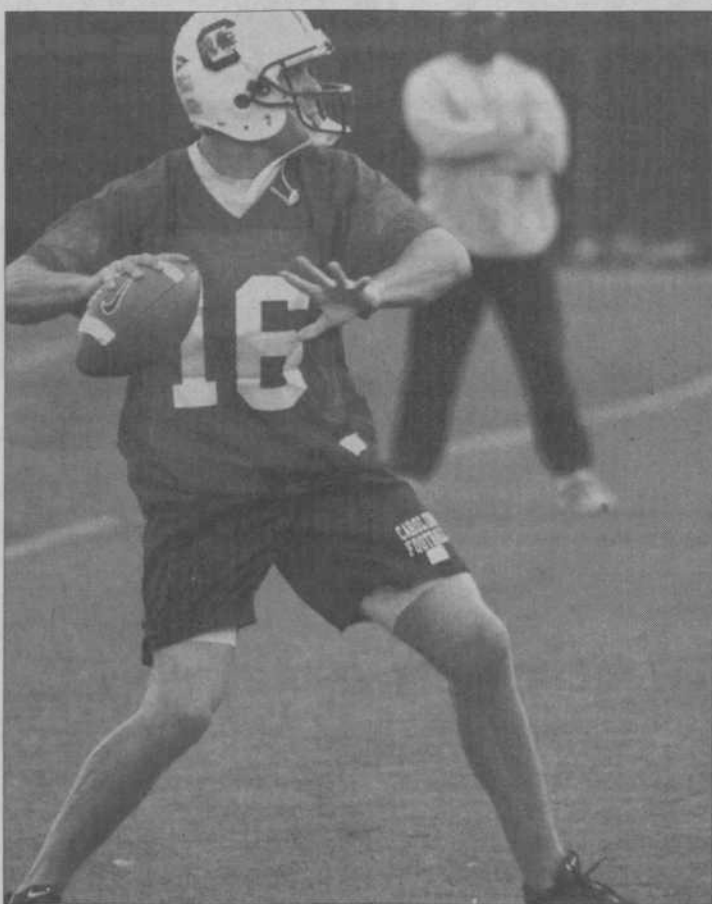


# Offense struggles in initial practice with pads



NICK ESARES/THE GAMECOCK

Rising junior quarterback Brett Nichols drops back to pass in a practice this week. Nichols took the majority of the snaps Thursday.

By AJ BEMBRY  
FOR THE GAMECOCK

Good thing the first regular-season game of Steve Spurrier's USC tenure isn't until early September. The way things were going for the ol' ball coach's offense during Wednesday's practice, it might take all summer for the Gamecocks to assimilate Spurrier's heralded fun 'n' gun system.

"It was a struggle for the offense today," Spurrier said after the two-hour workout. "The defense looked good. [We're] a struggling bunch of Gamecocks. We couldn't even execute the snap to the QB."

## OFFENSE

Sophomore Blake Mitchell led the first-team offense throughout the opening passing drills Wednesday, but he split time with redshirt freshman Antonio Heffner and junior Brett Nichols during the brief scrimmages. The quarterbacks, however, are lacking in size — a fact Spurrier laments.

"Our QBs may not last very long," he said. He added that they were off-limits to the defense, as they won't be eligible for open-field hits for the rest of spring.

None of the quarterbacks threw much during Wednesday's scrimmages, though, as the ball was kept mostly on the ground by redshirt freshman Albert Ashcraft and senior Daccus Turman. Turman appears to be lighter and quicker than he was last season, as he cut through the linebackers and hit his holes with authority. The lanky Ashcraft lost his footing a few times, but after early struggles was able to hit the outside corner and take off to the endzone, making good use of his 4.5-second 40-yard dash speed.

Thursday was a different story, however, as Nichols took the majority of the final snaps at quarterback.

"Brett was doing some of what we asked him to do," Spurrier said Thursday. "He threw some completions and like I told the quarterbacks afterwards, if one guy's fairly hot in practice he may go the whole day."

The receivers continued to be the bright spot on offense as freshman Sidney Rice impressed again along with junior Noah Whiteside.

Spurrier said that the team had put in a good portion of his offense, but not all of it yet. He hinted that all of it could be

**"Brett was doing some of what we asked him to do. He threw some completions and like I told the quarterbacks afterwards, if one guy's fairly hot in practice he may go the whole day."**

STEVE SPURRIER  
USC FOOTBALL COACH

installed by the end of spring practice.

## DEFENSE

Takeaways were the name of the game early on for the defensive drills, as defensive line coach/co-defensive coordinator Tyrone Nix had his units working on stripping the ball and protecting the fumble. Secondary coach Dave Wommack also worked with turnovers, running several interception drills. The Gamecocks look to improve last year's takeaways, as they fared only a plus-one in the category, ranking them sixth overall in the SEC.

During full-team drills, the defensive linemen repeatedly got the better of their offensive counterparts, collapsing the pocket to put pressure on the quarterback. Sophomore Stanley Doughty showed great hustle throughout drills and scrimmage, earning praise from the coaching staff.

## THEY SAID IT

"You got scared!" Various members of the USC secondary after wide receiver Syvelle Newton dropped a pass while looking around potential tacklers.

## INJURY REPORT

Sophomore defensive back Ko Simpson is being kept out of practice as a precaution because of an injury to his left pinkie finger. Spurrier said doctors should re-evaluate him in 10 days, but he might be lost for the remainder of spring practice. Sophomore wide receiver Travis Lee reportedly hurt his neck in the weight room and is expected to be out for two weeks.

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# Baseball to take on Gators in Sunshine State

■ Florida, Carolina both looking for their first SEC series win

By BRIAN SAAL  
FOR THE GAMECOCK

The USC baseball team will travel to the Sunshine State this weekend to battle its SEC East foe the Florida Gators. The Gators have a 17-6 record but fell five spots in the Baseball America poll after losing twice last weekend to Ole Miss at Oxford.

Big victories this season for the Gators have been against No. 25 Central Florida and twice against No. 6 Miami. Florida has a 16-4 record at home at McKethan Stadium.

The Gators rely on timely hitting, as they are 10th in conference with a team batting average of .300. They are, however, fourth in the conference with 25 home runs, and they lead the conference with 128 walks but carry 144 strikeouts.

Pitching-wise, Florida has a 3.31 ERA, an SEC median, partly

because they give up plenty of doubles, home runs and hits. The Gamecocks' task will be to cool off the Gators' offense, as they are coming off a 17-run performance Tuesday night against the UCF Golden Knights.

It appears to be a tale of two teams this season for the Gators. When they win, they bring their bats, averaging 10.2 runs while allowing only 3.17 runs with two shutouts in 17 wins. However, when they lose, they can muster only 3.8 runs per game, while their pitchers average 7.6 runs in the six losses.

Carolina pitchers, who have the fourth-best ERA in the SEC at 2.80, need to continue their success. After one weekend of SEC play under their belts, Carolina and Florida are 1-2 and need wins in a wide-open race for the SEC title.

Gator senior center fielder Jeff Corsaletti leads the offensive charge with a .461 batting average, three home runs and 23 RBIs. Carolina must look out for sophomore catcher Matt LaPorta, who leads his team with eight home runs and 27 RBIs. The

pitching projection for the Gators looks to be juniors Bryan Ball and Alan Horne and senior Tommy Boss. Ball posts a 5-0 record with a 1.54 ERA. Horne has a 5.25 ERA and a 1-2 record. Boss, who will most likely anchor the Sunday matchup, has a 4.34 ERA and a 3-1 record. Their pitchers have good control with 173 strikeouts and 48 walks.

Carolina will counter with senior Aaron Rawl on Friday, senior Zac McCamie on Saturday and senior Jason Fletcher on Sunday.

The Gamecocks lead the all-time series, dating back to 1919, 24-19. Carolina took two games last season from the Gators during a three-game Easter weekend series. Game times will be at 6:30 p.m. Friday, 4 p.m. Saturday and 1 p.m. on Easter Sunday.

The Gamecocks will sandwich in games against Brown on Tuesday and the Citadel on Wednesday before welcoming Georgia on April 1 to Sarge Frye Field.

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CHARLIE DAVENPORT/THE GAMECOCK

Freshman pitcher Wynn Pelzer fires a pitch last Sunday against the Arkansas Razorbacks. The Gamecocks will travel to Gainesville this weekend for a three-game series against the Florida Gators.

## ■ STEVE

Continued from page 10

what's going on.

He's got to be a good communicator because he's got to tell 10 other people what to do.

And after that, he's got to be a good passer. I usually put the passing part about third or fourth on the list of qualities and traits of a truly great quarterback.

Finally, he needs to be a team

player. It seems like most of the ones who win championships, his teammates love him. That's why Danny Wuerffel was so special at Florida. Danny did not have a real strong arm, although he was a very accurate passer. But his teammates loved him, and that's why we won four SECs and a national championship during his four years as our quarterback down there.

JH: Do you see those traits in quarterbacks here at USC?

SS: Could be. It's too early to tell. These players that are here now haven't played much at all. Blake Mitchell certainly has a chance. Brett Nichols has a chance. Even though he's not on scholarship, yet he's a good passer. Antonio Heffner does a lot of good things. And Mike Rathe, we still don't know if he's going to get his sixth year of eligibility or not.

We're also excited about the two quarterbacks we just signed. Cade Thompson, from Maryville,

Tenn., and Tommy Beecher from Concord, N.C. We know both of them are very smart young men, and they played in pass offenses in high school. So, they've got a chance to be outstanding.

Look for part three of this series Monday, as Spurrier talks about the coach under the visor.

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# Gamecocks aim to overcome Tigers

By STEPHANIE PENDRYS  
FOR THE GAMECOCK

Instead of seeking out Easter eggs and chocolate rabbits, the USC softball team will travel to Auburn this weekend to tame their second squad of Bengal cats in two weeks. The Gamecocks took 2-of-3 against the No. 12 LSU Lady Tigers on March 12-13, the squad's first series victory against the Tigers since 1997. Because of rain and severe weather, the Gamecocks (20-12, 5-3 SEC) haven't taken the field since March 15. Games against Coastal Carolina and the Tennessee were canceled in the last week.

USC last saw action Tuesday against SEC powerhouse Tennessee, ranked No. 4 in the national polls. The Gamecocks fell to the Lady Vols 9-1 and 12-0 in the doubleheader. The series was cut short because of rain, and game three was cancelled. The Gamecocks' bright spot was a sixth-inning home run by sophomore Chrissy Schoonmaker, which ended the no-hitter by Tennessee southpaw sophomore Monica Abbott.

The Gamecocks look to one veteran and one rookie ballplayer to continue tearing it up at the plate. Senior first baseman Meghan Cornett leads the team with a .390 batting average, while freshman outfielder Jessica Josker is second, hitting a .362 mark. Cornett and Josker are the only two Gamecocks that have more than 40 hits this season. Their vital roles are made clear as both have garnered SEC Player of the Week awards this season. Josker was honored March 8, and Cornett the following



KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK

Freshman pitcher Kate Pouliot fires a pitch toward home plate earlier this season.

week. Only two USC players received this recognition for the 2004 season.

The Gamecocks will also look to a pair of younger players to keep driving runners across home plate. Sophomore utility player McKenna Hughes leads the Gamecocks with 25 RBIs, and freshman shortstop Lisa Longo is second on the team with 24.

The old saying about March is that it "comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb." The No. 25 Auburn Tigers (29-8, 5-1 SEC) have been as aggressive as jungle cats, slugging the lumber and speeding around the bases for double-digit run totals in four games this month. The team's assertive play has resulted in an impressive 11-2 March record. The Tigers went 2-1 against Ole Miss during the weekend, taking their second SEC series of the season, the first being a clean

sweep of the Arkansas Razorbacks. Auburn sophomore pitchers Holly Currie and Beth DiPietro picked up victories against Ole Miss. In two seasons with the Tigers, the duo has yet to combine to lose back-to-back games.

The Tigers have not lost consecutive games this season and have posted two seven-game winning streaks. Prior to the USC series, Auburn will travel to Tuscaloosa to take on archrival Alabama. After battling the Crimson Tide, Auburn plays host to Georgia State on Tuesday and travels to Jacksonville State on Wednesday.

This weekend's series between the Gamecocks and Tigers will be the second time this season the teams have matched up on the diamond. USC and Auburn competed in the Buzz Classic earlier this month in Atlanta, where the Tigers came away with a 6-4 win. The Gamecocks fought hard but left 12 men on base during the game, and a late-inning rally stalled. USC had the tying run at first base with two outs in the bottom of the seventh when a base-running mistake at third base ended the inning, giving the Tigers the victory against the Gamecocks. The Tigers were led in the game offensively by junior shortstop Ashley Griffin (1-for-3, two runs, one RBI) and senior second basemen Lolani Alyarez (1-for-3, two runs, two RBIs). Schoonmaker and Jessica Josker were USC's offensive leaders.

The doubleheader is scheduled for 1 p.m. Saturday, and game three is set for 1 p.m. Sunday.

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