

Spurrier's rep
as SEC king
can't lift USC
past Bulldogs

Ol' ball coach's legacy
won't bring USC out of
perennial mediocrity

The headline everywhere this week has been the same — the evil genius returns.

And just below the banner screaming of USC coach Steve Spurrier's return to Athens and SEC play is his 11-1 record all-time against Georgia.

The storyline continues with all the success he had offensively at Florida, and all the points his teams scored, and how he won a national title, and that he won 122 games in Gainesville, and how revolutionary the scheme was and that he even made Duke into a winner for a few years before the ACC became the power it is today.

Footnotes below all the praises heaped on Spurrier leading up to this weekend's matchup:

— He is coaching at USC, a perennial underachiever in the strong SEC, and even before it joined the conference.

— The program he took over is in shambles. Gamecock players ended 2004 in an all-out brawl with rival Clemson, and 12 players were arrested this offseason for crimes including stealing the team's own video equipment from Williams-Brice Stadium and for breaking into a campus dorm room. The rap sheet continues with another Gamecock being arrested for DUI. The State newspaper reported.

Other players were suspended for various reasons, and the program faces NCAA sanctions including the loss of scholarships for rules violations under former coach Lou Holtz. The school should have known this was to come when it hired him.

Spurrier even pulled the scholarships from current Gamecock players, almost unheard of in college athletics.

— Spurrier has no running back. Last year's leading rusher, Demeris Summers, is no longer with the team. Last week against a usually bad Central Florida team, the team ran for 32 yards on 28 attempts. The team's top back, Mike Davis, ran 11 times for 15 yards.

— Carolina just can't beat Georgia (it has lost the past three meetings). The games have been somewhat close, but the Gamecocks always choke like last year, blowing a 16-0 first-half lead to lose 20-16.

Spurrier's return is a big deal. He won at Duke and turned dormant Florida into a national powerhouse. There is the potential for him to turn things around in Columbia, but the 60-year-old ol' ball coach can't perform miracles.

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GAMECOCK GREATS: ROB DEBOER

Multi-talented star defined image of what a running back is supposed to be

Alex Riley
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

He was a two-sport athlete in baseball and football. He was a leader on the gridiron, guiding USC to big upsets in the opening years of SEC play. He was one of the most popular players to ever walk the Carolina campus.

But even through all that, Rob DeBoer is still honored to be one of Carolina's most beloved running backs.

"You know, for a 5-foot-9, 210-pound white guy from Nebraska, it's a great honor," DeBoer said. "I just always pride myself on being a hardcore runner, never go down by one guy and leave it all on the field. And I think the fans respected it, and that's what I tried to deliver."

DeBoer traveled a long way from his native Omaha, Neb., to play football for the Gamecocks. While he had offers from other big-name schools, this gifted athlete chose Columbia because of the promise he could play both of the sports he loved.

"There were two schools that were going to let me play football and baseball at the Division I-A level: Notre Dame and South Carolina," DeBoer said. "And I chose South Carolina for the opportunity to play both football and baseball as a freshman."

Aside from Notre Dame, DeBoer took visits to some of the Midwest's biggest schools, including Colorado and his home school of Nebraska. But it was the chance to shine on two fields that DeBoer called the "best fit" for him.

When he arrived at USC, the Gamecocks were in their second year of work with new coach Sparky Woods. The 1990 season produced almost as many highs for the Gamecocks as lows, as USC went 6-5 with wins against North Carolina and Virginia Tech, but took a 3-point loss to The Citadel in Columbia on the chin. The 1991 campaign featured more of the same, as USC beat Virginia Tech and Georgia Tech, but managed ties with Duke and Louisiana Tech and a loss to East Carolina.

That 1991 season marked the end of a long stretch with USC as an independent school, as DeBoer led the Gamecocks into the SEC as its newest member.

"I was a part of a team that was an independent for two years, and then we entered into the SEC," DeBoer said. "I was just a guy that loved playing football. It didn't matter, win or lose, I was going to lay it all out there on the field."

It was that mentality that helped DeBoer lead the Gamecock program to three of its biggest wins in school history. Aside for their 0-5 start in 1992, the Gamecocks managed to turn their season around with a win against No. 15 Mississippi State. That win was only the first of numerous memorable upsets, as Carolina proceeded to knock off Tennessee 24-23 in USC's only victory against the Vols since joining the league. With a close loss to Florida, the Gamecocks' goals of a bowl berth were cut short, as their 4-6 record wasn't good enough. That left the season finale with Clemson as a chance for nothing but pride.

The game turned into a classic, as rookie quarterback Steve Taneyhill taunted Clemson fans following a

touchdown in the 24-13 win, DeBoer's only win against the Tigers.

The strong finish in 1992 pumped up the Gamecocks for a strong start in 1993. That season would not only be DeBoer's senior campaign but would also mark his selection as the team's co-captain along with Ernest Dixon.

"Probably the biggest honor (I've ever received) was being named by the coaching staff and your fellow teammates as a captain of that team," DeBoer said.

The Gamecocks overall finish in the 1993 campaign, a dismal 4-7, would eventually lead to Woods' firing, but the first game of that season proved to be one of the most talked about wins in school history.

USC traveled to Athens, Ga., for a date with the Bulldogs to open the season. With Georgia leading 21-17 late in the ball game, Taneyhill guided the offense down the field. With time almost out, the Gamecocks called one final play, with DeBoer as the lead blocker, for a leaping Brandon Bennett who cleared the pile of players to notch a 23-21 upset.

"Anytime you can win against a top-tier team in the SEC is great. But certainly to do it on the last drive with just a few seconds on the clock at their home field really is encouraging and a lot of fun," DeBoer said.

DeBoer finished his career with 1,810 yards with a 4.7 yard-per-carry average, 12th on the career rushing list. Ten years later, he is still in the top 20, sitting at 16.

Although he only had three games with more than 100 yards rushing, each had a special meaning in the history books. His 165-yard against East Carolina in 1990 was the best rushing total by a USC freshman at the time and is still the second-highest total by a freshman. It was also the 20th best rushing performance ever in a game that featured two 100-yard rushers, as Mike Dingle also ran for 113 yards.

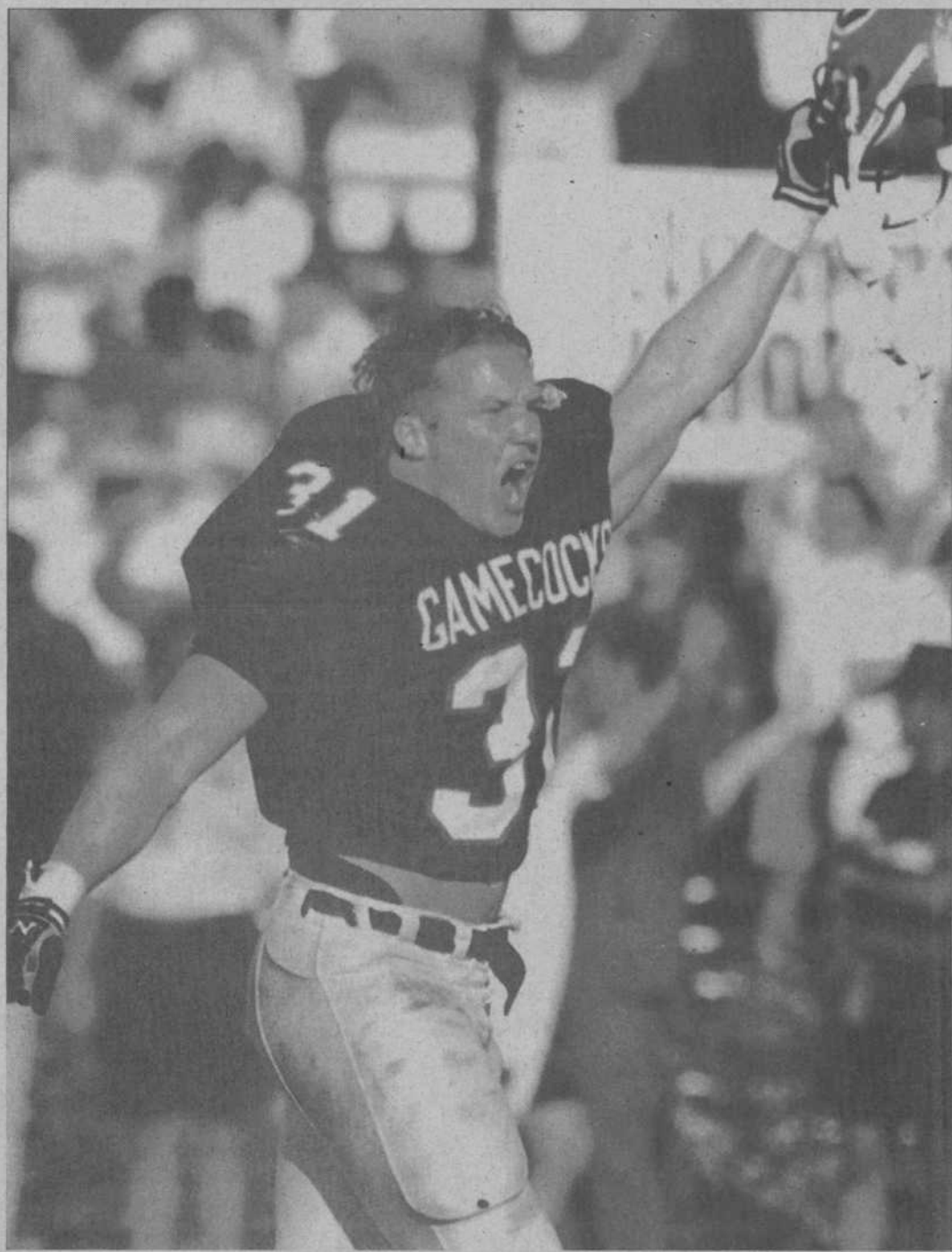
His 104-yard performance against The Citadel in 1990 was impressive, as it was coupled with a 117-yard receiving day from David Pitchko, one of only 19 times that has happened in Gamecock history. DeBoer's other 107-yard output came attached with a 129-yard effort from Bennett.

"I think it's certainly something to look back on. It's fun to pull open the book and see your name," DeBoer said. "Things like that are fun to reflect on."


When he finished his career on the gridiron, DeBoer resumed his time on the diamond as the starting catcher for USC's baseball team. During his junior season, the MLB draft had come calling, selecting DeBoer in the eighth round to the Toronto Blue Jays. Most people would jump at the opportunity, but after much thought he returned to Columbia to finish out his senior seasons.

The next season, DeBoer managed to get drafted again, this time to the Oakland Athletics, where he played in the minor leagues with some of today's biggest names.

"It was a lot of fun. It makes watching major league a lot more fun," DeBoer said. "Half the guys who are making



Former USC running back Rob DeBoer celebrates the Gamecocks' upset of Tennessee in 1992.



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