

GAMECOCK GREATS MIKE HOLD

Junior college transfer pioneered amazing run through 1984's storied 'Black Magic' campaign

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Mike Hold never had any intention of becoming a Gamecock. The Arizona native enrolled at Mason Junior College in Arizona with the intent of eventually becoming an Arizona State Sun Devil. In fact, Hold calls coming to USC a "fluke thing."

"I grew up in Tempe and always wanted to go to Arizona State," Hold said. "I almost turned down the scholarship (at USC) to walk on (at ASU). Which would have been the biggest mistake of my life obviously."

"Jo Lee Dunn took over the job at New Mexico after coach (Joe) Morrison was there," Hold said. "Coach Dunn was down recruiting our junior college and thought that I'd be a good fit for what coach Mo was doing offensively at South Carolina. I never talked to coach Dunn, but he called coach Morrison and said to take a look. And that was that. I made a trip and ended up signing."

When he arrived in Columbia in 1984, Hold joined a Morrison-led team coming off a 5-6 season in 1983. Little did he realize that 1984 would forever become part of Carolina football lore.

"Twenty-one years later and people are still talking about it. So that's special," Hold said. "I'm sure a lot of people have won national championships, but just the fact that it's special in the history of the university is what's neat. People talk about it all the time. You're back there for a game, people want to talk about it."

During that 1984 campaign, the Gamecocks posted a 10-1 regular-season record with wins against Georgia, Pittsburgh, N.C. State, Florida State and Notre Dame. They also closed out the regular season with a win against archrival Clemson in Tigertown. The team achieved the school's highest rank of No. 2 in the national polls, and finished the season ranked in the top 10 after an appearance in the Gator Bowl.

"It's fun to talk about. It's fun to go back in those days. There were some special times," Hold said. "Going to Notre Dame and beating Notre Dame at Notre Dame. Some of the teams that we beat that year are teams that are perennial champions every year. Pitt has a great team every year, Georgia has a great team every year, Florida State has a great team every year. And to say that we beat all those teams in one year is something to look back on."

The one victory Hold originally called his greatest victory was USC's win against the Irish in South Bend, 36-32. But Carolina fans soon convinced him that the Irish were nothing compared to the rivalry game.

"It's kind of funny because people always ask, and I'd only been there two years, what the most memorable time was in that season," Hold said. "I learned later that was beating Clemson. But at the time, for me growing up in the west watching (Southern Cal) and Notre Dame play week-in and week-out every year, beating Notre Dame at Notre Dame was one of the highlights for me. Because I grew up with that on TV every week. And never knowing much about Clemson and Carolina. I mean, the rivalries in the South are so much bigger and real than they are in the west. As I got away from football as a player and sat back and began to understand this Clemson-Carolina thing, it's just amazing. Now looking back, I think we could have been 10-1, beat Navy but lost to Clemson and I don't think it would have the same long lasting effect that it does. You know how it is. You can be 5-6 or 6-5, but you beat Clemson and you've got bragging rights for a year."



Mike Hold played quarterback for USC during the 1984 season that would be dubbed the 'Black Magic' season. Carolina achieved its highest rank ever at No. 2.

Photo Courtesy of Mike Safran

Even with as little as he knew about the intensity of the rivalry between the Tigers and Gamecocks, Hold managed to create an image of the game that is forever a part of the more than century-old civil war. As he took a knee to finish winding down the clock in a stunning 22-21 come-from-behind win, defensive lineman William "The Fridge" Perry lunged at Hold out of frustration. That's when the quarterback extended his hand to Perry with the football, in what looked like an attempt at arrogance. But when asked, Hold says rubbing it in had nothing to do with his gesture that eventually became one of the most famous USC paintings in history.

"What it looks like in the image and the paintings is nothing like its supposed to be," Hold said. "You can say what you want about me and who I am or whatever, but one thing I was, was scared of William Perry. And by no means was I trying to incite some on the field brawl by doing that. Bottom line is I took a knee and was ready to celebrate, he was frustrated because they lost. He grabbed me by the facemask and wouldn't let go. I guess he thought 'He's a scrawny little guy, he isn't going to do anything.' I just jerked away and said 'Here, have it.' And of course they take a picture of that and it looks like I'm being cocky. I get a kick out of it now because it's one of the pictures I've got hanging on my wall. Clemson people hate me for it, Carolina people love

me."

When he left USC in 1985, Hold took his shot at the NFL. After a tryout with the Denver Broncos in 1986, he got a small shot at playing time with the Tampa Bay Bucs in 1987 when he threw for 123 yards and two touchdowns. But after being cut in 1988, Hold took a bold step into a newly formed league of football called Arena. He joined up with the Chicago Bruisers in the inaugural 1987 season and posted a 12-year career as a quarterback. During those 12 years, Hold recorded four seasons with more than 1,000 yards passing and three with more than 20 touchdowns, including his 1991 campaign with the Denver Dynamite when he passed for 1,506 yards to go along with 28 aerial and 13 rushing scores. But Hold's most impressive moment might have been his retirement as a player in 2000, as he was the last remaining player from the first season in 1987.

"I had a couple cups of coffee with the Broncos during training camp," Hold said. "Played with the Bucs, went to back to camp with them the next year. In between those two seasons, I got into the Arena league. Because it was a summer league, I could play and then go to camp with the Bucs in August and then go right back into Arena after I got cut. My career since Carolina has been in the Arena league. I got in early during the very first year when nobody knew



Mike Hold

• Led Carolina to 10-2 record and No. 2 ranking during 1984 Black Magic season

• Ninth all-time in passing with 2,981 yards and 15 touchdowns

• In his sixth season as a coach in the Arena Football League after playing for 12 seasons

about it. It's the longest football league to last outside the NFL."

More than 20 years after his last pass attempt in Williams-Brice, Hold is still a vibrant part of the USC record book. When he left Carolina, he had the third highest number of passing yards in school history, behind only Tommy Suggs and Jeff Grantz. Today, Hold sits in ninth place. He had six games with more than 200 yards passing, but it is Hold's 11 passing plays of more than 50 yards that comprise one of the best marks in school history.

"The record book is a little over blown," Hold said. "If you look at Todd Ellis' passing yards compared to mine, it's not even close. I'm only in there because not too many quarterbacks have been there since."

Since giving up the shoulder pads and helmet, Hold didn't stray far from

the Arena league, becoming a coach immediately after his on-field retirement. In 2001 he took over the expansion team Augusta Stallions of the Arena Football 2 league, guiding them to a 9-7 finish and top-10 rankings in scoring offense and passer rating. The following season, Hold finished 13-3, best in the league. He then served as coach of the Macon Knights and Carolina Cobras for one season each before becoming offensive coordinator for the Las Vegas Gladiators today.

"Fortunately I stayed with it cause it's a career. I played 12 years, went straight from player to coach," Hold said. "This will be my sixth season as a coach. It's what I know. It's what I love."

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