The 67-year-old coach said he considered stepping down after last season's loss to Clemson but that it was normal thinking under the circumstances.

"When that happened, you always think about leaving," Holtz said. "It's a sanity test. I wasn't going to leave the program in that condition. I didn't think that would be fair. I do think the program is pretty solid (now). We'll find out Saturday."

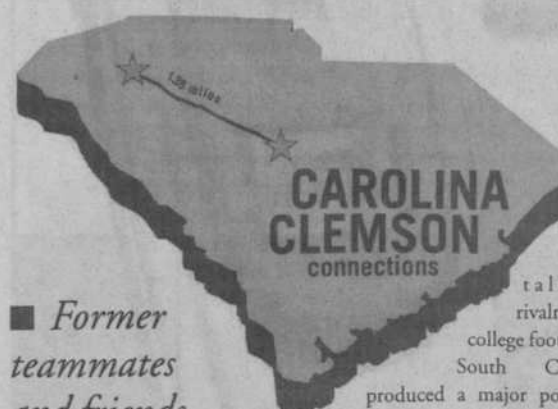
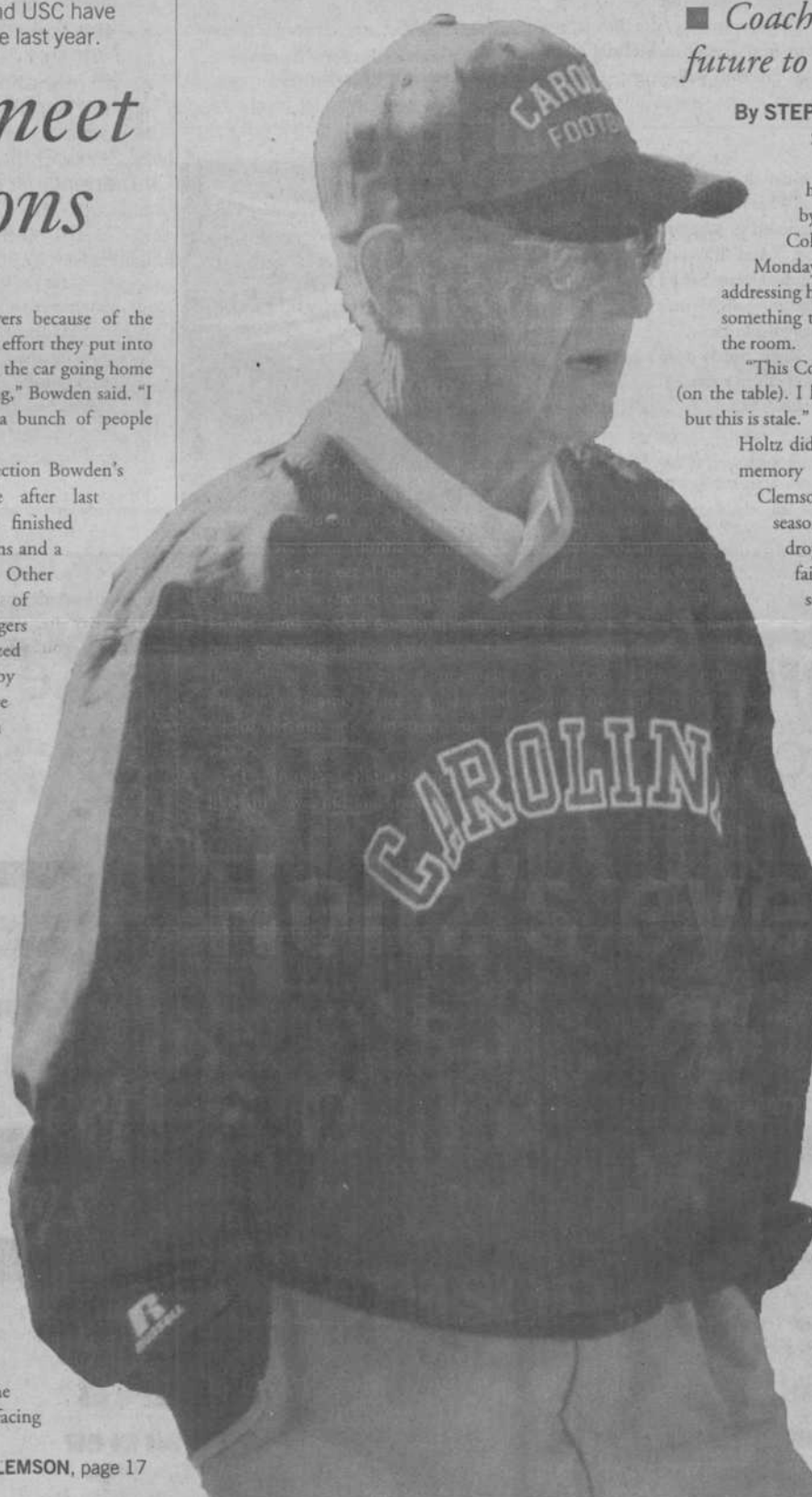
Regardless of the outcome Saturday, the Gamecocks will still be playing in a bowl game this year after qualifying with a win against Arkansas. Clemson, at 5-5 on the season, will need a win to avoid failing to reach a bowl for the first time in coach Tommy Bowden's tenure. Despite the heated rivalry, Holtz's goal is to uplift his school rather than bring down the Tigers' program.

"This isn't about you hate somebody but that I love South Carolina, and I want to see us on top," Holtz said. "It's not about getting even with somebody. It's about putting your school, your people, where they belong."

With the pressure of this week's game against his team's biggest rival, Holtz was still able to find some humor in the situation.

"I tried to get my wife to leave town this week because I'm not a good guy to be around," Holtz said. "I wanted her to leave, and she wouldn't leave, and she has me on a suicide watch. Other than that, I'm fine."

Comments on this story? E-mail [gamecocksports@gwm.sc.edu](mailto:gamecocksports@gwm.sc.edu)



## Links abundant in Palmetto rivalry

◆ *Former teammates and friends to face off in contest*

By **ALEX RILEY**  
THE GAMECOCK

The 102-game-old rivalry between USC and Clemson has always divided the state into two factions on game day: Tigers and Gamecocks, with no middle ground.

Many in the state grow up cheering for one or the other based on their surroundings, including living in a family or town that is either orange or black.

That loyalty is what has made the rivalry one of the most prominent and

talked-about rivalries in all of college football.

South Carolina has produced a major portion of both teams' talent during the years, and this season is no exception.

Fifty-eight of the 106 players on the Gamecocks' roster are from the Palmetto State, while 45 of the 104 players on Clemson's team have ties to South Carolina.

While players like Demetris Summers (Lexington) and Jamacia Jackson (Sumter) have stayed close to the Midlands, other players have gone to Tigertown. Players like Tramaire Billie (Columbia) and Airese Currie (Columbia) were heavily recruited by the Gamecocks. Carolina has had its share of upstate grabs, though. USC picked up Noah Whiteside (Greenville) and Ricardo Hurley (Greenwood) from the

upstate.

Beyond taking players from other areas, both squads feature players that were teammates in their high school days. Jabari Levey and Brent Smith graduated from Berkley High School in 2003, while Gamecock David Smith will be across the sideline from fellow Union High School graduate Kyle Browning.

While players are always the biggest part of a rivalry, there is something to be said for the men who are leading them. Both USC and Clemson have coaches with ties to the other, as USC features wide receivers coach Rick Stockstill, while Clemson has former Gamecock head coach Brad Scott.

Stockstill, added to the coaching staff in 2004, was an assistant coach at Clemson from 1989-2002 before leaving to take on offensive coordinator duties at East Carolina.

Stockstill was the receivers coach at Clemson also, and his most legendary player could be Washington Redskin standout Rod Gardner, also known by longtime USC fans as "The Push" during the 2000 contest at Clemson.

Scott was USC's head coach from 1994-1998 and led the Gamecocks to their first bowl win in his first year, a 24-21 victory over West Virginia in the CarQuest Bowl.

That season, USC was 5-5 coming into the rivalry game at Death Valley and went on to beat the Tigers to become bowl-eligible. Scott, who was fired prior to the 1999 season, was 2-1 in Death Valley and is one of only seven coaches in history to have a winning record against Clemson at Tiger stadium after three games.

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CHARLIE DAVENPORT/THE GAMECOCK

Sophomore running back Demetris Summers, left, stiff arms an Arkansas defender on his way down field in the Gamecocks' 35-32 win.