

## Baseball makes easy work of LSU



PATRICK DENNIS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

By **ALEX RILEY**  
 STAFF WRITER

With a 25-5 record and a road trip to face a top-10 LSU team, USC picked the perfect time to regain its College World Series form. The Gamecocks used a midweek drubbing of The Citadel to run their winning streak to eight games, prepping them for a huge showdown in Baton Rouge.

But all the hype went down quietly into the Bayou, as Carolina ran away with a three-game sweep of the Tigers.

USC started the weekend off right, as senior Jason Fletcher got the Friday start and earned his fourth win of the season on his longest career outing with 8 1-3 innings. Fletcher allowed just six hits on the game, as junior Brent Marsh finished the game in the ninth for his sixth save of the season, taking game one, 3-1.

Carolina took a 1-0 lead on an LSU miscue, as junior Michael Campbell brought in junior Davy Gregg on a misplayed hot shot to Tiger senior second basemen Clay Harris. The Tigers tied things up in the bottom half of the frame off a Will Harris solo homer. That tie lasted no time at all, as junior Steven Tolleson and sophomore Ryan Mahoney hit back-to-back doubles to start the fourth, while Gregg added his second double of the game with two outs to boost the Gamecock margin to its final standing, 3-1.

Pitching ruled day two, as senior Zac McCamie pitched his first complete game of the season, allowing one run on three hits for a 5-1 USC win, clinching the series.

Ian Paxton is congratulated by third-base coach Jim Toman as he rounds third after hitting a solo home run Sunday in the second inning to push USC's lead to 2-0.

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## College World Series bid rests on pitching staff

By **MIQUEL JACOBS**  
 STAFF WRITER

USC baseball coach Ray Tanner knew that his team's strength during last season's run in the College World Series was in the pitching staff. With three of his top hurlers leaving Carolina early for a crack at the major leagues and his pitching coach leaving to head the program at Old Dominion, an obvious question would arise: Can this season's staff take the Gamecocks to their fourth consecutive trip to Omaha?

After a series sweep of perennial power No. 8 LSU on the road, the performances of the starting three leave little doubt that they can also take a shot at the national championship.

The 2004 Major League Baseball draft was unkind to Tanner's program, claiming three regular starters and three marquee pitchers away from college and a spot on a minor-league roster. The Kansas City Royals spent the most time in Columbia, scouting the Gamecock pitchers enough to take ace starters Billy Buckner and Matt Campbell along with

arguably the best closer in college last season, Chad Blackwell.

"They're very solid on the mound with a first-rounder (Campbell), a second-rounder (Buckner), and that bullpen is nasty," Baseball America writer Will Kimmey said before USC's appearance in the College World Series last year. "Campbell and (Aaron) Rawl have so much experience and just throw strikes. The staff is deep, but they really just use six or seven guys — but those guys are usually enough."

Indeed, those guys, much like the six or seven needed this season, were enough. Campbell was taken in the first round of the draft with the No. 29 selection, quickly followed by Buckner in the second round and Blackwell in the sixth. The losses left behind regular starter rising senior Rawl, along with fellow rising seniors Jason Fletcher and Zac McCamie, a rotation proving to be of championship-caliber.

Heading into the season, analysts projected senior Steve Pearce and junior Michael Campbell as the top professional prospects on the Gamecock

roster, but after this weekend's series sweep against LSU, the pitchers are beginning to once again pull scouts' attention towards the mound. Starting with Friday's opener, Fletcher's 8 1-3 innings of work were a career high for him, giving up only three hits in a difficult win on the road. Junior Brent Marsh, USC's new closer, completed the final outs and earned his sixth save of the season.

After Fletcher's career day, McCamie used tips by the latter to turn in his own historical performance. The Gamecocks took the series with a 5-1, three-hit victory Saturday, the first time USC ever won a series in Baton Rouge. Even more impressive, McCamie pitched his first complete game, spreading out the three hits during the full nine innings.

"Zac McCamie pitched a great game," Tanner said. "He got in a couple of jams he pitched out of. In the second inning, it looked like it might get ugly, but he was able to battle his way out."

Rawl, the Gamecocks' four-year starter, truly battled it out in the series finale, taking a 7-5 victory for the first

ever sweep against the Bayou Bengals. In the victory, Marsh recorded his seventh save of the season in relief work. Rawl holds a 32-11 record in his career at Carolina, 15 wins short of the single-season record.

Coupled with a bullpen Tanner said he is increasingly gaining confidence in, this season's pitching staff might have what it takes to finally push the Gamecocks over the hump for a championship ring. Last season's SEC Tournament championship was a nice steppingstone, and with the performances displayed during their current eight-game winning streak, the Gamecocks might indeed be primed for a deeper run than in 2002 when Rawl pitched the national championship game against Texas.

"I have a lot of confidence in our pitching staff," Tanner said following last week's sweep of Georgia. "When pitchers give you a chance to win, that's all you can ask for."

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PATRICK DENNIS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Aaron Rawl throws against LSU Sunday in a 7-5 win in Baton Rouge, La.

## MLB opens '05 with a bang

By **JONATHAN HILLIARD**  
 SPORTS EDITOR

One week of the 2005 Major League Baseball season is in the books, and the sport couldn't have asked for a better jumpstart.

Last weekend the Red Sox and Yankees picked up right where they left off with an action-packed, three-game series in the Bronx. New Yankees ace Randy Johnson got the Bronx Bombers rolling with a 9-2 victory against the defending World Series champions in the MLB season opener.

After all-world closer Mariano Rivera blew a 3-2 lead for New York in the ninth inning of game two, Yankee captain Derek Jeter picked up the slack, ending the game on a walk-off homer in the bottom of the ninth.

Game three saw even more heroics, as the Red Sox battled back from a ninth-inning deficit to overtake the evil empire, 7-3.

The Detroit Tigers' Dimitri Young stole the show on MLB's opening Monday, going 4-for-4 with five RBIs and three home runs against the Kansas City Royals. Another hot hitter in the first week of play was Philadelphia Phillie leftfielder Pat Burrell. Burrell went 12-for-25 on the week and belted a MLB-leading 15 RBIs. The former No. 1 draft pick also hit three homers during the first week of play.

The Seattle Mariners signed free agents Richie Sexson and Adrian Beltre in the offseason and saw immediate dividends last Monday. Sexson became the first Mariner to homer in his first two at-bats, leading Seattle to a 5-1 opening-day win.



GREGORY SMITH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The New York Mets, left, and the Atlanta Braves line the field during opening day ceremonies at Turner Field last Friday. Atlanta won, 3-1

Also very busy in the offseason was the New York Mets. The Mets threw newly acquired ace Pedro Martinez on opening Monday, but despite pitching well, the Cincinnati Reds spoiled the day with a last-inning comeback. The Mets continued to struggle throughout the week, losing their first five before finally picking up a win Sunday in Atlanta. Martinez threw a complete game and allowed only one run in the victory.

The Braves had doubts about their starter, turned closer, turned ace John Smoltz, as he lasted only 1 2-3 innings in the opener against Florida. The veteran gave up seven runs and the Braves were shut out, 9-0. The winners of 13 straight

division titles would not stay down for long though, as they won the final two games of a series at Florida and won 2-of-3 in their home opening series against the Mets, solidifying an early claim for first in the National League East.

The action won't cool down in week two as the game's biggest rivals clash again this afternoon in Fenway Park. The Red Sox will have their first championship rings in 86 years presented to them before the game, and another three-game series with George Steinbrenner's Yankees should provide plenty of excitement.

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MORRY GASH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tiger Woods, right, gets the Green Jacket from Phil Mickelson, left, after winning the 2005 Masters at the Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta, Ga., Sunday.

## Woods bests DiMarco for fourth Masters win

By **DOUG FERGUSON**  
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**AUGUSTA, Ga.** — Tiger Woods is the Masters champion once again, turning back a surprising challenge Sunday with a shot of sheer magic and a birdie putt to win a playoff he never expected.

A spectacular finish of birdies and

bogeys finally ended when Woods produced the most important shot of all — a 15-foot birdie putt on the first extra hole to capture his fourth green jacket and finally put away the gritty Chris DiMarco.

Woods knew it was over when the ball was a foot from the hole, taking two steps

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