



Women's basketball overpowers Charleston

By ALEX RILEY
STAFF WRITER

The USC women's basketball squad showed no ill effects from its lackluster performance against Vanderbilt last weekend as the Gamecocks took care of business against in-state rival College of Charleston, 67-37.

Carolina fell behind 2-0 early in the game, but an Iona Burgrova layup tied things on the following possession. The Cougars managed one more tie at 4-4, before USC went on an 8-0 run to begin spelling the end.

The closest it got the rest of the game was at the 12:04 mark in the first period when Charleston pulled within three at 12-9, but USC proved to be too much. The Gamecocks used a huge height

advantage to post five first-half blocks and a stunning 24-8 advantage on points in the paint, allowing Carolina to go into the second half with a 32-16 lead.

The first half was just the beginning for sophomore Melanie Johnson, as she went into the locker room with 12 points, seven rebounds and three blocks.

USC continued its dominance in the second frame, holding Charleston to under 20 points for almost the opening five minutes.

USC continued to build on its lead, which hit 32 on a Stacy Booker three with less than four minutes left.

The most inspirational moment of the game came when reserve Ebony Jones entered the game for the first time

this season. Jones, who was an All-State player in high school, began the season as the team's manager but now is a regular in uniform.

Jones got the moment she had hoped for, as a Lakesha Tolliver rebound and Kulcsar pass ended up as a fast-break layup, her first career points.

"She's really worked hard," coach Susan Walvius said about Jones. "She is fearless. She's the voice of this team. She's the spiritual leader."

Johnson, who had been in a bit of a slump lately, got a new career high with 19 points and earned her sixth double-double of the season with 15 rebounds. She also set a new career high in blocks, leading the team with five on the night.

"It always feels good to get back on

track, especially after a drought," Johnson said.

USC finished with a 40-12 advantage on points in the paint and a Colonial Center record of 11 blocked shots. The women also set Colonial Center records by holding the Cougars to a 20.6 percent shooting average and by grabbing 55 rebounds.

"We've got tremendous height advantage," Walvius said. "We need to take advantage of that. We still have a ways to go."

The Charleston game closes out non-conference play for the Gamecocks, who host the Florida Gators on Sunday at 2 p.m.

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CHARLIE DAVENPORT/THE GAMECOCK

Sophomore Melanie Johnson blocks a Cougar shot Thursday in the Gamecock victory. Johnson led Carolina in scoring with 19 points.

Gamecocks to face Vols in vital game

By STEPHEN FASTENAU
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

After nearly knocking off Kentucky and blowing out the Georgia Bulldogs, USC (9-5, 1-2 SEC) stumbled on the road, losing to LSU, 79-64. The Gamecocks hope home is where the heartache ends when they return to the Colonial Center on Saturday to take on Tennessee.

USC fell to LSU on Wednesday in a game in which no Gamecock player recorded more than three rebounds. Senior Carlos Powell continued his recent strong play with 16 points, but in the end Tiger freshman Glen Davis was too much for Dave Odom's team.

Davis scored 28 points and grabbed 14 rebounds as LSU avenged last year's SEC Tournament loss at the hands of the Gamecocks.

At halftime the score stood at 41-29, and USC was never able to make a run at the lead. The Tigers led by as many as 23.

LSU had lost four out of its previous five games and had not played at home in a month. The Tigers bounced back to hand USC its second SEC loss, both coming on the road.

Powell and company now turn their attention to the Volunteers, who upset No. 11 Mississippi State 64-63 on Wednesday. UT built a 16-point lead at halftime and held on to break the nation's longest road winning streak.

UT is led by 6-foot-5-inch senior Scooter McFadgon, who averages 15.7 points per game. McFadgon put up 14 points against the Bulldogs, all coming in the first half. C.J. Watson, the Volunteers' team leader in assists, had nine to go with nine points. MSU's 16-

game road winning streak started after a loss to Tennessee and also ended with one.

For the Gamecocks to win Saturday's match-up, they will look to replicate the fast-paced transition game that helped to run Georgia out of the Colonial Center. USC was only able to produce 14 points out of 12 turnovers.

Odom's team came into the game forcing nearly 18 turnovers per game, fourth in the SEC.

Tre' Kelley has continued to emerge as a solid point guard in his first season running the offense. Kelley had 11 points and five assists against LSU after coming off a career-high eight assists against Georgia.

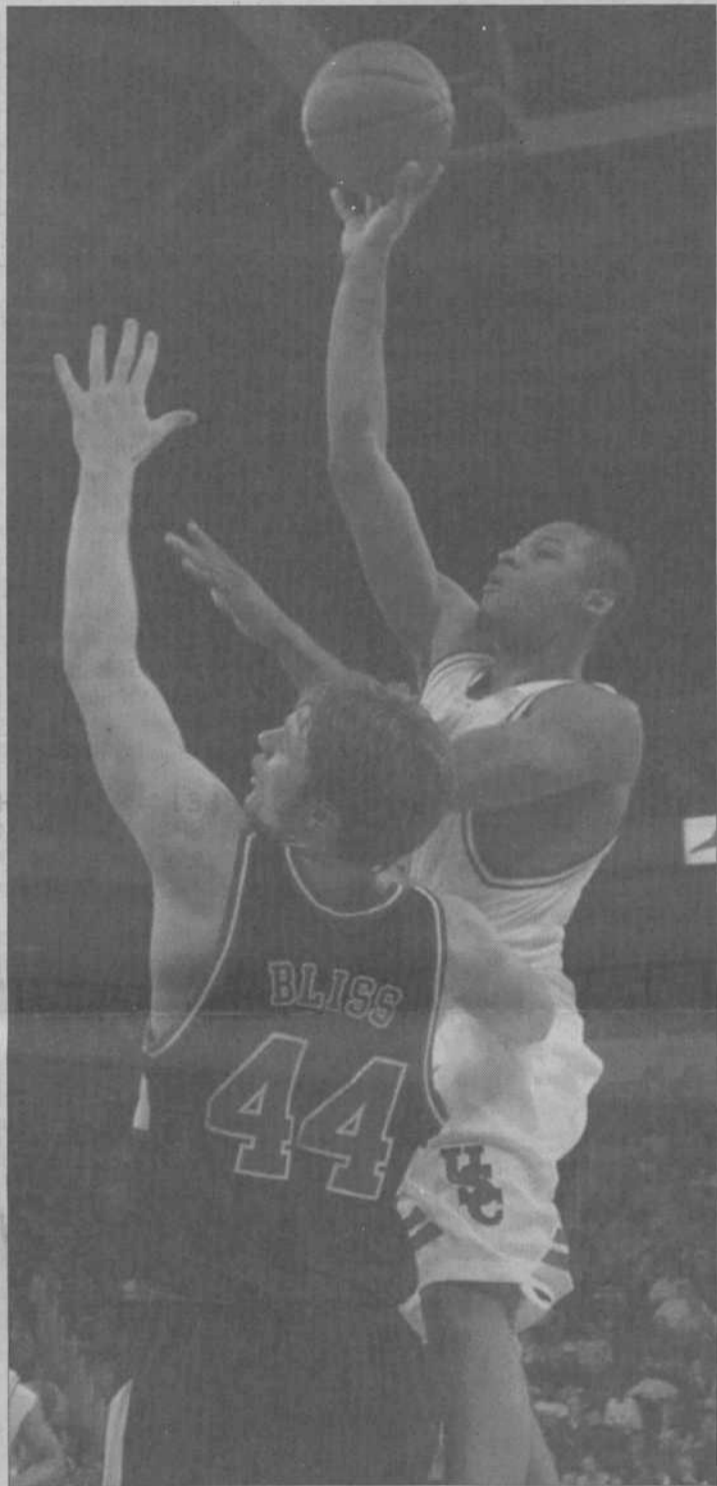
Six-foot-7-inch Tarence Kinsey will likely match up against McFadgon, while Antoine Tisby will have the first shot at limiting 6-foot-10-inch, 250-pound senior Brandon Crump. Crump comes into Saturday's SEC East contest averaging 11.7 points and 5.6 rebounds per game.

Odom will also use defensive help from John Chappell and Brandon Wallace off the bench. Chappell had four blocks and Wallace added three against Georgia.

Volunteer freshman Chris Lofton is one of four UT starters averaging double figures in points at 11.7 per game. Lofton also leads the nation in three-point percentage, converting 53 percent of his shots beyond the arc.

Tennessee plays five of its next six games on the road. USC does not take the court again for a week following Saturday's game, taking on Mississippi State in Starkville.

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KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK

Junior Antoine Tisby shoots a hook shot over a Georgia defender in USC's win over the Bulldogs on Saturday in the Colonial Center.

Commitments roll in for USC

■ Recruiting enters crucial weekend as prospects take visits

By ALEX RILEY
STAFF WRITER

The Gamecock football program continues to bag some of the top recruits in the south. According to Gamecockcentral.com, USC had already garnered two four-star players and many highly touted three-star recruits.

The list is topped by the Gamecock's earliest signee, four-star defensive back Mike West of Butler Community College. West, who is considered one of the top defensive backs in the nation, was redshirted his first season at Butler but put up stunning numbers last fall. The 6-foot-1-inch, 215-pounder had 67 tackles, three interceptions, five fumble recoveries and 11 pass breakups last fall.

West was a true early commitment under former Carolina coach Lou Holtz. However, new coach Steve Spurrier decided that West was still welcome to play for the Gamecocks this fall, and West recently signed his letter of intent. While his numbers were impressive, West received very little attention and only received offers from Kansas, Memphis and TCU.

Carolina's other four-star pickup is safety Brandon Isaac of Georgia Military College. Isaac, who is originally from Blackville, S.C., chose his home team over some of the country's premier programs in Georgia, Louisville and Utah.

Little has been discussed of Isaac's numbers while at college, but he was a stand-out player at Blackville-Hilda High School, where he rushed for more than 1,000 yards and 20 scores during his senior season, earning him Shrine Bowl honors. However, because of academics, Isaac slipped off the radar screen and decided to pursue the junior college route in order to catch a bigger program's eye.

USC's most recent commitment comes from Tallahassee, Fla., from three-star defensive end Kerry Bonds. Bonds had been one of the most-talked-about defensive front men in the country, coming in at No. 38 in the nation for strongside defensive ends. He received offers from the likes of Clemson, Tennessee and Maryland, and visited Texas and Oklahoma.

In the end, Bonds left the Sunshine State for the Palmetto State. Bonds' 6-foot-3-inch frame is imposing, and his 4.6 time in the 40 gives him quickness up and down the line.

Spurrier also picked up someone to help fill the shoes in the receiving core, as the Gamecocks got a commitment from three-star wide out Freddie Brown of Byrnes High. Brown received decent offers across the board from major schools like Kentucky, N.C. State and Virginia. But it's Brown's playmaking ability that will allow him to fit nicely into the "fun-and-gun" offense, as indicated by his 1,459 yards receiving on 86 catches with 12 touchdowns.

USC also managed to keep three-star Greenville defensive end Nathan Pepper in-state. Pepper was considered one of the quickest defensive ends in the state, and it shows as he received offers from schools like border-rival North Carolina and Georgia Tech. His nine

sacks last fall and play in the North-South All-Star Game made Pepper a hot commodity. Pepper's final decision came between the Gamecocks and the Tar Heels, but he chose the in-state route in the end.

Carolina managed another early in-state commitment in three-star safety/wide receiver Damien Wright of Crestwood High. Wright had a list of impressive schools, headlined by Vanderbilt and Duke because of his 3.3 GPA. But with 165 tackles, 10 for a loss, five sacks and four fumble recoveries, one for a score, Wright was looking for a big-time school and got it in USC. Wright was also on numerous honor lists, including the Shrine Bowl last fall.

Dorman High School two-star defensive back Mychal Belcher's recruitment has flown under the radar. He was a member of the Shrine Bowl

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squad last fall, and was getting looks from some top-name schools including Tennessee and Maryland. But he chose to remain in-state with the Gamecocks. Belcher is listed by Rivals.com as an "Athlete/Dual-Threat Quarterback."

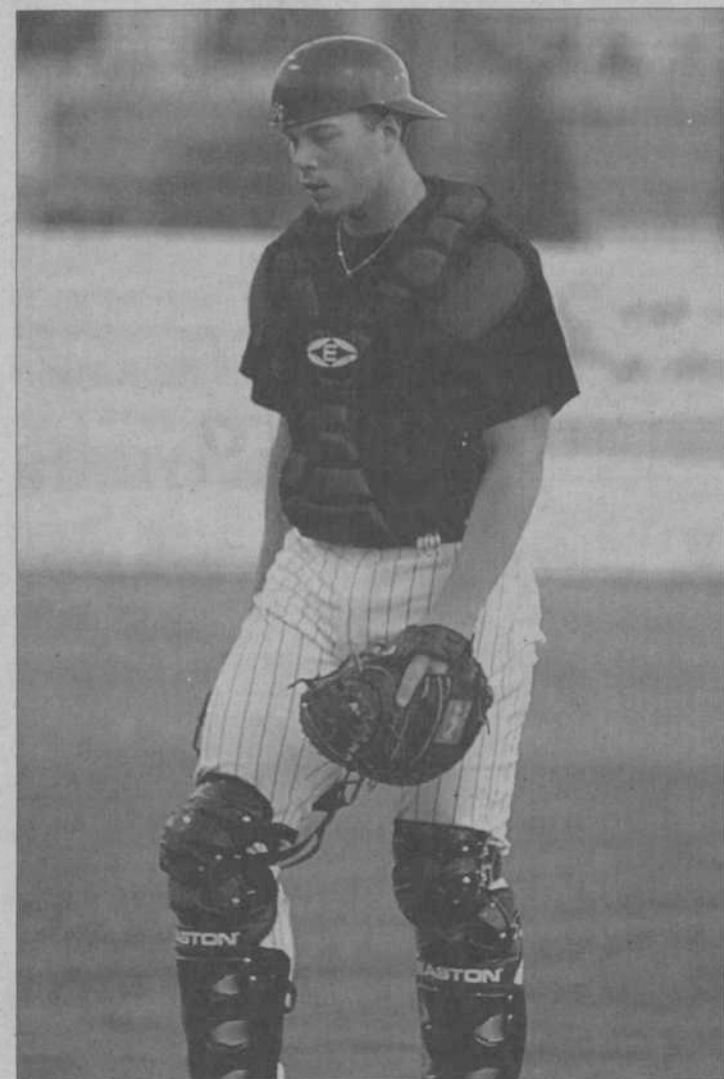
USC's long-distance signee is three-star safety/running back Taylor Rank of Evergreen High School in Washington. Rank, who grew up in Atlanta, had only two offers, one on each coast. His home state of Washington made an offer to the two-sided player, but he chose to come back to the Southland. Rank rushed for 2020 yards and 36 touchdowns while leading his team to a state title. For his work, Rank earned Associated Press Player of the Year Award for 4A from the Seattle Times.

One commitment comes from Ryan Succop, a kicker, which is a position that USC hasn't offered a scholarship to in years. Holtz never signed a true "scholarship kicker" during his era, but Coach Spurrier already has in three-star kicker Succop of Hickory, N.C. Succop, at 6-foot-3-inches, has a large frame that drew attention from all over the South, including Auburn, Tennessee and North Carolina. Succop's numbers were nothing short of stunning, as he went 44-of-44 on PAT's and 12-of-14 on field goals with a long of 41. His career long was 53 as a junior and 97 percent of his kickoffs resulted in touchbacks.

The Gamecocks have another big weekend scheduled as four-star receivers Carlos Thomas and O.J. Murdock headline a stellar roster of visitors.

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Baseball alumni thrive in minors



FILE PHOTO/THE GAMECOCK

Former catcher Landon Powell and former infielder Kevin Melillo are now playing in the Oakland Athletics minor league system.

By BRIAN SAAL
THE GAMECOCK

Many times players star for the USC baseball team, then draft day comes along and their futures are determined but undocumented. General Managers take chances on high school and college players with each of their goals being "playing in the majors." So the question is what happened to these numerous Carolina players after their collegiate careers? The past three seasons Ray Tanner's club has gone a total 57-32 with all three seasons ending in a top 10 ranking. Nineteen teams decided to draft a Gamecock player during that three year stretch. Four in 2002, Seven in 2003, and Eight in 2004.

In 2004, with a record of 17-13 Carolina stormed the College World Series with their conference championship rings and survived all the way to the CWS final four. The news came to eight USC players on June 7 and 8 that they were drafted and given a minor league team to report to. After they ended their career at USC, many players quickly reported to their respective teams.

Three players had Idaho Falls listed on their plane tickets as the Kansas City Royals drafted two Gamecocks with their top four picks. In the first round the Royals drafted pitcher Matthew Campbell; in the second they drafted pitcher Billy Buckner and took closer Chad Blackwell in the fifth. The three played a key role in leading the Chukars into the playoffs of the Pioneer league. Blackwell split the closer role with 27th round pick Zane Carlson. In 21 games Blackwell saved seven and finished the season with a 1-1

record and a 3.27 ERA. Buckner started five games and went 2-1 with a 3.30 ERA. Campbell did not have good luck in his rookie season however. In just 10.2 innings of pitching he went 0-2 with an 8.44 ERA. This season, if the three players prove themselves in the advanced rookie league, they may move themselves up the ladder into the AA Midwest League and play for the Burlington (IA) Bees. All three are high rated pitchers in the Royals farm system and one of them could be the first Gamecock called up to the majors since Brian Roberts got called up by the Baltimore Orioles in 2003.

Those were not the only Gamecock players to enjoy the company of their former teammates on their new minor league team. Oakland's famous general manager Billy Beane liked what he saw in two Gamecock players. He drafted Landon Powell in the first round 24th overall. He then drafted Kevin Melillo in the fifth round despite playing in only 54 games due to an injury. Both players reported north of the border to Vancouver to play for the Canadians of the Northwest (A) League. In leading the Canadians to the finals, Melillo hit a powerful .340 in a short 22 game season. Melillo is believed to be a sleeper pick by his front office and has a very promising future. Teammate Powell hit just .250 but pleased his general manager with a .374 OBP, a statistic that Beane believes is the most important. Powell will have a tough road to the majors because of their recent addition of Jason Kendall. He also must battle behind the bright lights

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