

# Gritsaeva shines in European games

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STAFF WRITER

USC's women's basketball team has five international students as its scholarship players, a recruiting pipeline that coach Susan Walvius has used to attract top talent. The added bonus of having these European players on the roster is that, unlike a majority of the American counterparts, the players can play in European Championships for their individual countries.

Last season, Gamecocks Lea Fabbri and Iva Sliskovic helped their home country Croatia to a seventh place finish in the International Basketball Federation Under-20 Championships, and heralded freshman Ilona Burgrova represented the Czech Republic to an amazing bronze medal finish.

This year, the Gamecocks had only one player represented in the

championships, Olga Gritsaeva of Russia.

Gritsaeva, a key reserve last season and USC's lone senior for the upcoming season, played a major role for Russia in the eight-game European Championships. Finishing at 5-3, her team concluded the tournament in 11th place, but it was the inspired play of Gritsaeva that should leave Carolina fans anxious for the 2006 season. Playing in all eight games and never playing less than 25 minutes in a game, Gritsaeva averaged 7.6 points, 7.1 rebounds, 2.4 assists and 1.9 steals per game while in Europe. She also averaged 47 percent from the field. In contrast, Gritsaeva posted averages of 2.8 points on 23 percent shooting, 3.3 rebounds, 1.4 assists and 0.5 steals per game for the 2005 USC season.

The Russian team began the tournament hot with back-to-

back wins against Poland (70-65) and Germany (62-51). They then lost the next two games to Italy (65-85) and Turkey (89-93) before rebounding for another two-game streak against the Czech Republic (86-71) and Belgium (78-59).

Gritsaeva's best game of the tournament was arguably against the Czech Republic team, posting 14 points, six rebounds and five assists in 29 minutes. To close the tournament, the Russian team lost to Germany (60-74) before pounding Hungary 70-40 to claim an 11th place finish.

Given the dramatic changes on the court between Fabbri and Sliskovic last season after the FIBA Championships, only the season will tell if the extra experience will result in a major change in play for the senior.

Fortunately, after a down year last season from learning a new



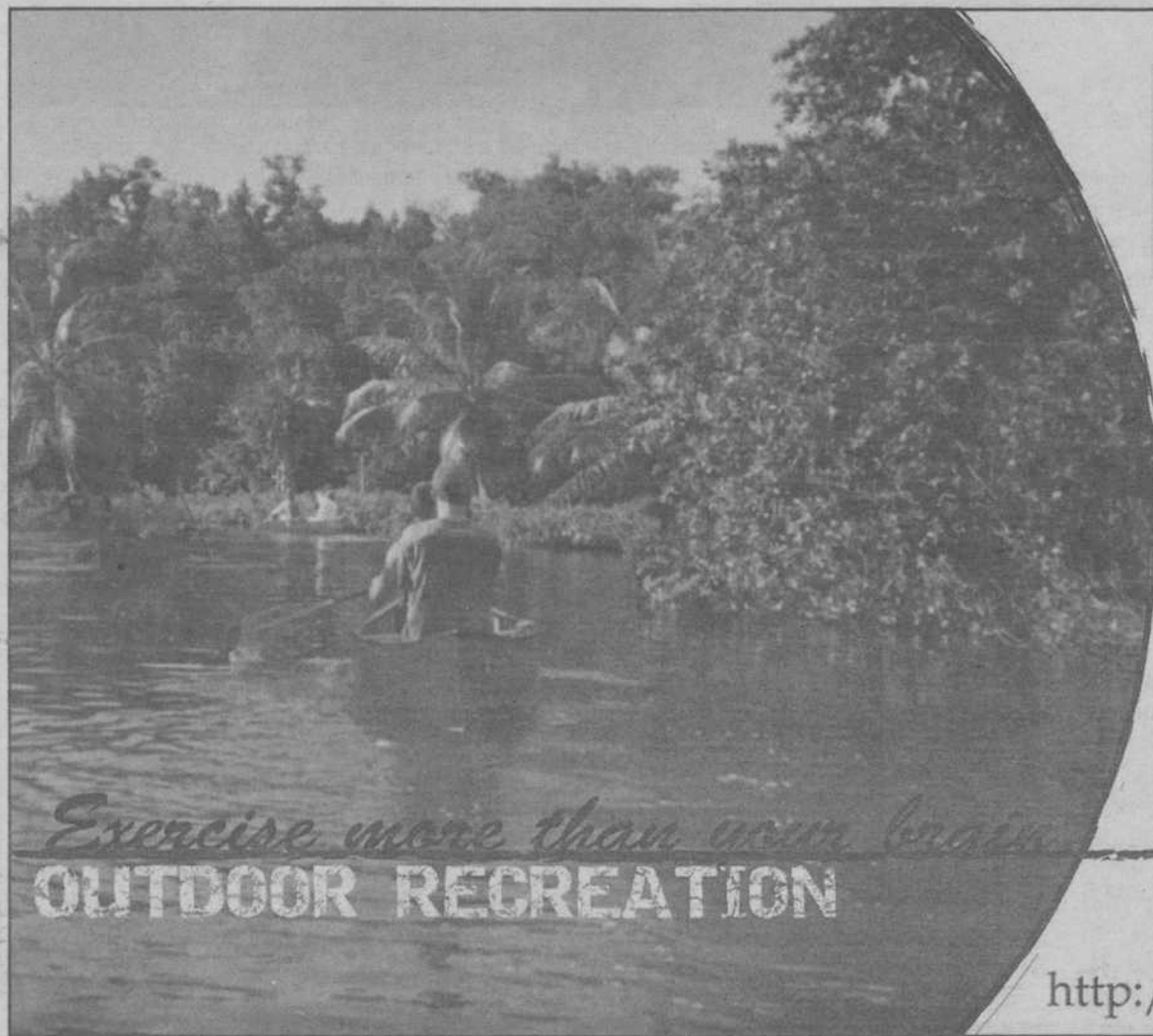
FILE PHOTO/THE GAMECOCK

Gamecock senior Olga Gritsaeva, center, went home for the European Championships, leading Russia to a 5-3 record.

position as a wing player, Gritsaeva's leadership and experience as the only remaining member from the NCAA Tournament team in 2003 should be enough to help propel

Carolina back into contention for an SEC title and a shot at the NCAA Tournament.

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