

JIM CARLEN

GAMECOCK GREATS

USC coach led team to three bowl appearances, produced Heisman Trophy-winning running back

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ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

In more than three decades, Jim Carlen has rubbed shoulders with some of the most influential people in the history of college football. But the Cookeville, Tenn., native had no idea how much he would influence the world of college football and the people he encountered.

After graduating from college, he spent time coaching at his high school alma mater before going into the service. But from the beginning of his football career, Carlen was surrounded by some of the great names of the game, even though they were too young to be recognized as such.

"Cookeville High School, my head coach's name was Eddie Watson and that's Mack Brown's (University of Texas coach) granddaddy," Carlen said. "I helped raise Mack Brown."

"I graduated from Georgia Tech, went into the Air Force and coached the Air Force team in Germany," Carlen said. "After the Air Force, I went to Georgia Tech and I was there for eight years. Went from the freshmen coach, to the JV coach, to defensive coach, to the head coordinator of defense. And I left there and went to West Virginia."

Carlen took the head coaching job at West Virginia in 1966 and remained coach of the Mountaineers through 1969. He compiled a 25-13-3 record, including a 10-1 season in 1969 that culminated in an appearance at the 1969 Peach Bowl in Atlanta — the same Peach Bowl that USC was in after winning the 1969 ACC championship. It was the Gamecocks' first bowl appearance since 1946, and it would be their last until 1975 when Carlen became their head coach.

Aside from the wins and losses, Carlen jump-started the career of arguably one of the greatest coaches in college football history.

"My offensive coordinator, assistant coach was Bobby Bowden. Have you ever heard of him?" Carlen said with a grin. "Bobby Bowden replaced me at West Virginia; I got him the job 'cause I told them, 'If you didn't give him the job, he's going with me to Texas Tech.' I had a lot of other good football coaches. My coaches do all the work. I'm serious, they do. I kind of oversee a little bit, but I kind of stay out of the way."

In 1971, Carlen accepted the position as coach of the Texas Tech Red Raiders. Five years in Lubbock, Texas, produced four winning seasons including an 11-1 campaign in 1973, which included a 28-19 win against Tennessee in the Gator Bowl. During

his five-year tenure, Carlen guided the Red Raiders to four bowl game appearances.

Carlen received the offer to come to Carolina in 1975 after the departure of Paul Dietzel.

"When I came here, I was athletic director and head (football) coach," Carlen said. "And that's the reason I came here for, because I felt like as athletic director I'm a businessman and I could make every sport be good. I don't call them minor sports. I call them non-revenue. There's only one revenue sport, and that's football."

What Carlen accomplished at USC very few coaches have been able to match. In seven years he went 45-36-1, the second-highest number of wins in USC history, second to only Rex Enright. He produced six campaigns that were winning seasons or even records. His one losing season came in 1977 when Carolina finished at 5-7. Along with back-to-back eight-win seasons, Carlen and the Gamecocks appeared in three bowls (Tangerine 1975, Hall of Fame 1979 and Gator Bowl 1980). The only other coach to guide USC to three bowls was the late Joe Morrison.

"People don't understand this — players win games, coaches help win games," Carlen said. "Coaches don't win games. A lot of kids I like best didn't get to play because they weren't the best player. If a kid's on the team and he's the best player, you ought to play him. Now if a sorry kid's on the team, he shouldn't be on the team."

While the win against Michigan at Ann Arbor in 1980 was a big win for the program, the fondest memory for Carolina fans happened during Carlen's first season when the Gamecocks blew out Clemson 56-20 in what was the largest margin of victory in the series history until 2003.

"It was a mistake," Carlen said. "I told Jeff (Grantz), 'Do not score again. Do not score again.' I told him I said, 'You hand the ball to the dive back.' Little kid that was a second-team receiver gave him the signal that said 'I'm open.' He was out there in one-on-one coverage. So Grantz steps and fakes and we go in standing up. Every time I make a speech with Grantz there, I say, 'You tell them who cost us that last touchdown.'"

Carlen's biggest success story came in 1980 when his offensive style produced USC's lone Heisman Trophy winner, George Rogers.

"I recruited him and coached him. I made sure he got the ball and ran the ball," Carlen said. "I tried to protect George from the press. George was one of those shy kids. He was unselfish to the point I almost had to put a baseball bat on (his)



Photo Courtesy of Mike Safran

Former Gamecock coach Jim Carlen was coach and athletics director at USC from 1975-81. Carlen led Carolina to three bowl game appearances, while producing only one losing season. Carlen coached 1980 Heisman winner George Rogers.

head."

Carlen's approach reached not only to his players, but to his biggest supporters and critics — the students.

"Back when I was here as AD, they'd say 'Coach, you're wanting to give the students more tickets.' I'd say yeah," Carlen said. "They'd say, 'Well they fuss at you all the time.' I said,

'Well they're immature. But they're students, this is their four years at this school. I don't care if alumni's give multimillion dollars. This is a student's four years.' And they'd say 'Coach, but they chew you out?' I'd say give every one of them a seat."

Much to the dismay of Carolina fans, Carlen's accomplishments on the

field went unnoticed by the media and administration. After years of investigation, it was found that then-president James Holderman was embezzling funds from the university, an issue now thought to have cost Carlen his job.

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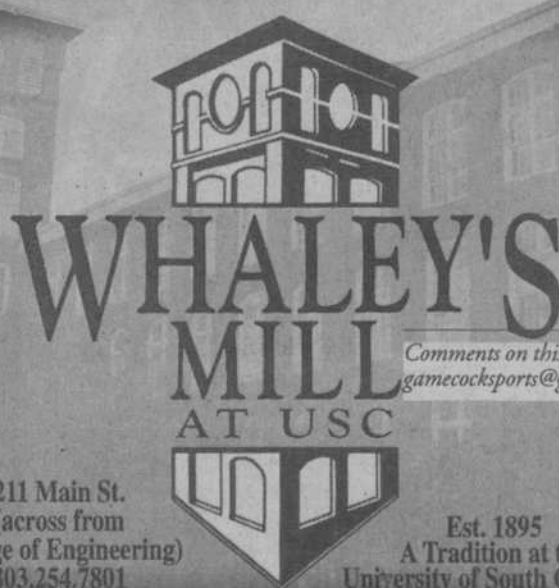
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