



Seniors refuse to let Gamecocks lose

By JONATHAN HILLYARD
SPORTS EDITOR

Here we go again. Is this really happening? Am I watching a rerun?

These are all comments that flew through the minds of USC basketball fans everywhere as Miami junior guard Robert Hite drilled a 3-point shot with eight seconds to play Tuesday night in the Colonial Center, tying the score at 67.

Just less than four game minutes earlier, a similar feeling set in after the Gamecocks fell behind by 4, 60-64. After speed demon Guillermo Diaz made a fall-away 3-pointer.

Carolina could have easily folded, called it a season and sent the seniors out losing six of their

last seven games. Enter the Gamecock seniors, who simply weren't going to let it happen.

Forward Carlos Powell, who has been the team's physical and emotional leader, simply didn't want it to end that way.

"I didn't want this to be my last game," Powell said. "I played it like it was my last. I was just out there having fun the whole game."

Powell and senior teammate Josh Gonner entered the post-game news conference with what can only be described as playful attitudes. Gonner, who gave Powell a break from being the team's hero by hitting the game-winning shot with two seconds left, said it was just his turn.

"I was gonna shoot it," Gonner said. "I saw Carlos doing jumping jacks under the basket though."

"I didn't want this to be my last game. I played it like it was my last. I was just out there having fun the whole game."

CARLOS POWELL
USC SENIOR FORWARD

"Yeah, he could have passed it," Powell said.

Gonner finished with 10 points, just one game after being held scoreless by Ole Miss in the SEC Tournament.

Powell continued his gaudy scoring pace, scoring 18 points to total 69 points in the last three games.

When asked if he was saving his best for last, he laughed and said, "I don't know when my last is, but I hope it's in Madison Square Garden."

Gonner shrugged off the notion of having any doubt in his ability to win the game for his team.

"I don't have doubts. I could miss a thousand shots, and I'll still shoot it."

"A thousand and one," Powell said.

The team has been in similar situation's all season long, having lost seven games by 4 or less, four of which came to NCAA Tournament-bound teams.

"Losing close games made us better prepared for games like this," Gonner said.

"This is what we call a new

season right here," Powell said.

Powell and Gonner were not the only upperclassmen who stepped up for the Gamecocks. Junior Rocky Trice hit a crucial 3-point play with 26 seconds left that gave USC its 3-point 67-64 lead.

Junior Tarence Kinsey also played a big role, hitting critical 3-pointers and finishing with 11 points in 33 minutes.

Some wondered if the team would be motivated to play in the second-tier tournament.

"We didn't know if this was gonna be our last game and yesterday was gonna be our last practice," Powell said. "We're always motivated. I make sure of that."

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KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK
USC senior forward Carlos Powell led the Gamecocks with 18 points.

USC beats Miami in NIT

By STEPHEN FASTENAU
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

Tarence Kinsey told USC basketball coach Dave Odom at halftime that Miami was quicker in person than he'd seen on tape. In the end, senior Josh Gonner was faster.

The USC guard raced past the Hurricane defense to score on a driving layup with just two seconds remaining to give the Gamecocks a 69-67 win in the opening round of the National Invitation tournament Tuesday night.

Miami guard Robert Hite had tied the game six seconds earlier with a 3-pointer in front of the Hurricanes' bench.

"With them celebrating, I knew I could take it down court and either get a good pass or get a good shot," Gonner said.

With the game tied 64-64, Hite missed on a 3-point attempt. USC secured the rebound, and Odom called a timeout with 1:05 remaining. Senior forward Carlos Powell then missed a shot from the post, but Rocky Trice was able to race underneath and snatch the offensive rebound.

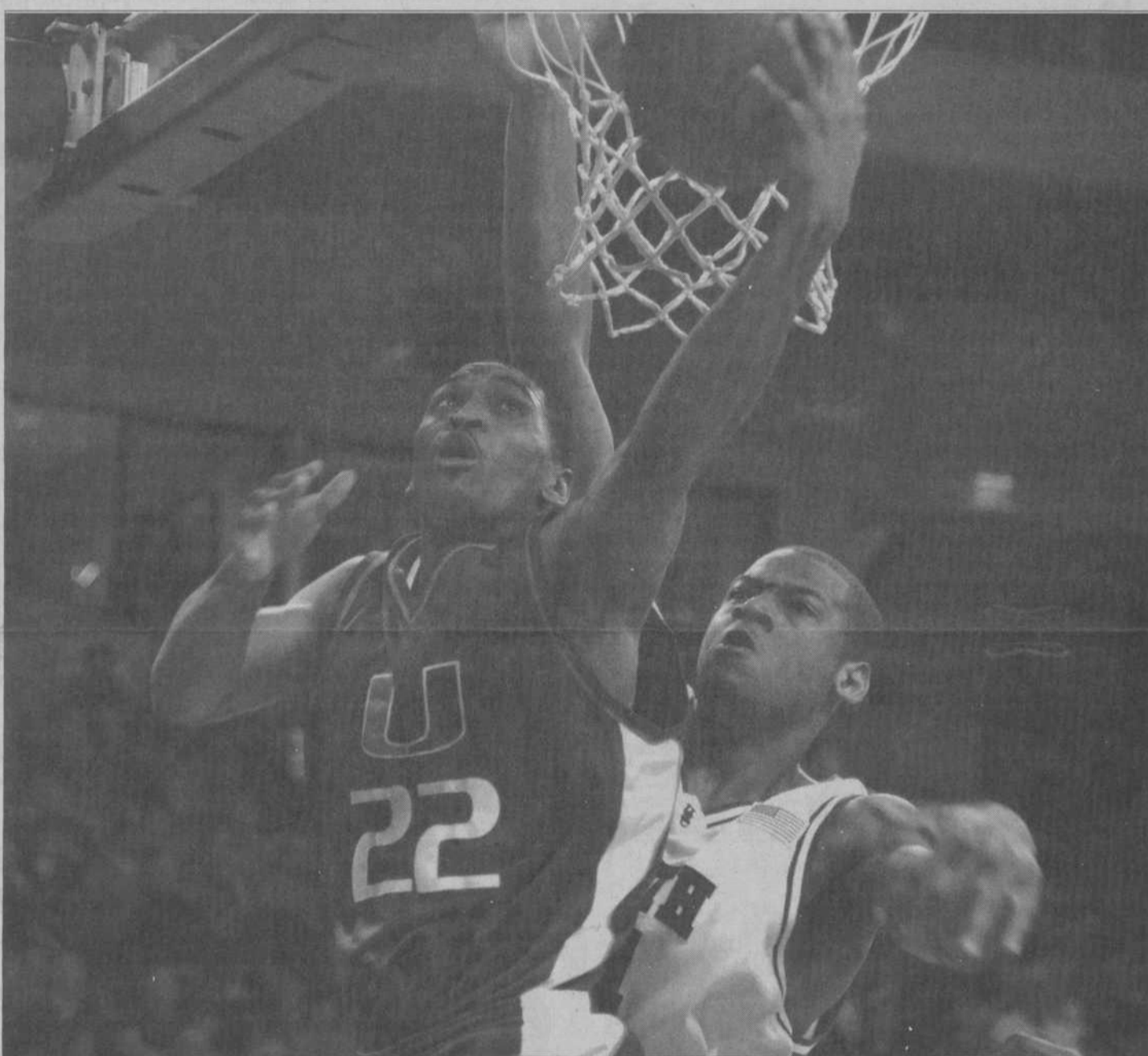
Powell got the ball back in the corner and was able to rifle a pass to Trice under the basket. The junior guard made the layup, was fouled and converted the free throw to set up the late drama.

"That was really some basketball game," Odom said. "It was a game worthy of any tournament, regular season, conference tournament or any postseason tournament."

Gonner finished with 10 points, while Powell led USC with 18 points and seven rebounds. Sophomore forward Brandon Wallace turned in one of his better games, taking advantage of constant double-teams on Powell to finish with 10 points and seven rebounds.

The 6-foot-9-inch sophomore also contributed with four blocks on the defensive end.

USC guards spent most of their 40 minutes on the floor trying to slow down the Hurricanes' 3-point barrage. Miami lofted 27 3-

KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK
Miami's Robert Hite is stopped short of the basket in the Gamecocks' 69-67 victory against the Hurricanes in the Colonial Center.

point attempts with Hite draining five.

The Gamecocks never managed to pull away. Miami's 48 percent shooting from beyond the arc kept the USC lead from at seven points at the most.

Leading 36-33 at halftime, USC got consecutive Powell and Trice layups to stretch the lead to 43-36 three minutes into the

second half. Miami countered with a layup and a 3-pointer from guard Anthony Harris to pull within 2, 43-41.

USC went cold late in the second half, not converting a field goal for nearly eight minutes but getting five free throws. Miami held its largest lead at 64-60 with 3:50 remaining. Gonner followed with two free throws, and a Powell layup with 1:50 remaining broke

the drought and tied the game at 64.

The Hurricanes, coming off a 66-65 loss against Virginia in the first round of the ACC Tournament, were led by Hite's 23 points. All-ACC selection Guillermo Diaz scored 21 points and Harris added 14. No other Hurricane player recorded more than two points.

USC will advance to play the

winner of the Arizona State-UNLV game. While Odom said he was unsure where his team would play next, he said that if Arizona State won, the game would be played in the Colonial Center, as ASU will play host to a women's NCAA Tournament game.

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One man's journey into the heart of the tourney

Listen, it's time to be honest here. It's the week after spring break, and I've had a rough weekend. I've got nothing. All jokes aside, I've got nothing. So I did what any young man in need of advice would do: I asked Stephen Fastenau. "Fear not, young Jake, for you can always write about the NCAA Tournament," he said. Well, all righty then.

The first thing I noticed about the bracket is that the odds of Chicago No. 1 seed Illinois being in the Final Four are about the same as the odds of finding me in the Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen group on Facebook:

very, very high. They are in a pretty weak bracket with two overrated teams, Oklahoma State and Arizona, as their only real competition. Plus Dee Brown is single-handedly bringing back knee-high socks for the first time since Keith Van Horn did it in the mid-'90s. I respect that.

The second thing I noticed is that the odds of Albuquerque No. 1 seed Washington being in the Final Four are about the same as the odds of finding Best Buy running classified ads in The Gamecock looking for Carolina football players: very, very low. Georgia Tech, Louisville, Gonzaga and Wake Forest could all easily beat Washington if they get the chance. The only reason I want them to stay is so I can hear Digger Phelps say the phrase "U-DUB" a few more times. He kills me.

In the Syracuse regional, all the "experts" have already given North Carolina a free ticket to the Final Four. I like their chances, but it won't be that easy. With a potential third-round matchup with Florida and fourth-round matchup with Connecticut or Kansas very likely, the Tarholes will have to play their best. I think Florida can give them a great game. Matt Walsh is finally starting to heat up, and he is dating a Playboy Bunny. I'm not sure if this helps his cause or hurts it. On one hand, I'm sure he wants to win, but on the other hand, how many other guys in this tournament could say "Oh well, we lost. I guess I'll just go out with my Playboy girlfriend tonight instead of basketball"? That is some serious anti-motivation.

In the ACC tournament, North Carolina wasn't exactly flowing smoothly, but I know one thing that was: Rashad McCants' poopie. (Did I just say poopie? College journalism — I love it!). McCants was suffering from an "intestinal disorder" and was struggling to regain his midseason form. I'm not sure about you, but if the game is on the line and my best player is shooting free throws, I want holding his butt cheeks together

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Softball drops 2 against Vols

By MIQUEL JACOBS
STAFF WRITER

Two days after claiming a series (2-1) against No. 12 LSU, the USC softball team (20-12, 5-3 SEC) returned to Beckham Field on Tuesday for a doubleheader against No. 4 Tennessee. The result this time was almost perfect pitching for the opposition, as the Lady Vols dominated the Gamecocks, 9-1 and 12-0.

Improving to 31-4, Tennessee's pitchers gave up only two hits in both games combined, allowing one run in 11 innings.

In game one, Tennessee sophomore Monica Abbott hurled in a common dominating performance, striking out 15 of 20 batters in the game. Abbott was one inning away from a no-hitter before Carolina sophomore Chrissy Schoonmaker hit a solo home run in the top of the sixth inning. The only other player to reach a base was junior Ashley Smith after being hit in the head by a pitch in the second inning. She never advanced past the first bag, as the next

batter struck out. Abbott's record improved to 21-1 for the season, with only four runs given up and 254 strikeouts in 136.2 innings pitched. Opposing batters have accumulated a .098 on-base percentage on the mound, a sign that last season's SEC Pitcher of the Year is still dominating.

"This was one of the most dominating performances I've seen her throw," co-Tennessee coach Ralph Weekly said. "She made one bad pitch to South Carolina, and they made her pay."

The game was already over by then. The Lady Vols first scored on a single to center field in the second inning and never looked back. Picking up three more runs in the third, the offense showed off even more in the final inning, turning in five runs in the top of the sixth. With two outs and the bases loaded, junior Kristi Durant hit a two-RBI single out to center to increase the lead to 6-0. The very next batter, junior Katherine Card, hit one over the right-field fence, driving in the remaining three runs.

The Gamecocks' starter was senior Aleca Johnson, whose record dropped to 2-2 in her first start of the season.

The second game proved an even bigger blowout than the first, as the Lady Vols continued swinging the bat well with 12 runs on 11 hits. In contrast, the Gamecocks managed only one hit on freshman pitcher Megan Rhodes, who recorded seven strikeouts in five innings.

The top of the second inning was enough to do the Gamecocks in after a homer to begin the inning put Carolina behind. Four more runs, two batted in by Durant, ensued on freshman pitcher Kate Pouliot, who dropped to 5-4 on the season. The Lady Vols did not quit there, scoring two more in the fourth and five runs in the fifth to finish the scoring. Durant went 5-8 on the day, scoring seven batters for Tennessee. Card also was a strong force for the Lady Vols, going 4-8 with seven RBI and two home runs, both in the final inning of each game.

"Card and Durant both had exceptional

◆ Please see **SOFTBALL**, page 13

KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK
USC freshman shortstop Lisa Longo prepares to fire the ball to first base in a game earlier this year.