

Eagles' receiver initiates another war of the words

By BARRY WILNER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Roll out the steel cage. Or maybe just invite Rodney Harrison and Freddie Mitchell to the "Jerry Springer Show."

The WWE-style rank-out feud between the New England safety and Philadelphia receiver has gotten pretty juicy. It's even overshadowing the Terrell Owens will-he-or-won't-he saga.

Anyone who thought the Patriots are too well-versed in this Super Bowl stuff and far too classy to get involved in a war of words with the Eagles a full week before the big game might need to think again.

The Patriots are angry about comments last week from Mitchell. The defending champions made it clear Sunday when they arrived in Jacksonville that they aren't about to ignore Mitchell dissing their secondary, particularly Harrison.

"When he says something like that," linebacker-lineman Willie McGinest said of Mitchell, "he's disrespecting our whole defense. Not only Rodney, but me and Tedy Bruschi and Mike Vrabel and all the rest of us."

That Mitchell has been an underachieving backup for Terrell Owens hasn't escaped New England's notice. Owens, sidelined since Game 14 with torn ankle ligaments, probably deserves the spotlight as he attempts to get healthy enough to play next Sunday. He still hasn't practiced, but has been running and no longer has a limp.

Considering how the Patriots might be gunning for Mitchell in the game, maybe the Eagles need Owens more than ever.

But even if the All-Pro receiver returns — coach Andy Reid said he will be evaluated daily — he isn't likely to be a focal point of Philadelphia's offense. And he probably won't get nearly the attention from the Patriots during their media sessions as Mitchell will receive.

Or already has received.

"Maybe he was drinking before he started talking," Harrison said, "because that was clearly a mistake. No one in this league would attack somebody a week before the Super Bowl."

"I'm not really surprised because you're always going to find one jerk out of the bunch, just like (Mike) Vanderjagt," added Harrison, who also verbally feuded with the Indianapolis kicker during the playoffs. "You're always going to find one guy like that who wants some attention and wants to do something to try and stir up the emotions of the game."

"I don't need any extra motivation; I need something to calm me down."

Hey, Rodney, there's still six days before you have to suit up.

For the veteran Patriots to dive headfirst into such a fray is almost astonishing. Many of the Eagles recognize that. Even though this is the team's first trip to the Super Bowl in 24

years, they came across Sunday as the more experienced, resolute bunch.

"They were meaningless comments," Donovan McNabb said. "Freddie didn't mean anything by them. It's sad that people have to blow them up to make them into a story."

"Freddie apologized. If someone needs those comments to get up for a game like this, they don't need to be here. This is the Super Bowl, this is the ultimate."

The ultimate what? It was hard to tell Sunday.

Maybe Mitchell, who was unavailable to the media on Sunday, will take this oral spat a step further when he does speak.

Asked if he would directly address Mitchell, Harrison responded

"Maybe he was drinking before he started talking because that was clearly a mistake. No one in this league would attack somebody a week before the Super Bowl."

RODNEY HARRISON
PATRIOTS' SAFETY

sarcastically: "What would I say? I don't have much to say. It's Freddie Mitchell."

Mitchell could be a key figure during the game itself, when everyone hopefully will be paying attention to the actual play, not the wordy by-play. Even with its banged-up secondary, New England has shut down opponents, and if T.O. is MIA, Mitchell must produce to give Philadelphia a decent chance for its first NFL crown since 1960.

The Eagles acquired Owens to get them over the hump of three straight NFC title game losses. While they scaled that mountain, they did so without the injured Owens, whose main role was as a cheerleader.

While team doctors have not cleared Owens to be on the field next Sunday, he's making every effort to play. Reid and his staff have been close-mouthed — isn't that refreshing? — about Owens' potential availability.

New England has its own health issues, with both starting cornerbacks out, as they have been for months, and All-Pro DT Richard Seymour's status uncertain with a knee injury.

But the Patriots have treated those absences as a non-issue — at least until Mitchell insulted them.

"We have a pieced-together secondary," said Troy Brown, the receiver-kick returner turned cornerback. "It's patchwork, but so what? It's a team sport. It doesn't matter if you know our name or not."

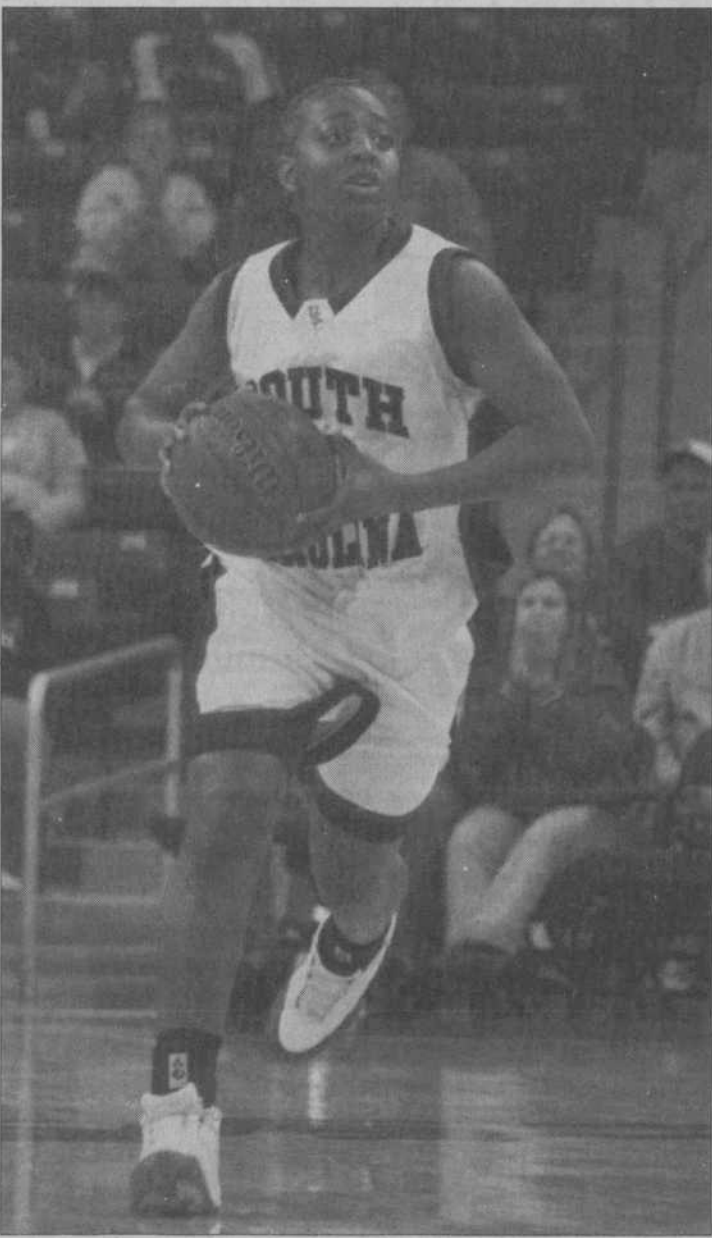


CHRIS O'MEARA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver Freddie Mitchell walks across the tarmac after arriving with teammates at Cecil Field Sunday in Jacksonville, Fla. The Eagles take on the Patriots Sunday.

Road loss leaves USC struggling

By MIQUEL JACOBS
STAFF WRITER



KYLE PARKER/THE GAMECOCK

Sophomore guard Lauren Simms prepares to pass the ball in USC's game against Tennessee on Thursday. The Gamecocks could not beat an upstart Kentucky team on Sunday.

In the well-respected SEC, winning home games is not enough. Without the ability to prevail on the road, teams can forget about booking reservations for postseason play. Only seven regular-season games remain for the USC women's basketball team, and the Gamecocks' loss Sunday at Kentucky ended any hopes at finishing above .500 percent in conference play this season.

After dropping yet another game away from the Colonial Center on Sunday, the Gamecocks (6-15, 0-7 SEC) are in jeopardy of finishing winless on the road in the SEC for the second consecutive season. Dropping a 66-50 decision to the Wildcats, three road dates remain on the season, with two against top-20 teams.

The Wildcats moved to 13-8 overall with a 11-1 mark at home. Carolina's 6-7 home mark makes it the only team in the SEC that has not won more than half its home games.

"Kentucky is tough at home," USC coach Susan Walvius said. "This crowd was absolutely fantastic. Being a part of the SEC for several years, our players know — especially when you have young players — the emotion fans can bring to the facility. I saw the fans take a toll on our team today with the energy in here and the crowd support."

Kentucky guard Sara Potts also contributed to Carolina's collapse, scoring a game-high 17 points. The inside game also worked, as freshman center Sarah Elliott put up 16 points and nine rebounds. Matching the height of Ilona Burgrova, Carolina's tallest player at 6-feet-6-inches, Elliott and the Wildcats responded to the challenge by winning the rebounding margin 47-35.

"I thought Sarah Elliott played a fantastic game today," Walvius said. "She

did a nice job on the boards for them. She's consistent, and she takes it strong. I love our size. We're 6-6, 6-5 inside. I would put our post game up against anybody's in the country, and Kentucky took it right at us in the post and had one of the better post performances we've seen all year."

Unlike previous games when Carolina's turnover problems led to losses, the main culprit against Kentucky was poor first-half shooting. Carolina shot 25 percent in the first half, largely because of a span of 5:35 in which the Gamecocks did not register a field goal. Walvius acknowledged that a change in game-day philosophy might have contributed to the off shooting.

"We took shooting practice off this morning — and it looked like we took shooting practice off this morning — trying to figure out if that is the answer for this team, trying to give them more rest."

On the positive side for the Gamecocks, the 14 turnovers committed for the game ties a season low. Averaging 20.4 turnovers per game, the Gamecocks have begun to take better care of the ball. In Thursday's loss to Tennessee, Carolina committed 17 turnovers, quickly followed by Sunday's 14, tied with the Coastal Carolina game for the season low.

Forward Iva Sliskovic led the Gamecocks for the second consecutive game in points with 13. The only other player in double figures was guard Lauren Simms.

The Gamecocks are off until Sunday when the Auburn Tigers come to town. With a 1-4 mark in the SEC, Carolina will look to this as the best opportunity remaining to secure an SEC victory.

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

PLAYERS

Continued from page 10

locker room, gaping holes filled the USC lineup. Florida forwards David Lee and Al Horford, along with Gator center Joakim Noah, had their way in the paint. But with Tisby out, sophomore forward Renaldo Balkman continued to establish himself as a top echelon player in the SEC. Balkman scored 15 points in his second start of the season and seemed to slice through the Florida defense with relative ease.

Gonner's absence presented a problem USC hadn't seen yet this season — the lack of a true perimeter shooter. Odom turned to freshman Dwayne Day, who the coach even contemplated redshirting at the outset of the season.

All Day did with his opportunity was score 14 points in the span of about three minutes. Day hit his first four 3-point shots and single handedly cut Florida's second half lead from 17 points to just seven.

Prior to his breakout day, no pun

intended, the freshman had played in just four games with a total of 29 minutes of playing time. His 14 points against the Gators are one more than his total production of 13 points before Saturday.

"He stepped up and knocked down some shots," senior leader Carlos Powell said of Day. "I saw a lot of (Florida) people looking at their scouting report asking 'Who's that?' It's Dwayne Day. He does that every day in practice."

"Yeah, I was kind of feelin' it," Day said after the game. "I was just glad to be able to have the opportunity to help my team in an important situation."

When asked about the possible discipline problems on the team, Odom said he had mixed feelings.

"It's going to be handled to our satisfaction," he said. "If that turns out to be to their satisfaction, fine, well and good. I'm happy. It's a win-win. But if it turns out to be anything other than to their satisfaction, then I'll still love them, but I'll miss them."

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

RECRUIT

Continued from page 10

Volunteers have commitments from five players ranked No. 1 or No. 2 in their position, including No. 2 quarterback Jonathan Crompton from Waynesville, N.C., and No. 1 center Josh McNeil of Collins, Miss.

Arkansas: After losing star quarterback Matt Jones to graduation, Razorback coach Houston Nutt has his work cut out for him next season. The centerpiece of this year's Arkansas recruiting class is hometown product Darren McFadden from Little Rock. McFadden, the No. 2 ranked athlete in the country by Rivals.com, has good size and blazing speed. He could end up playing running back, wide receiver or defensive back, depending on the team's needs.

Florida: New coach Urban Meyer is in the same situation as Spurrier — one of the SEC's new kids on the block — but it certainly hasn't stopped him from putting together another solid recruiting class for the Gators. Meyer's spread option offense

requires a quarterback with good running ability, and that is exactly what he is getting in California star Josh Portis. Portis will be joined by a plethora of great skill-position players, including former USC commitment Eric Sledge from Apopka, Fla.

Clemson: With USC's coaching situation in jeopardy during fall 2004, Clemson coach Tommy Bowden took full advantage and got early commitments from many of the state's top prospects. The most significant in-state sweep for the Tigers was on the offensive line where they got commitments from Greenville's Cory Lambert, Honea Path's Barry Humphries, Mullins' Jamarcus Grant and Camden's Thomas Austin. The Tigers' skill-position class is headlined by Atlanta's James Davis, the nation's No. 6 ranked running back.

Coaches are making their final recruiting push and will see the upshot of their efforts Wednesday on signing day.

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

Briefs

USC swimmers split with Crimson Tide

The USC men's and women's diving teams took on Alabama on Saturday in dual meet competition.

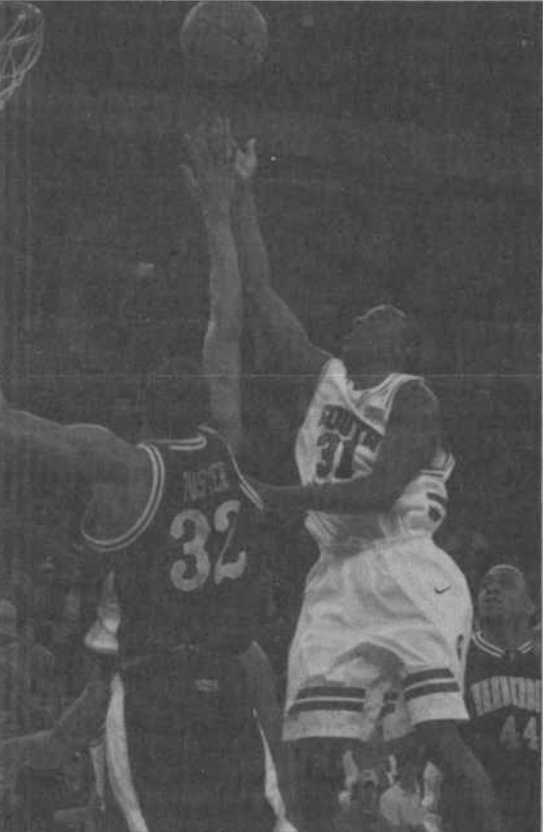
The women's team defeated the Crimson Tide, 126-117, while the USC men fell, 149-94. The women improved to 4-3 on the year in dual meet competition and 2-2 in conference competitions. The men fell to 1-5 on the year.

Senior diver Lauren King took first place in two events. King had a first-place finish in the 1-meter and 3-meter boards with 290.48 and 299.10, respectively.

Troops to watch Carolina basketball

USC basketball will be televised to more than 850,000 service men and women around the world, as games against Arkansas and Auburn have been picked up by the Armed Forces network.

The Armed Forces Network reaches more than 177 countries around the world, including Iraq. ETV taped spots Friday of family members in South Carolina of those in service. The spots will run during the games.



Senior guard Josh Gonner did not play in the second half of Saturday's game because of a "coach's decision." Gonner was one of two Carolina players who did not play in the second half of the game at Florida.

CHARLIE DAVENPORT/THE GAMECOCK

GONNER

Continued from page 10

suiting to play ball with the USC women, whose attendance numbers are less than half that of the men but who all manage not to whine about playing time.

If Odom can pull his squad together and regain some of the chemistry attained by last year's surprising NCAA

Tourney team, then the Gamecocks should have a legitimate shot to return next year.

If not, the mounting problems will likely guarantee USC a trip to New York come March, which wouldn't be a shock. After all, you can't spell Carolina Basketball without N-I-T. On the other hand, there's also an N-C-A-A, if Gonner and Co. can work to find it.

Cornell Arms

AN HISTORIC RESIDENCE

Efficiency	\$525
One Bedroom	\$585
Two Bedroom	\$620

Rent includes all utilities and cable TV.
All rates quoted are month to month.
(Leases available, prices subject to change)

Located across from the
University Of South Carolina Horseshoe
and the State Capital, Cornell Arms
offers the premier location for
downtown living.

(803) 799-1442
1230 PENDLETON STREET
COLUMBIA, SC 29201