

SPRING CHICKENS

Spurrier era takes flight



NICK ESARES/THE GAMECOCK

USC football coach Steve Spurrier looks on as the Garnet and Black teams warm up for Saturday's spring game. The game marked the end of spring practice.

By MIQUEL JACOBS
STAFF WRITER

At 1:07 p.m. Saturday afternoon, the Steve Spurrier era of USC football unveiled itself to the nation. The Garnet and Black Game, televised by ESPN2, was a method for returning players to unveil how much of Spurrier's system they have learned, as many players used the opportunity to solidify favorable impressions with a new coaching staff.

In front of a USC spring game-record 38,806 fans, the Blake Mitchell-led Black team outlasted freshman Antonio Heffner's Garnet team, 20-10.

"It was a typical spring game," Spurrier said. "Our players played hard. They had a few good plays here and there. It was chance for a whole lot of guys to play. We've had very few injuries, so guys have practiced a lot. We've gotten off to a pretty decent start."

The only Gamecock injured during the game was junior receiver Noah Whiteside, who dislocated his ankle after making a 19-yard catch in the middle on a Heffner pass. Whiteside, named Offensive MVP for the spring by Spurrier, was a projected fall starter and the team's leading returning receiver.

Junior receiver Syvelle Newton fielded the opening kickoff for 35 yards to start things off for the Garnet team. As anticipated, the first play from scrimmage was a Heffner pass that sailed down the left sideline before slipping straight through the hands of an open Newton. The Black defense, headed by sophomore Stanley Doughty, went to work, forcing a three-and-out for the first possession.

Mitchell went straight to work on his first possession, completing his first four passes with two going to redshirt senior tight end James Scott. A missed field goal would allow the Garnet team to score first on its next possession, highlighted by senior Daccus Turman's eight carries for 46 yards and a touchdown. Turman, who rushed only once more after the drive,

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KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK

Junior running back Cory Boyd is stuffed inside the 5-yard line by the Garnet defense. Defense has been generally more impressive than Spurrier's offense.

Defense flexes muscles in spring scrimmage

By ALEX RILEY
STAFF WRITER

After weeks of prep work on the practice field, the first glimpse a Steve Spurrier-run USC team hit Williams-Brice Stadium on Saturday afternoon for the Garnet and Black spring game.

The defense started the day shorthanded, as safety Ko Simpson, last year's SEC Freshman of the Year, did not play because of a broken pinkie finger. Simpson had returned to practice but was sidelined for safety reasons. Added to that, the defense had one rule holding it back — the players were not allowed to blitz.

With the offense supposedly shaky and the defense being forced to use less pressure, the game looked like it could have a tone dominated by either side. But it was the defense that took control in the early goings, as the Black team's Spurrier-dubbed "unblockable" sophomore defensive tackle Stanley Doughty burst

through the offensive line to sack redshirt freshman quarterback Antonio Heffner for a 2-yard loss.

Doughty was not done, as he picked up another sack on Heffner in the second quarter, this time for a loss of 9. Doughty finished the day with three tackles, two on sacks for a loss of 11 yards.

"(Doughty) was probably the guy that made a whole lot of plays (this spring)," defensive coordinator John Thompson said. "The key is you have to do it in the fall."

"I'm just looking forward to next year," Doughty said. He had family drive up from Louisiana to watch the game, and said afterward, "Hopefully I gave them a good show."

Not to be shown up, Garnet team sophomore defensive tackle Marque Hall picked up the only other sack of the game for either team on a rundown of sophomore quarterback Blake Mitchell

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Coach: USC quarterback race still wide open

By JONATHAN HILLYARD
SPORTS EDITOR

On Thursday, Sept. 1, the eyes of college football will be on Williams-Brice Stadium to witness the return of Steve Spurrier and the fun 'n' gun offense. And taking snaps for the high-powered, Spurrier-led offense will be ...

Well, we still don't know.

Saturday's Garnet and Black Game did not produce a clear-cut leader at the quarterback position — in fact, it might have done the opposite.

Entering Saturday's final practice of the spring, redshirt freshman Antonio Heffner was thriving under the tutelage of the pass-happy Spurrier and looked to have emerged as the favorite to win the job, surpassing redshirt sophomore Blake Mitchell.

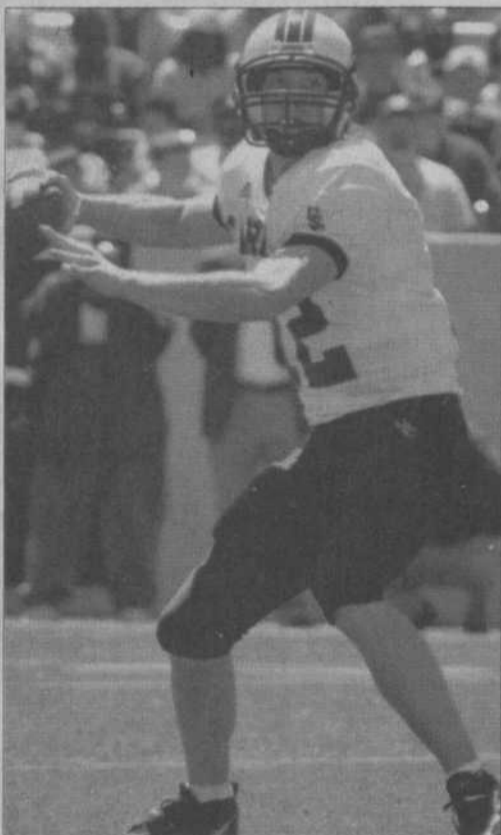
Mitchell, who has seen more game time than the four quarterbacks in contention, has had an up-and-down spring, drawing praise from Spurrier at some points and criticism at others.

In front of a record crowd at a USC spring game, the roles almost seemed reversed.

USC's Black squad, led by Mitchell under center, got the better of Heffner's Garnet unit in the game, but the more experienced signal caller also seemed to have a better day individually.

"Blake did a lot better than he's done. He did a lot of good things," Spurrier said after the game. "He took his steps and let it go most of the time."

Mitchell finished the day completing 12 of his 23 passes for 175 yards and one



touchdown, a deep fade to rising star receiver, redshirt freshman Sidney Rice.

"It's been a lot of fun just going out there and throwing the ball around," Mitchell said in post-game interviews. "It's been great time this spring."

Heffner looked impressive at times, using his mobility to dodge defenders and extend plays while not panicking and taking off to run. The Memphis native

provided what could have been the highlight of the day, eluding two Black team defensive linemen and reversing fields before hitting redshirt sophomore D'von Hill in stride for a 40-yard completion that would set up a Black team field goal. Heffner also committed the game's only turnover when he was picked off by redshirt sophomore safety Ty Erving, who returned the interception to

Meet THE QBs

BLAKE MITCHELL,
6-3, 194, R-SO.,
LAGRANGE, GA.

◆ 9-for-22 for 86 yards with one touchdown and three interceptions in 2004

◆ Completed 12-of-23 passes for 175 yards and one touchdown in Saturday's Garnet and Black Game

◆ Connected with redshirt freshman Sidney Rice for the game's only passing touchdown

◆ Rated as high as the No. 7 quarterback in the nation out of high school

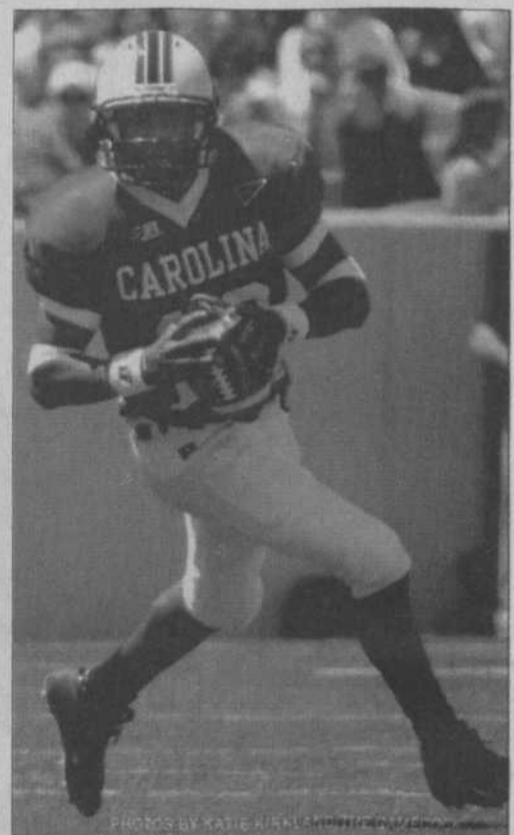
ANTONIO HEFFNER,
6-1, 186, R-FR.,
MEMPHIS, TENN.

◆ redshirted in 2004 by coach Lou Holtz

◆ completed 7 of 14 passes for 129 yards and an interception in Saturday's Garnet and Black Game

◆ Scrambled before hitting sophomore D'von Hill on the game's longest pass play

◆ Rated 15th best pro-style quarterback by Rivals.com out of high school



the Garnet 5-yard line, setting up a Black team touchdown.

Despite making some plays, Spurrier said that Heffner had a little rougher day than they expected.

However, as the quarterbacks exit spring practice and head closer toward opening day, the race to be Spurrier's first quarterback is in no way finished.

"The quarterback situation is just as

wide open as probably the first day," Spurrier said. "The player that comes back the smartest, has worked the hardest and knows what he's doing will have a chance to be the starter."

Senior offensive tackle Na'Shan Goddard was impressed with both quarterbacks.

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STARS of the spring



SIDNEY RICE, R-FR. WR
Impressed coach Steve Spurrier with size, leaping ability



DE'ADRIAN COLEY, T-SR. DE
Has emerged as a starter at defensive end position



ALBERT ASHCRAFT, R-FR. RB
Filled in for injured Cory Boyd, had TD run in first scrimmage



STANLEY DOUGHTY, R-SO. DT
Has been called "unblockable" by Spurrier



NOAH WHITESIDE, JR. WR
Named offensive MVP for spring practice