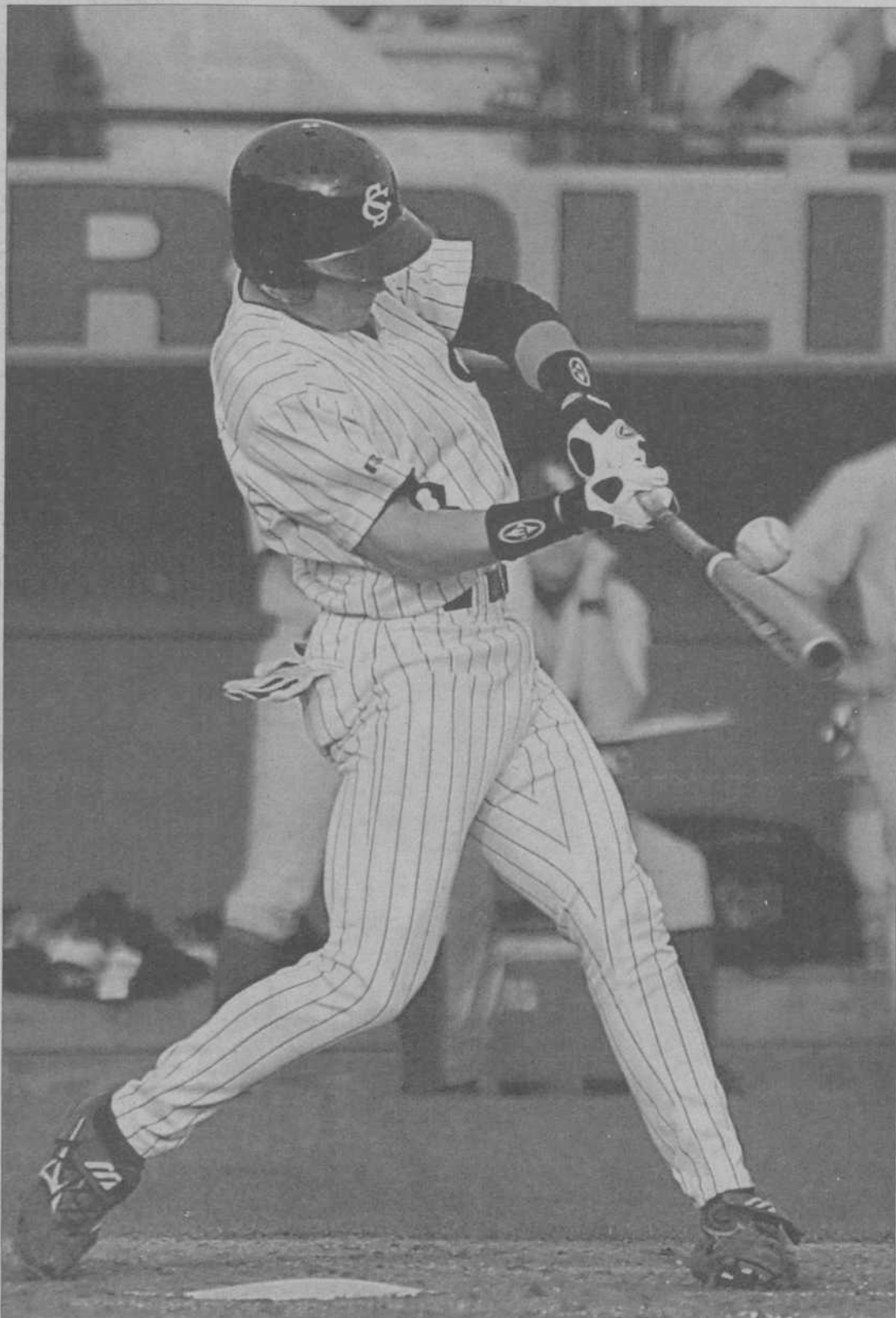




BASEBALL PREVIEW



FILE PHOTOS/THE GAMECOCK

The USC baseball team will rely on junior shortstop Steven Tolleson, above, sophomore catcher Ryan Mahoney, right, and junior centerfielder Davy Gregg, far right, to provide experienced leadership to a group of incoming players in the 2005 season. Tolleson and Gregg have their starting spots sewn up, while Mahoney is in a battle with two junior-college transfers for the starting catcher position.



Gamecock hitters to boost 2005 team

■ *Veteran outfield, inexperienced infield bring USC into season*

By ALEX RILEY
STAFF WRITER

Even with the departure of catcher Landon Powell and second baseman Kevin Mellilo, the Carolina baseball lineup is riddled with talent. The most noticeable returning force is senior third baseman Steve Pearce.

Pearce, after being drafted in the 10th round last year, turned down an offer from his favorite major league team, the Boston Red Sox, to return for his senior campaign. The Florida native garnered the team's triple crown last season, leading the team with a .346 batting average, 21 home runs and 70 RBIs. Pearce also set a school record with a perfect fielding percentage, acquiring 416 put-outs with 22 assists and no errors.

While he played the majority of the 2004 season at first base, Pearce will most likely transfer back to the hot corner at third. Last spring, Pearce was named to each All-Tournament team he played on in the postseason, including the College World Series. However, after a leg injury, Pearce's status in the coming weeks is unknown.

Pearce's neighbor on the diamond is

junior shortstop Steven Tolleson. The aptly nicknamed "Tolly" is one of three captains for the 2005 season, after hitting .316 with 14 doubles, one triple and four homers last season. While his power seems nominal, Tolleson proved clutch last season, hitting a long ball in the 10th inning to beat Clemson in Tigertown. Tolleson keyed the scoring that would eventually beat East Carolina in the Super Regionals to send USC back to Omaha.

Sophomore second baseman Tommy King and junior college transfer Chris Brown will look to fill the shoes of Mellilo, this time permanently. Brown had reportedly beaten out King for the starting position but will not be at full strength this weekend because of injury. King earned 24 starts last season when Mellilo went out with a leg injury and filled the role quite well. King started hot off the bat, literally, going 11-of-25 with a .440 average. However, an injury slowed the Florida native down, as he finished the season with a .235 average. His most impressive numbers came from the defensive side of the field, as the sophomore made only one error in 89 chances.

First base is the biggest question for the Carolina infield. The position belongs to JUCO transfer Neil Giesler of Okaloosa Walton Junior College. Giesler is a huge target at first, with a towering 6-foot-5-inch frame. His numbers from junior college show why

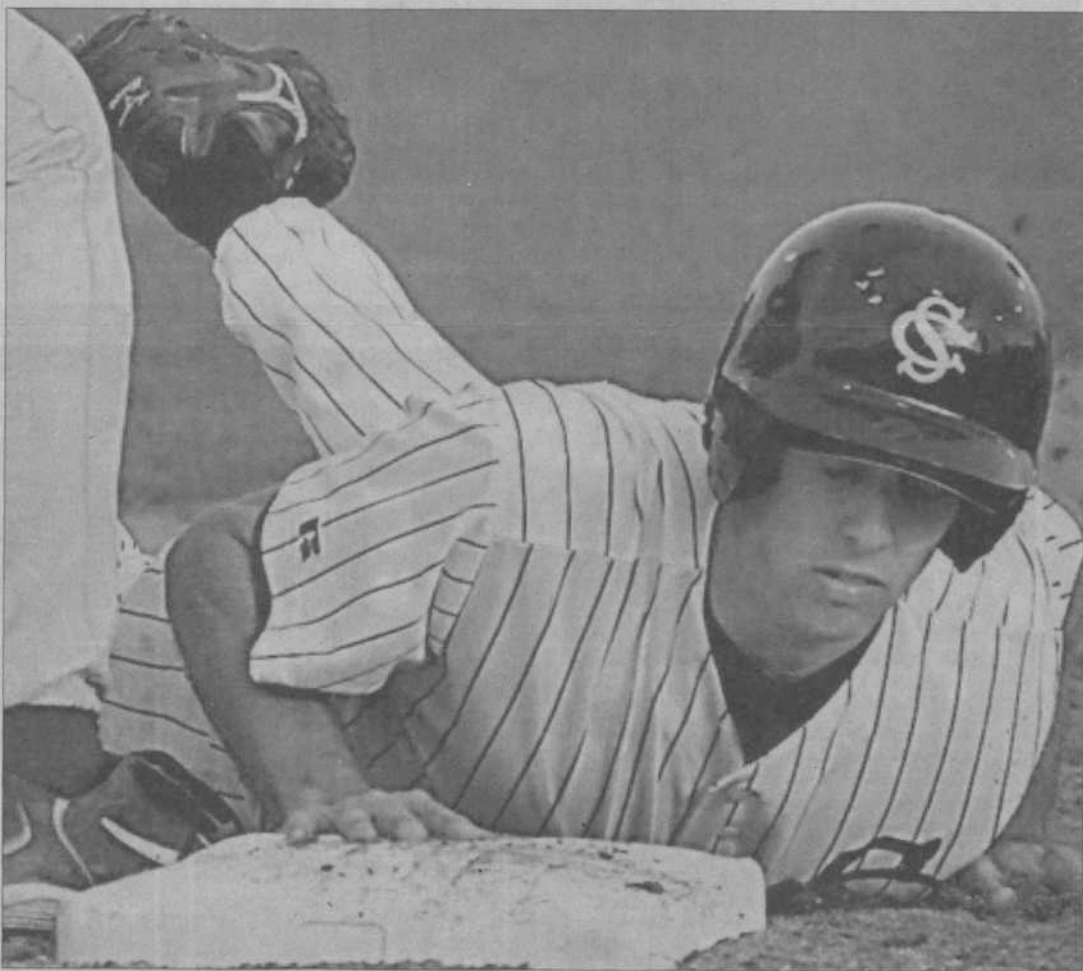
he is a leading candidate, as he batted above .400 both seasons, with a .432 average last year. Giesler is also a former draft pick gone back to college, being picked up in two drafts by the Chicago White Sox in the 29th and 37th rounds.

While first base is still a major concern, the burning question comes from home plate, as the Gamecock coaching staff looks to find someone to replace Powell, one of USC's all-time greatest players. The returning candidate is sophomore Ryan Mahoney. The New York native appeared in 46 contests last fall, batting .257 with seven doubles. While his numbers are not mind-boggling, Mahoney proved he could be clutch as well, ripping a shot down the first-base line against East Carolina in the Super Regionals.

All three projected starters for the Carolina outfield were in the lineup most of last season, as Michael Campbell, Brendan Winn and Davy Gregg look to solidify the Carolina team's strength.

Campbell is a junior left fielder out of Virginia. He was key in USC's run to Omaha, batting in one run and scoring another in a 4-2 win against East Carolina in the Super Regionals. Campbell also scored twice and had an RBI in a 15-11 win against Miami in the College World Series. Campbell hit .312 last spring and was the fourth Gamecock

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Gamecocks return home to battle Tigers

By MATTHEW NAGY
THE GAMECOCK

Returning home from their first road win of the season last Saturday, the USC men's basketball team will face the Auburn Tigers at 7:30 p.m. Saturday evening. Auburn is coming off a loss against the LSU Tigers last Wednesday night.

Carolina, on the other hand, is coming off a 60-53 win in Athens against the Georgia Bulldogs. The Gamecocks held on despite a slew of technical fouls called shortly after senior Carlos Powell was poked in the eye while trying to score against the Bulldog defense. Powell, along with Rocky Trice and USC coach Dave Odom, was given a technical foul for his conduct toward the officials. After the game, Georgia coach Dennis Felton accused Carlos Powell of flopping and being fraudulent, despite Powell being sidelined several minutes with his eye swollen shut.

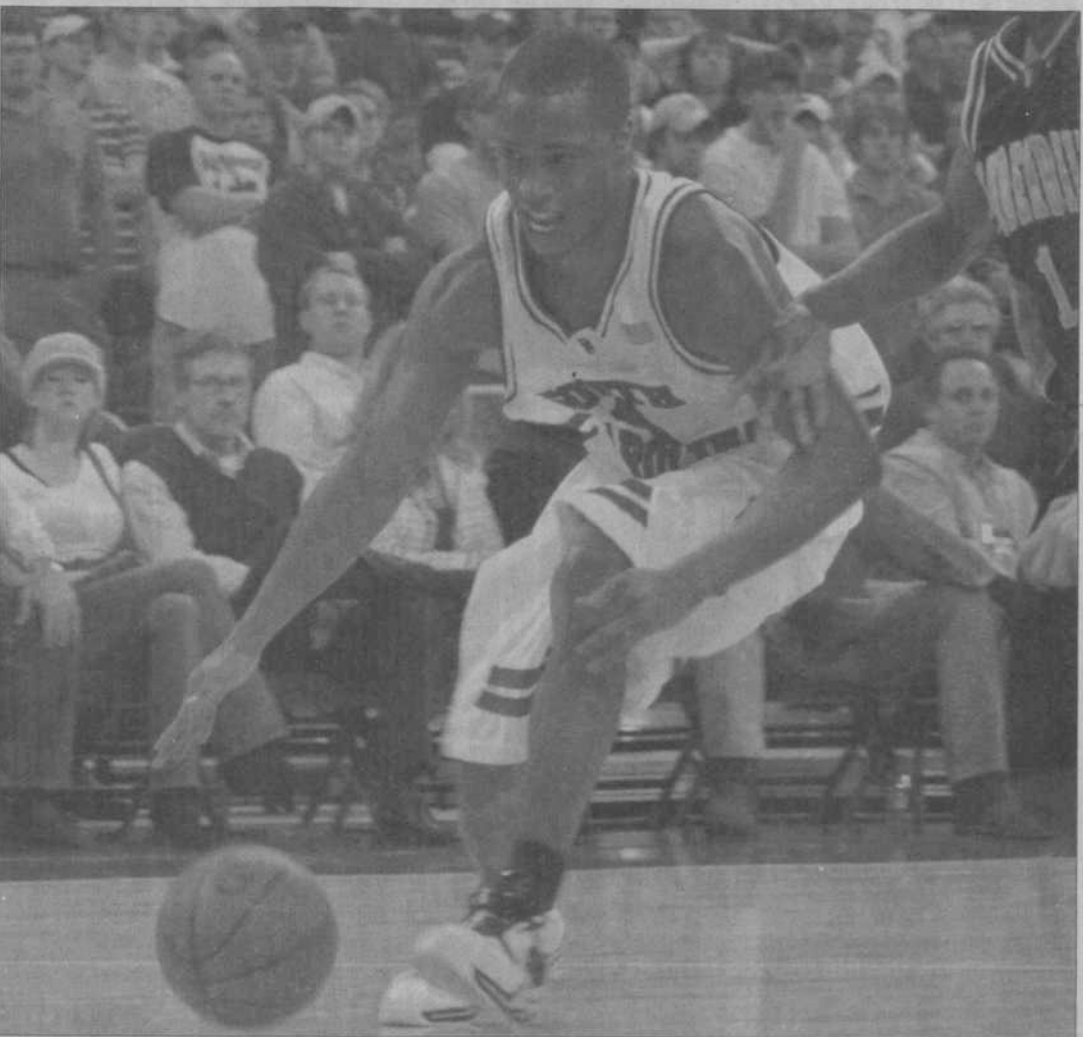
USC will need Powell's presence inside the paint again Saturday, as his 16 points greatly contributed to the win against UGA. Powell is averaging more than 15 points per game in SEC play and has been an emotional spark for the team as well as a vocal leader. Throughout the season, Powell has been the go-to guy in an offense that prides itself in spreading the ball around to everyone on the floor. Carolina is looking to improve to 14-7 on the year and stay within one game of second place in the SEC East. The Tigers will look to freshmen

Like the Gamecocks, Auburn plays a small, quick, guard-heavy lineup that should make for a fast-paced contest.

Frank Tolbert and Toney Douglas as guards. Tolbert is the reigning SEC player of the week after scoring 29 points against the Mississippi State Bulldogs a week ago, while Douglas leads the team averaging nearly 18 points per game. Along with the freshmen, senior Ian Young will figure heavily into the mix Saturday night. The guard from Orlando, Fla., is averaging almost 15 points per game, second on the team. Young is also leading the team in assists and steals per game.

Like the Gamecocks, Auburn plays a small, quick, guard-heavy lineup that should make for a fast-paced contest. The Tigers have only one player over 6-feet-7-inches on their roster and have struggled against larger teams this season. This should create opportunities for both Powell and sophomore forward Brandon Wallace. The Gamecocks should rely heavily on Wallace not only on defense, but also inside the paint where he has shown flashes of brilliance this season. Renaldo Balkman will also figure heavily into the mix yet again for USC, as he has continued to improve his play through the season.

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KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK

Sophomore point guard Tre' Kelley drives to the basket in a game earlier this season. Kelley and Carolina will look to establish their first three-game winning streak in the SEC season Saturday.



KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK

USC coach Dave Odom wants more support from students.

Good day Gamecock student body!

The Gamecock basketball team, coaches and staff would like to encourage you to attend the 7:30 p.m. game against Auburn on Saturday. We are 5-4 in the SEC and 4-0 at home this year in league play. We need each one of you as we continue to build our program. You are very important to us! You are our sixth man! You help us get more excited and motivated to play well. Come to the game, cheer hard and have fun.

Remember — 7:30 pm Saturday against Auburn. This is another important test for USC in the SEC. We appreciate your continued enthusiasm!

USC basketball coach Dave Odom