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Since 1908

Holtz tells players he won't be back

By **STEPHEN FASTENAU**
THE GAMECOCK

Coach Lou Holtz will retire at the end of the season, reportedly opening the door for former Florida coach Steve Spurrier to take over, a source close to the team confirmed Thursday.

According to the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, Holtz told his players before Thursday's practice of his plans to retire. Wednesday, sophomore quarterback Syvelle Newton said Holtz would let his players know of his plans before he addressed the media.

Just two days before USC plays its biggest game of the season against rival Clemson, Columbia awoke to a plethora of talk on a report from The Tennessean, a Nashville newspaper.

Spurrier, former Florida and Washington Redskins coach, has agreed to take the head coaching position at USC if Lou Holtz retires following the season, according to a report published in The (Nashville) Tennessean on Thursday. ESPN.com confirmed the report.

Holtz has repeatedly said he will not make a decision on his future until after this week's game against the Tigers. He has also said it would be a "great thing" if Spurrier were to succeed him if he were to retire.

Holtz should make a formal announcement early next week. In the meantime, USC Sports Information Director Kerry Tharp has said neither Holtz nor his players would meet with the media until after the Clemson game.

Tharp said he fielded calls Thursday from various media outlets across the country and gave them all a similar response.

"Coach Holtz has mentioned several times that he is going to take a look at whether or not he's going to coach beyond this season," Tharp said. "He certainly has some season left."

"It's his call, and it always has been his call. We'll talk about this publicly when it's best for him."

During the past two weeks, Holtz had not given a definite answer to the situation. Earlier this week he noted that he had talked with Spurrier.

"I've talked with Steve," Holtz said. "We've talked about how to cure a slice. That's about it."

Golf has apparently played at least a

small part in Spurrier's decision making. Spurrier is reportedly enticed by the prospect of becoming a member at the prestigious Augusta National golf club, where Holtz is an associate member. USC alumnus Hootie Johnson is the chairman of the club.

Local news station WIS was on campus Thursday gauging student reaction.

Other news stations from Charlotte and Charleston, as well as a crew from ESPN, were in the Williams-Brice parking lot.

Campus reactions were mixed. First-year engineering student Kayleigh Hudson said she thinks Spurrier would be good for the program.

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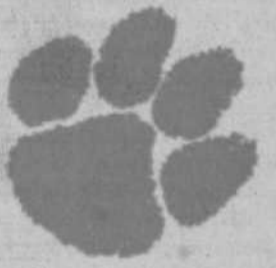


KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK
A USC student shows his feelings about Spurrier during the USC-Florida game in Gainesville last Saturday.



Countdown to : 1 day

Clemson



Rivals to meet again

By **JOEL WALLACE**
THE GAMECOCK

The battle for pigskin supremacy in the Palmetto State continues Saturday with the 102nd meeting between USC and Clemson.

The usual pageantry associated with the rivalry has taken a backseat to questions surrounding the future of coaching legend Lou Holtz. This is particularly disconcerting for the Gamecocks, as Holtz has tried to avoid distractions so the team can be better prepared than when they headed into last year's 63-17 debacle at Williams-Brice.

Holtz has beaten Clemson only once in his Carolina career, and he has made it clear that he wants to win this game more than any he's ever coached. Statements like that have left the door open for speculation about the coach's future at USC, especially with rumors of Steve Spurrier running rampant.

The Gamecocks and Tigers head into this game with question marks surrounding their quarterback situations. For USC, the question is how effective the Gamecocks can be at the position, as Syvelle Newton's ankle injury might limit his mobility. The sophomore sensation was unable to avoid the Florida pass rush in the Swamp.

"Syvelle has been moving around pretty good," quarterbacks coach Skip Holtz said. "His ankle seems much better."



Seasons hinge on defense

By **MATTHEW NAGY**
THE GAMECOCK

As USC and Clemson enter the 102nd Palmetto Classic on Saturday, the only certainty is the teams' uncertain defensive performances — Clemson started slow and picked up the pace, while Carolina has faltered after a 4-1 start. Carolina has struggled since facing Mississippi on Oct. 9, while Clemson has started another late season roll after starting 1-4.

The Gamecocks came into the match-up with the Rebels ranked No. 25 in the week's AP poll but got torched on defense against Mississippi's three-quarterback rotation. Since the game, USC has gone 2-2 and given up more points against Tennessee (43) and Florida (48) than it had during its entire 4-1 stretch to begin the year. While Carolina has been struggling since mid-October, the Tigers have turned it on down the stretch yet again and were able to position themselves for bowl eligibility with a win Saturday.

Carolina gave up an average of 7.8 points per game in the first five match-ups, but that number has ballooned to 32.2 points per game in the last five contests. The Gamecocks forced more turnovers in the first five games than the second five and were able to get to the quarterback more. The USC defense has not earned a sack since the Tennessee match-up and has had problems putting pressure on the quarterback all year.

CHARLIE DAVENPORT/THE GAMECOCK
I am the Cock Commander. All other cocks must bow before the Cock Commander. Yo soy el Cock Commander.

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Seniors bid farewell to season



By **STEPHEN DEMEDIS**
STAFF WRITER

Since 1908, the Clemson-Carolina game has been an annual in-state showdown, but for some Gamecocks, this year will be the last game. On Saturday, 23 USC seniors, including 15 from the state of South Carolina, will take the field for the last time against the archrival Clemson Tigers.

Once again, the game has huge implications concerning bowl games, coaching changes and recruiting leverage. But for USC's senior players, the game has an extra meaning.

"This game is really important to both schools when you think about the rivalry and how we want to win as a team," linebacker Rod Wilson said. "But it is different this year because (as a senior) you get a lifetime worth of bragging rights if you win. It gives the game extra meaning."

Some seniors were part of the team that defeated Clemson 20-15 in 2001 and know what it is like to beat the Tigers. Others have only been on the roster the past two years, in which USC lost both games to Clemson.

"I have never beaten them," South Carolina native Marcus Lawrence said. "I was a junio: college transfer and have been

here two years. To be able to beat them for the first time and go out on top as a senior would be awfully special."

One of the losses Lawrence witnessed was the 63-17 trouncing Clemson handed Carolina last year at Williams-Brice. The loss not only kept the Gamecocks out of a bowl game for the third year in a row but humiliated Carolina's oldest players on Senior Night. The reactions of their teammates last year looms in the minds of the '05 seniors.

"It was hard seeing seniors like Travelle Wharton and Jeremiah Garrison last year after the game, just watching them get undressed and seeing the hurt that they had," senior guard Jonathan Alston said. "The whole team felt that way, but it was different for (the seniors) because they couldn't come back and play another game."

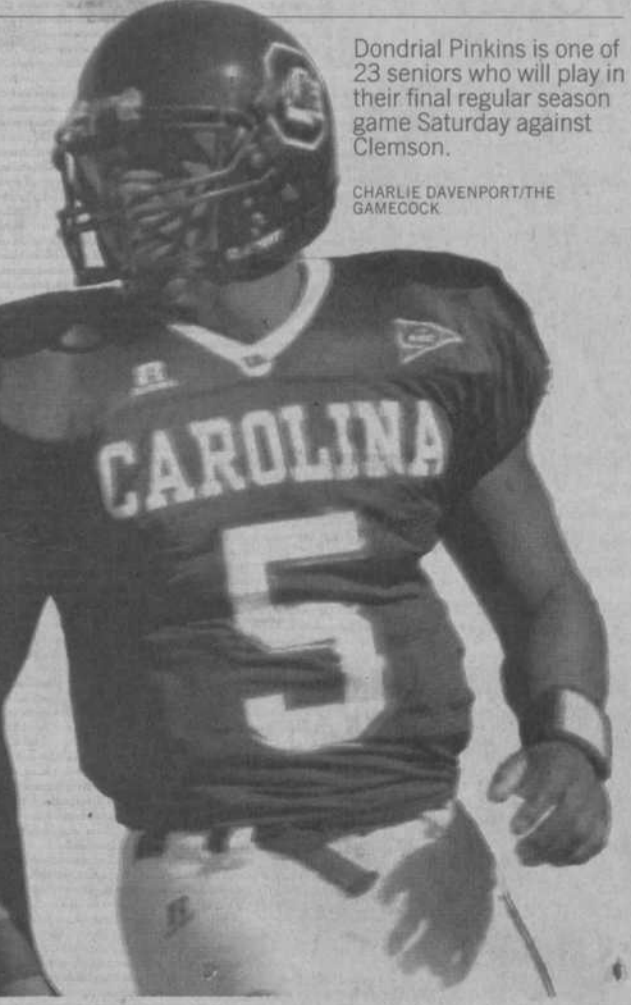
Carolina's upperclassmen have been taking time to convey their emotions and anticipation to their younger teammates. On Wednesday, Wilson, a fifth-year senior, explained to a freshman who did not believe in rivalries just how much this game means to the students and alumni.

It is a message that those who returned from last year's team know all too well, as they were reminded of the 46-point loss wherever they went.

"Last year when I went home (to Goose Creek), I was at a gas station and these little kids are yelling, '63-17,' and it was embarrassing," Alston said. "But at the same time, this year I don't want to do anything but smile and know that we came away with a victory."

Any success that Carolina has Saturday will be directly related to the play of its seniors, who will clearly bring drive and emotion with them onto the field. Throughout the week, USC head coach Lou Holtz has stressed the importance of strong play from the offensive line and defenders in pass coverage over the middle — both areas where seniors hold starting rolls.

How the Gamecock seniors respond to their coach's comments will wait to be seen, but one thing is certain: A victory in their last game against their archrivals would deliver a great sense of pride and bragging rights, as well as something to hang their hat on in years to come.



Dondrial Pinkins is one of 23 seniors who will play in their final regular season game Saturday against Clemson.
CHARLIE DAVENPORT/THE GAMECOCK

Seniors Rod Wilson, top, and Preston Thorne take part in senior day festivities.
CHARLIE DAVENPORT/THE GAMECOCK

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