

Close call shows we have a way to go before trip to face Bulldogs

Mitchell a nice surprise, but Spurrier's offense looked too rough around edges

Remember how I said that I was looking forward to the free food almost as much as the free football? Well, one of those two things lived up to expectations — and the football game was okay, too.

Although Steve Spurrier got his career started with a win, I was a little disappointed. The offense looked great for the first few series, but after that the highlight of my night was the halftime Rice, Krispy treats.



Jake Broom

Third-year political science student

I still can't decide if we just aren't as good as I was expecting, or if maybe Central Florida was just a lot better than advertised, but I wish we didn't have to go to Athens next weekend to find out.

One of the lone highlights of the game was the play of Blake Mitchell. He had more completions in the first half than he did all season last year. He was making great reads, hitting open receivers and he even made me shift my focus from ESPN's sideline reporter Erin Andrews (at least for a few plays). Already the 2005 Blake Mitchell looks completely different from last year's version.

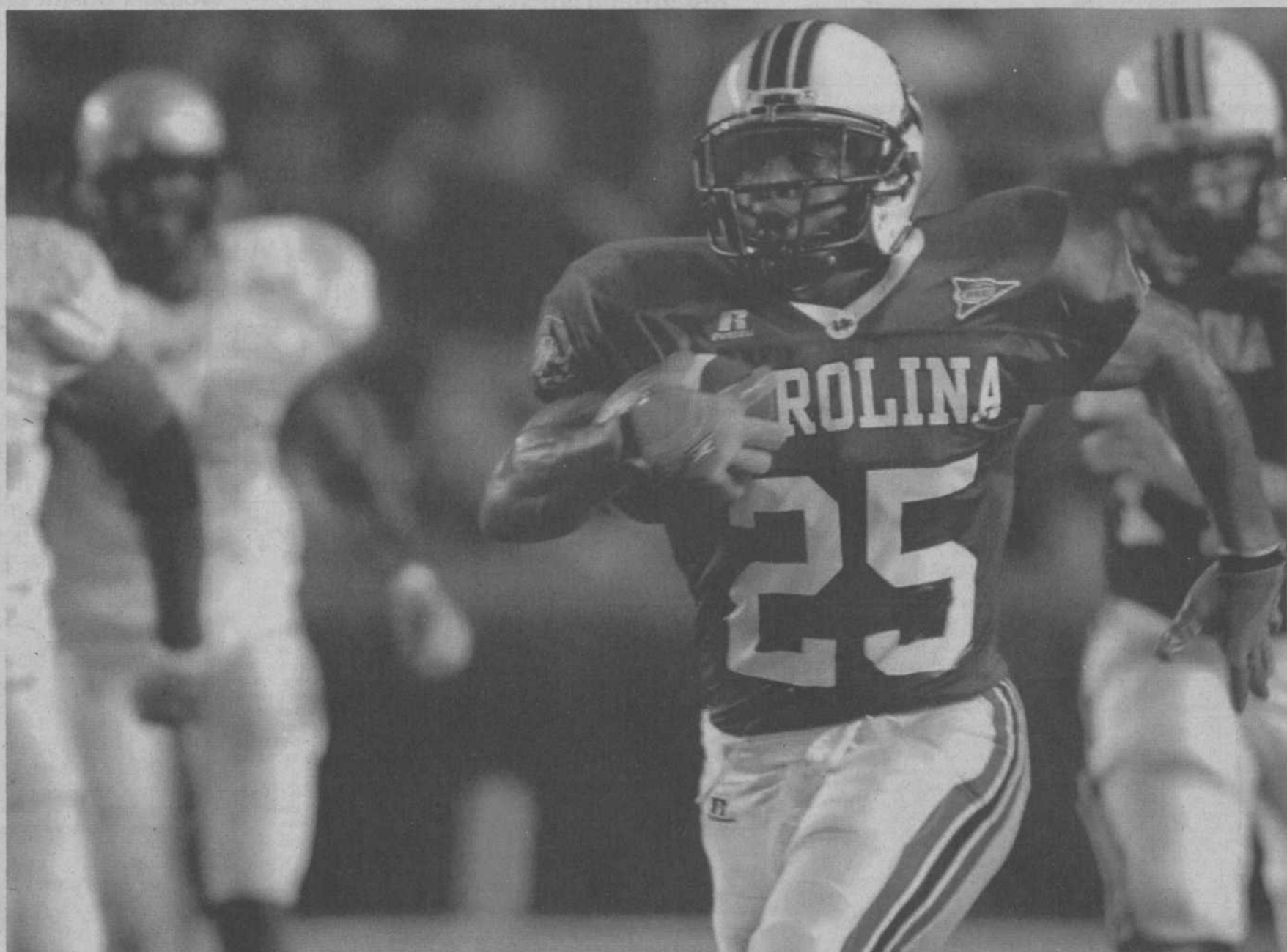
I'm not sure how he improved that much in a year — whether it was the coaching, experience or a deal with the devil — but I'm not complaining either way.

Although the new-and-improved Blake Mitchell surpassed my expectations, the running game did not. Blake did well, but if we don't find a way to run the ball, SEC defenses will be on him like stupid on a Clemson football player.

With all that said, at least we won. We beat a team we were supposed to beat. During the Holtz era I'd come into every game like this with the same look on my face my roommate has when he doesn't realize we are out of toilet paper until it's too late. I'd sit in the stands and keep waiting for bad things to happen, and usually they would. I got a different feeling from this team, even though we made it a lot closer than it should have been, I never really felt like we were going to lose.

All-in-all the first game of the Spurrier era was lackluster. I saw a few things that are very encouraging (such as the play of the wide receivers), and a few things that have me worried (such as our punt returners deciding that not carrying the ball with them as they ran was the best thing to do).

I have absolutely no idea how we'll do in Athens next weekend. Hopefully the same Blake Mitchell that was in Columbia last night will make the trip, and maybe pick up a running game on the way, because this time I won't have the free food to console me.



Katie Kirkland/THE GAMECOCK

Freshman tailback Mike Davis runs downfield after a screen pass from Blake Mitchell. Davis gained 64 yards on the play, setting up a Gamecock touchdown.

TALE OF 2 HALVES

Gamecock offense fires on all cylinders during first 2 quarters, goes stagnant before eking out victory against Golden Knights

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with a 12-yard touchdown reception by tight end Andy Boyd, as with more than seven minutes left in the first quarter USC found itself up 14-0. Mitchell was already 7-of-7 for 158 yards and two scores.

"We made some big passes early. Blake really opened up super," Spurrier said. "It was a nice play to Noah (Whiteside), a nice catch, and Blake (Mitchell) threw a nice ball."

UCF finally responded to the USC run with a bruising drive that finished with 37-yard field goal.

The response from the home team? Another crushing drive that put Mitchell into a territory few quarterbacks in Gamecock history had ever been. Driving the offense to the 16-yard line as time in the first period expired, Mitchell had finished the 15-minute period with 207 yards passing on 10-of-11 completions.

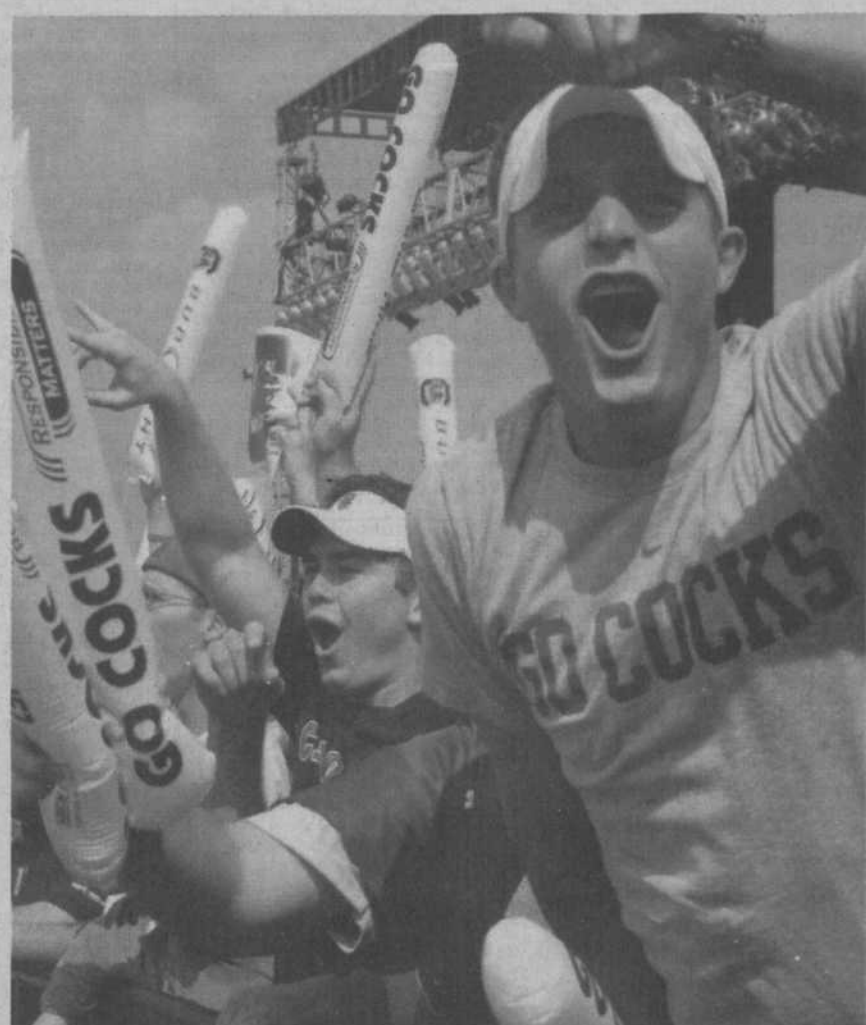
As the Gamecocks trotted into the half, Mitchell sat with stats typical of the former USC quarterback's game performance. Mitchell went 15-of-19 with 283 yards and two scores in only 30 minutes of play. Most impressively, he had no interceptions. He would finish with 330 yards to go along with three scores.

"After that first touchdown I was comfortable standing in there and calm and just played the game," Mitchell said.

When the offense took the field again, Syvelle Newton picked up 20 yards on a reverse, then hit Kris Clark for a first down at the 40 and moved closer to the end zone on a roughing-the-passer call two plays later. The following play gave Mitchell command of the Gamecock aerial attack, as he hit Newton for a 25-yard score to put USC up 24-3.

The Golden Knights looked like they were trying to make a comeback as Steven Moffett went on a tear, completing 10 passes in a row during the last two drives. But a 9-yard loss on a sack by Lance Laury and another sack with a forced fumble by Bennett set up a fourth-and-13 play for UCF at the 35-yard line that would end Moffett's completion streak as pass the dropped.

USC gave the Golden Knights the opportunity to score, as Antonio Heffner attempted to hand the ball off to Davis who thought the play was a bootleg, resulting in the first turnover of the night. The Gamecock defense would hold once more, as



Katie Kirkland/THE GAMECOCK

Fans line up at ESPN GameDay on Thursday. USC defeated UCF 24-15.

FOOTBALL ● 8

Defense steps up at critical juncture to preserve win



Nick Esarell/THE GAMECOCK

Sophomore rover Ko Simpson wraps up a UCF receiver after a catch.

Thompson's crew shuts down high-powered UCF offense by confusing quarterback

Jonathan Hillyard
SPORTS EDITOR

After playing seemingly effective bend-but-don't-break defense against UCF in the first half, the Gamecocks were forced to make a stand Thursday night at Williams-Brice Stadium. And that's just what they did.

Allowing only 3 points in the first three quarters, the Gamecock

defensive unit was forced to start in its own territory three times late in the game because of turnovers.

The biggest stand came late, as a fumbled kickoff by USC receiver Syvelle Newton gave UCF the ball back at the 20-yard line.

With the score at 24-13, the Golden Knights were creeping back into a game that Carolina dominated in the first half.

UCF would drive all the way to the Gamecocks' 1-yard line when Knight running back Kevin Smith attempted to dive over a pile of linemen on fourth down.

USC linebackers Ricardo Hurley and Ryan Brown met Smith, and a

push from the defensive line was enough to keep him out of the end zone.

"We pulled together as a unit and said 'Once we get down here on the goal line, we're not going to give up seven points and put our offense in a bind to where they have to score more points,'" USC cornerback Johnathan Joseph said.

The stats don't scream great defensive game by the Gamecocks. UCF quarterback Stephen Moffett had a good statistical night, completing 27-of-39 passes for 258 yards. Carolina allowed 341 yards of total offense against a team that hasn't won a game in a season and a half.

Only 120 of those yards came in the first half. But they got the job done.

USC's defense seemed to strangle drive after drive in the first three quarters, allowing some yards, but making the crucial stops on drives of nine and 10 plays.

"When it got to the nitty gritty, they were making plays," Moffett said. "Football's a game of inches, just like our coaches say, they were coming up with the inches in the first half."

The USC defense was on the field for more than 20 minutes of the second half, and was forced to backpedal, as turnovers gave UCF

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