

Spurrier assembles new staff

By JONATHAN HILLYARD
 SPORTS EDITOR

With the announcement that Steve Spurrier would be the new football coach at USC, a new era in Gamecock football has begun. Spurrier put together his supporting cast of coaches over the holidays, setting a foundation for what he hopes will be an era of success.

As announced after his hiring, Spurrier will retain three coaches from coach Lou Holtz's previous staff.

Rick Stockstill, the former wide receivers coach and recruiting coordinator, will coach the tight ends and remain as USC's recruiting guru. Stockstill is in his second year at USC after coaching at East Carolina and Clemson for a number of years.

Also returning from Holtz's staff will be secondary coach Ron Cooper. Cooper will be in his second season in this position. Before coming to USC, Cooper served as a head coach at both Eastern Washington University and the University of Louisville.

The third returning 2004 staff member will be former graduate

assistant David Reaves. Reaves will assist Spurrier in coaching the quarterbacks and will be in his second year at USC.

Taking Stockstill's spot as wide receivers coach will be Steve Spurrier Jr., who most recently was a coach at the University of Arizona. He has 11 years of coaching experience at numerous schools, including the University of Florida, where he won a national championship; the University of Oklahoma, where he won another national championship and the NFL's Washington Redskins.

"I am extremely excited about having the opportunity to coach at the University of South Carolina," Spurrier Jr. said. "This is a great school, with great fans, in the best conference in America. I'm looking forward to coaching the receivers in this offense, and I consider it a privilege to be here."

Also joining the offensive staff will be new offensive line coach John Hunt. Hunt was a member of Spurrier's staff at Florida and coached three All-SEC linemen during that time. Hunt played offensive line at Florida from 1980-83

where he was also voted All-SEC.

Adding a familiar name to the offensive staff, Spurrier has hired Madre Hill to be the team's running backs coach. Hill, only 29 years old, led the SEC in rushing in 1995 for the Arkansas Razorbacks. He was named first-team All-SEC that season as he led the Razorbacks to the SEC Championship game. After stops with the Cleveland Browns and the 2002 AFC Champion Oakland Raiders, Hill returned to Arkansas as an assistant coach.

"We're excited about having Madre Hill join the South Carolina coaching staff," Spurrier said. "He brings a lot of excitement, energy and enthusiasm to our football program."

On the defensive side of the ball, Spurrier has brought in a number of names familiar to SEC football fans.

Joining Cooper in the secondary will be Dave Wommack, who has served as the Arkansas Razorbacks' defensive coordinator since the 2002 season. In 2002, the Razorbacks' defense led the team to its second SEC Championship game.

In an unusual move for such a big

program, USC will have co-defensive coordinators this season. John Thompson, former Arkansas, LSU and Florida defensive coordinator, will be one of the Gamecocks' co-coordinators. Thompson was most recently the head coach at East Carolina for two seasons. Thompson has coached 40 all-conference players in his collegiate career, and in his one season at Florida, his defense ranked No. 7 in the nation against the pass. Thompson will specialize in coaching the linebackers.

Teaming up with Thompson will be former Southern Mississippi defensive coordinator Tyrone Nix. Nix has spent the last four seasons as the Golden Eagles' defensive coordinator, and in 2003 the unit ranked No. 5 in the nation in pass defense, No. 13 in pass efficiency defense, No. 14 in scoring defense and No. 23 in total defense. Three All-Americans were on that squad. Nix will specialize in coaching the USC defensive line.

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USC recruiting picks up after crucial weekend



BOB MACK/THE FLORIDA TIMES UNION

Coach Steve Spurrier is assembling his first Carolina recruiting class. The Gamecocks hosted 18 prospects this past weekend.

By ALEX RILEY
 STAFF WRITER

The USC football program received a boost from the basketball team Saturday. As fans cheered their hearts out for the Gamecocks, a group of 18 recruits witnessed the loyalty and devotion Gamecock fans show to their athletic teams.

It was enough to sway the loyalties of many recruits.

After Saturday's game, Carolina has picked up 15 commitments, according to gamecockcentral.com, for next football season.

USC's new coaching staff had already picked up three early commitments with running back Bobby Wallace, athlete Kenny McKinley and quarterback Tommy Beecher and has one signee in defensive back Mike West.

Wallace is a three-star running back ranked in the top-25 prospects from the state by Rivals.com after picking up 1914 yards rushing and 28 touchdowns. He was Steve Spurrier's first commitment. Wallace's honors are numerous, including being the MVP of the North/South All-Star Game this year.

McKinley, a three-star player, had

offers from numerous schools, headlined by Tennessee. McKinley played mostly quarterback in high school, but he is predicted to play wide receiver in college. McKinley accumulated 1470 yards passing last fall with 16 touchdowns as the Cobb County offensive player of the year honors.

Beecher, a two-star quarterback, heard a lot of talk from many big schools, little of which materialized. His only other offer came from Richmond, but his 2586 yards passing with 28 touchdowns spoke volumes to the USC coaches, and he became Spurrier's first quarterback commitment.

Two-star defensive back Yvan Banag of Buford, Ga., made his verbal commitment to the Gamecock program this past weekend. Banag received offers from numerous schools, including SEC rival Mississippi State and Vanderbilt, but will soon call Columbia his home. While a bit undersized at 5-feet-11-inches, Banag brings a 31-inch vertical leap to the secondary.

USC also picked up three-star defensive back Gerrod Sinclair of Jacksonville, Fla. Sinclair had offers

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Gamecocks to match up against Tigers in early conference road test

BATTLE ON THE BAYOU



KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK

Senior forward Carlos Powell will battle LSU star Brandon Bass in tonight's game in Baton Rouge. Tip-off is at 8 p.m.

By MIQUEL JACOBS
 STAFF WRITER

Don't expect another pushover win tonight when the USC men's basketball team (9-4, 1-1 SEC) travels to Baton Rouge to take on the LSU Tigers (6-5, 0-1 SEC). Despite a strong showing against Georgia and near upsets at three then-top-10 teams, conference play is always unpredictable as Carolina battles for SEC win number two.

Carolina leads the series against the Tigers 11-6 overall and 3-2 on the road. The Gamecocks have won four of the last five against the Tigers, including two victories last season. The most recent loss was a 71-58 setback in February 2003, the last time the game was played in Louisiana.

"Facing LSU in Baton Rouge is always a difficult challenge for any team, but especially for us," USC coach Dave Odom said. "They are the type of team that has given us problems this year. They are big inside, and their size is overwhelming. We had problems with Kansas and Kentucky's postmen, and their guys fall into that category with Brandon Bass and Glen Davis. This is a different challenge, and we will have to see how it goes."

Bass, who contributed 14 points and nine rebounds in an 85-64 LSU loss to Carolina in the SEC Tournament last season, will indeed cause problems for the Carolina frontcourt. A pre-season All-SEC player, Bass averages 16.6 points and 8.6 rebounds per game. He ranks in the top six of every category in the SEC generally associated with forwards, including topping the field-goal percentage list at 62 percent. Post players Carlos Powell, Antoine

Tisby and Brandon Wallace will have the responsibility of shutting down one of the conference's most prolific players.

The Tigers are most recently coming off a 73-58 loss to No. 19 Alabama in the conference opener. After beginning the season on a hot streak, LSU has dropped four of its last five games and became another team to fall victim to what many believe will be an unusually weak year for the SEC.

The Gamecocks are coming off a big win against the Georgia Bulldogs at home this past Saturday. Falling behind quickly to a 13-3 deficit, Carolina clawed back in the game seemingly in an instant after a 34-6 run put Georgia away for good. In his first start as a

Gamecock, Tisby provided the presence that Carolina will need in the post while Powell continued his stellar season with a game-high 19 points.

However, if the inside game isn't effective, the guards might have to carry this game for Carolina. Senior Josh Gonner averaged 12 points per game in the past four games, getting out of the slump that began his season averaging only 7.6 per game. In the slump, Gonner registered four games in which he either went scoreless or hit one field goal. Key contributors junior Tarence Kinsey and sophomore Tre' Kelley will also need to keep their strokes hot as Carolina enters the game as the worst three-point shooting team in the conference.

Defense, the staple of Odom's team,

has been a major reason that Carolina has surprised teams this season. Much like last year, the Gamecocks rank in the top five in the SEC of nearly every defensive statistical category. As Alabama showed, pressuring the LSU guards into turnovers should be enough to allow for scoring opportunities. The Tigers have had problems all season with turnovers. Given the success that Carolina has had in forcing them, this aspect of the game could decide the outcome as both teams are evenly matched on paper.

The game will be played at 8 p.m. at the Pete Maravich Assembly Center in Baton Rouge.

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This week's games:

3 UNC vs. 4 Wake Forest
 9 Kentucky at Georgia
 7 Syracuse at Providence
 Arkansas at 11 Mississippi State
 5 Duke vs. Virginia

8 Georgia Tech vs. NC State
 Florida at Vanderbilt
 Ohio State at LSU
 Clemson vs. Virginia Tech
 USC vs. Tennessee

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Momentum key in hoops success

By BRIAN DAVIS
 THE GAMECOCK

During winter break, the Gamecocks had three near road victories against elite, then-top-10 opponents in Kansas, Pennsylvania and Kentucky. These close battles should certainly boost the team's confidence, as these were the only three losses during its challenging winter break schedule. As each of the three losses were by four points, the Gamecocks were 13 points shy of going 8-0 and defeating three top-10 teams.

The team will take on LSU at 8 p.m. with the hope to advance its record to 7-5 (2-1 SEC). Countering the Tigers will be the Gamecocks' senior leader Carlos Powell, who is averaging nearly 15 points per game and more than six rebounds per contest. Additionally, with the emergence of sophomore starters Tre' Kelley as point guard and Brandon Wallace as forward, the Gamecocks are looking to advance their .500 record in the SEC and acquire some quality wins.

The team's high level of play, anchored by Powell, Kelley and Wallace and assisted by the remainder

of the participating players, was evident in the Gamecocks' utter dominance of border-rival Georgia.

Nearly two weeks after two wins and a near victory against No. 2 Kansas in Lawrence, the Gamecocks attempted to achieve a landmark by being only the second team to defeat No. 10 Pittsburgh at its new home, the Peterson Events Center. While the Gamecocks held a 28-25 halftime advantage, they were unable to withstand the pressure from Pitt's post player Chris Taft and underrated scoring guard Carl Krauser in the second half. This has been telltale of many Gamecock losses this season, including all three against top-10 opponents. Despite this, the value of such close match-ups with the nation's elite must suggest an enhancement in the level of the team's play as well as a boost in its self-confidence and intuition.

The Gamecocks' 4-point road loss to the Kentucky Wildcats was disappointing but in all reality, ousting Kentucky at Rupp Arena for an entire game and withstanding the crowd pressure is as likely for any team as overcoming gravity.

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