

# Davis set to jump-start USC running game

*True freshman ready to take reins of Gamecock ground game*

**A. J. Bemby**  
STAFF WRITER

One yard. Three feet. No, the distance might not seem like much, but for USC's starting true-freshman tailback Mike Davis, the end of the run was what mattered most. Waiting at the culmination of 36 inches was Davis' first collegiate career touchdown, and if his production at the high-school level is any indication, there will be plenty more in store for the local product.

Only a year ago, Davis was rushing for more than 2,000 yards for the Columbia High Capitals. Now, with last year's starting tailbacks gone — Demetris Summers was dismissed from the team and Cory Boyd was suspended for the season — Davis has the opportunity to be a vital cog in first-year coach Steve Spurrier's offense.

Davis' early rise to prominence in Carolina's offense continues a trend started by other Gamecock running backs;

Summers played significantly as a true freshman, as did Boyd. The trend stretches back to early in the Lou Holtz era, when running back Derek Watson started early in his career. Unfortunately for Gamecock fans, Watson, Summers and

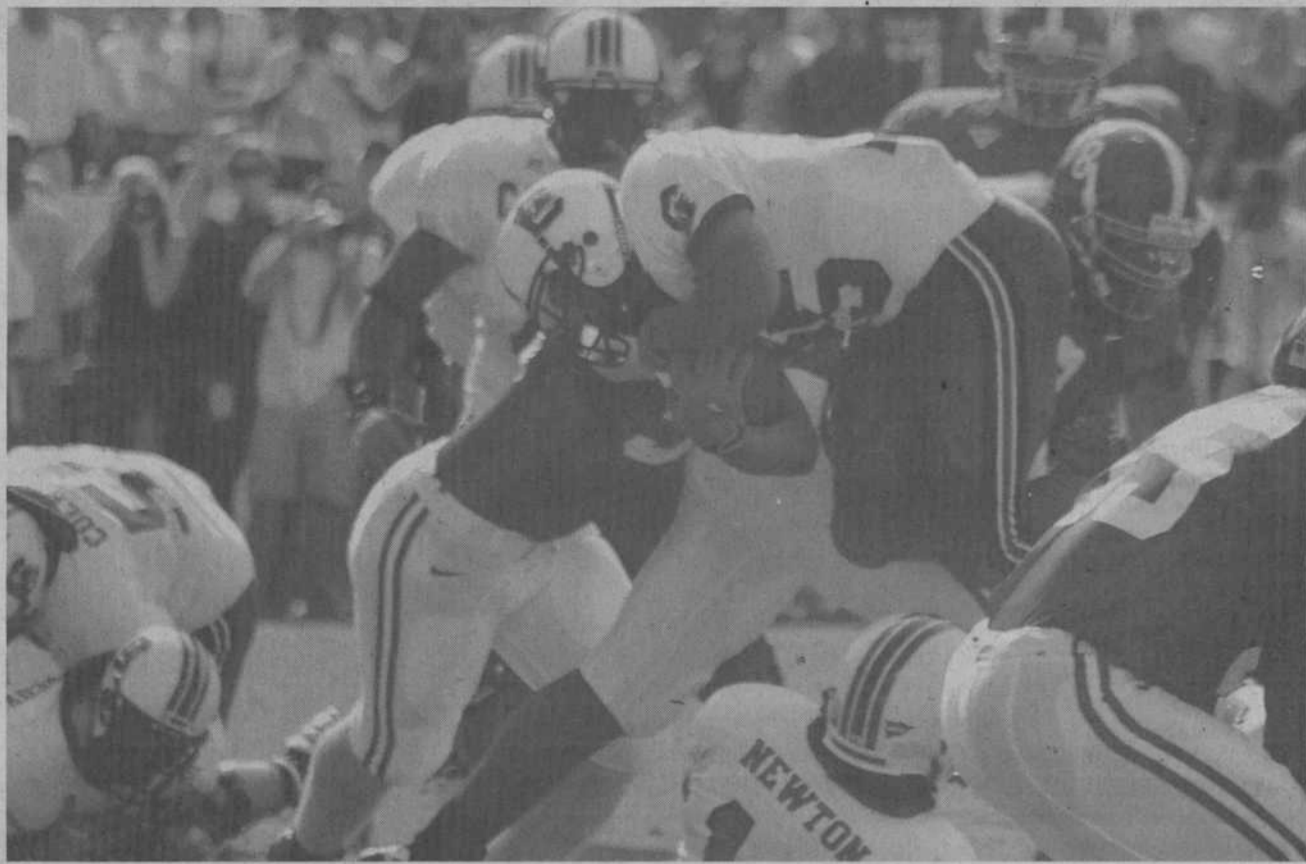
Boyd ran into trouble in their careers, costing Watson and Summers their spots on the team and Boyd the 2005 season.

Davis isn't taking his opportunity lightly. Spurrier recently said Davis will get more touches this week against Troy, but it's all about quality, not quantity, for the soft-spoken back.

"To me, playing in the game, I want to get just enough to contribute," Davis said. "It doesn't really matter how many carries I get; I'm going to do the best with the carries that I (can)."

That kind of attitude pushed Davis to excel in high school, where his career totals of 5,517 all-purpose yards and 68 touchdowns made him one of the most coveted recruits in the state of South Carolina as Maryland, Kentucky, North Carolina and archrival Clemson clamored for his services. Yet Davis decided it was best for him to stay closer to home. Among his chief reasons were the proximity to his family and friends and the comfort of being in familiar surroundings.

Davis' success in this familiar collegiate environment might be to emulate his sports idols. Growing up, Davis enjoyed the moves of Heisman Trophy-winning running back Eddie George at Ohio State and the Super Bowl-winning talent possessed by Dallas' Emmitt Smith. A couple similarities exist between those legends and Davis; like the bruising George, Davis enjoys running between the tackles, and like the diminutive Smith, Davis is less than 6



Juan Blas/THE GAMECOCK

Columbia native Mike Davis looks for some tough yards against Alabama's defense Saturday at Williams-Brice Stadium.

feet tall at 5-foot-9 inches.

Looking forward to the rest of the season, Davis has a few games highlighted on his calendar. While every game has certain magic in his first season, the season finale against Clemson holds a certain understandable intrigue, as many Clemson players have become Davis' close friends after playing in the Shrine Bowl together.


While the annual showdown with the in-state rivals is a major game for most on both rosters, another game piques Davis' interest just a little bit more.

Surprisingly, Davis can't wait to suit up against Kentucky. Not only did coach Rich Brooks and company actively recruit Davis, but one of Davis' former Columbia High teammates and friends is now a Wildcat.

"Every game is special, but Kentucky is one of those games (to be excited about) ... I'm playing against one of my teammates ... Ventrell Jenkins," Davis said. "We're still real good friends. It's going to be a big game."


With his strong work ethic and

## DAVIS, MIKE



**NAME:** Mike Davis  
**POSITION:** Running Back  
**HOMETOWN:** Columbia, S.C.  
**HEIGHT:** 5 feet 9 inches  
**WEIGHT:** 209 pounds  
**YEAR:** Freshman

*-Totalled 5,517 career rushing yards and scored 68 touchdowns during his years at Columbia High School*  
*-Rated the 11th-best running back in the nation by Scout.com*  
*-Named the starting running back prior to his first game in Carolina uniform*



Graphic illustration by Laura-Joyce Gough/THE GAMECOCK

desire to perform, Mike Davis is the kind of athlete that wants to make an impact with the program in the long haul. His high-school coach, Kemper Amick, said he believes Davis is a rare, special talent.

"Without a doubt, Mike is the

most complete player I have ever coached," Amick said. "He can be an impact player. He has all the tools and will only get better."

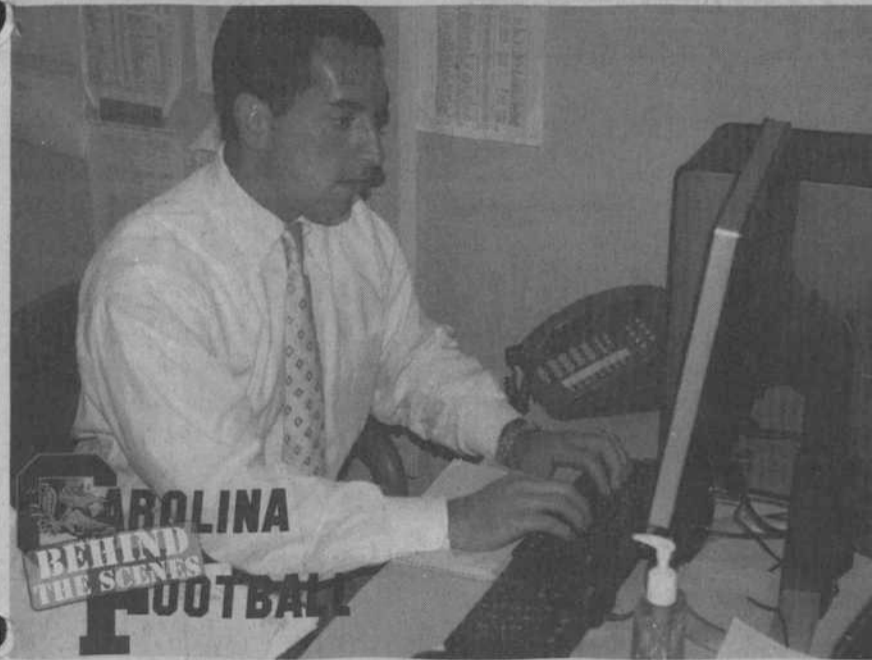
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## ON THE COVER

*Main photograph and Mike Davis photo by Juan Blas/The Gamecock, Mug shots courtesy of USC Sports Information, Sanford photo courtesy of Mike Safran, Cover designed by Laura-Joyce Gough/The Gamecock*



# Academic advisor puts 'student' in 'student-athlete'



Juan Blas/THE GAMECOCK

Academic advisor Jason Pappas types at his desk in his Field House office.

*Jason Pappas helps players balance athletic, academic commitments*

**Miquel Jacobs**  
STAFF WRITER

When football players are recruited, they come to the university as student-athletes. From the moment they set foot on campus, a tremendous support group of coaches and teammates is available to help them excel on the playing field. That takes care of the "athlete" part in student-athlete.

With the many hours of practice, games and travel, who coaches these students in the classroom?

"My job is basically to maintain an understanding of the student-athletes that they're not only here to play their sport, but they're also here to get a college education," Jason Pappas said.

That job belongs to him, academic adviser for the football team and

overall director of Academic Support. Pappas and his team of five full-time advisers find themselves handling an abundance of duties to ensure each student-athlete is in the position to not only remain academically eligible, but to also advance toward the primary goal of a degree.

"That's what we're about, to make sure they achieve graduation and not just eligibility. When it comes to the University of South Carolina, we truly believe in education," Pappas said.

All new players, from incoming freshmen to junior college transfers as well as students whose GPAs fall below a certain level, are required to check in with the adviser, whose office is located in the Academic Center near the Roost.

His daily schedule includes making sure students attend class, monitoring mandatory study hall sessions, meeting with coaches to discuss individual progression and issues, e-mailing professors for updates and meeting with various students one-on-one to discuss anything related.

"I think that's the part of the job

that I really enjoy the most, to be able to have that much of an opportunity to make an influential difference in our students," Pappas said. "Outside the coaching staff, in my opinion, we as academic advisers pretty much have the greatest control opportunity to make a difference in their lives."

Academic advisers are welcomed by coaches to join the teams on road trips, an opportunity to not only help with time and class management on the road, but to also allow the advisers to see what the athletes excel in.

"Coach Spurrier and all of our coaches do a great job of incorporating academics into that situation because they understand how important it is," Pappas said. "Coach Spurrier and (baseball) Coach Ray Tanner allow me to go to practice and the locker rooms and weight rooms. Any issues, any time that I need to meet with our students, they give me freedom to do that, which is wonderful."

One issue Pappas said he hopes to prevent is the negative perception from other students and the media regarding the academic integrity of student-athletes.

The spring 2005 football team GPA was close to a 2.5, the second highest in school history, but that's not what he hears reported in the news. Instead, the staff has to deal with the negative stereotypes from regular students about athletes and reports of players fighting for eligibility as in the highly publicized case of senior Freddy Saint-Preux in the preseason.

"It's tough on the student-athlete because if you're any other student, your academic issues aren't portrayed in the media," Pappas said. "They have to understand that they've got to do everything they possibly can so they won't put themselves in those positions."

Pappas describes the negative stereotypes attributed to athletes and issues such as attendance as "misnomers." With a program that includes receiving updated progress

reports on athletes from professors, he has written documents to validate that students are attending class and says the occasional immature decisions of some hurt the entire team.

"You have student-athletes that tend to be more mature than others and it takes longer for others," Pappas said. "What happens is those issues are probably typical of students, but because it's magnified in football or any other sport that gets the media exposure that it does, it allows that to be exaggerated tremendously and stereotype those individuals."

Whether he's dealing with a player in need of extra help or learning that yet another Carolina player made the Academic All-American list, Pappas enjoys being behind the scenes with his philosophy of "don't give me the

credit and don't give me the blame." However, he would like it if more credit was awarded to overachieving student-athletes.

"Ninety percent of our kids are well over a 2.9. (Former football player) Watts Sanderson was a great example. He got drafted by the Cardinals, graduated in three years, got his master's degree in five. An overachiever and just a super guy, but nobody wants to hear a story about that. They want to hear about the Freddy Saint-Preux's in the world and whether he's going to be eligible academically. All you ever really hear about is the negative. You don't see the success," Pappas said.

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## Who is Jason Pappas?

- ✓ Bachelor's degree in business communications from FSU; masters degrees in sports administration and higher education from USC
- ✓ Teaches University 101
- ✓ Former walk-on player for Bobby Bowden at FSU, became student manager for quarterbacks before landing a graduate assistantship in academic support; came to USC in 1999

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