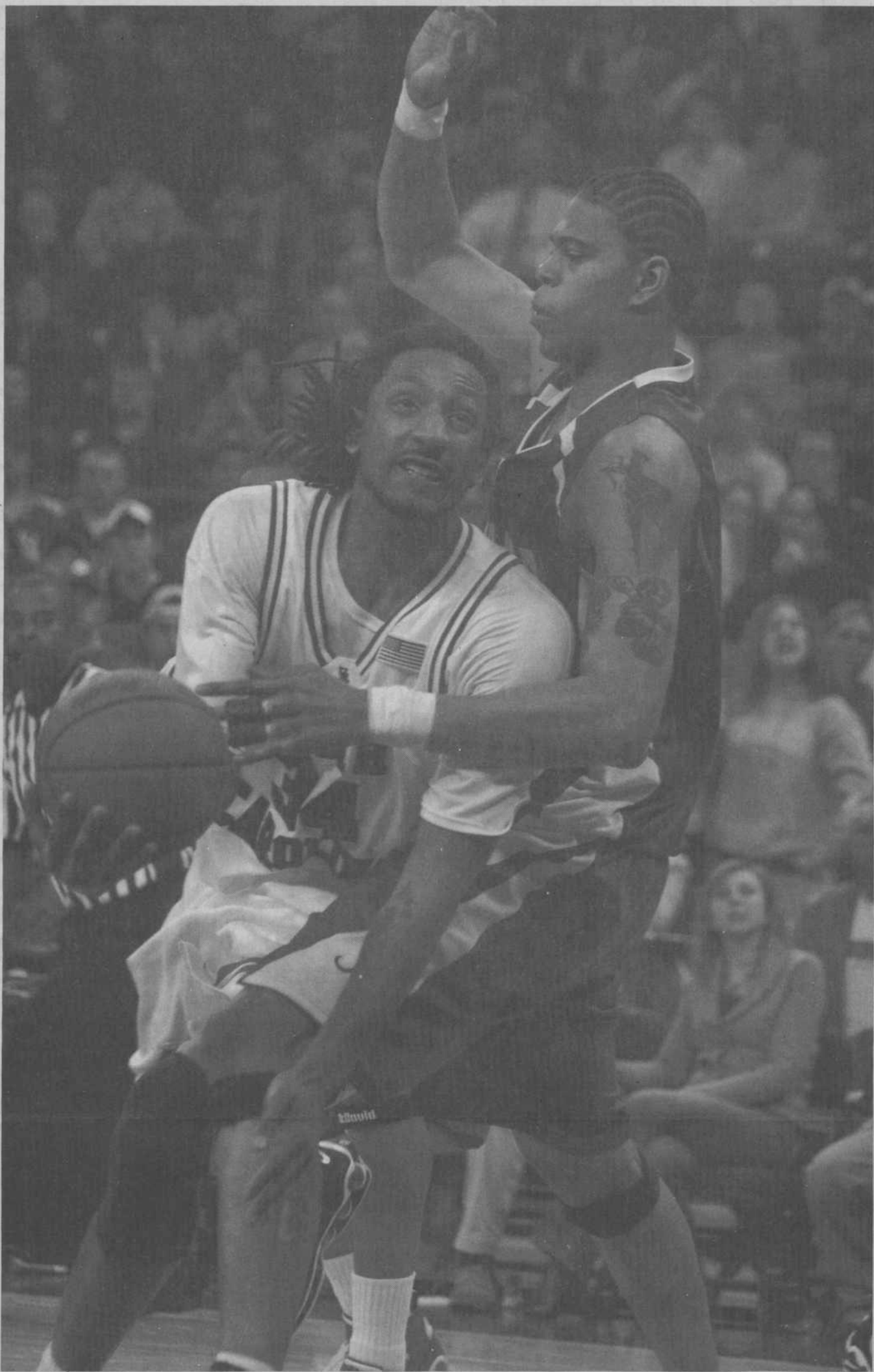


B A L K M A N I A



Katie Kirkland / THE GAMECOCK

Junior guard Renaldo Balkman drives past an Alabama defender Tuesday night at the Colonial Center.

Balkman enjoys record night in 67-56 win against Crimson Tide

USC coach Dave Odom. "I think we beat a very, very good basketball team. A team that I think's playing its best basketball of the year. To beat them, speaks volumes about the distance our team has come in the last month or so."

Balkman, who was still hampered with a knee injury, donned a heavily reinforced brace to support his leg. But even the injury could not slow down the forward as he started the game off strong, grabbing 11 rebounds in the first half and missing a shot at the buzzer of the first period that would have given him a double-double in the opening period.

"It was a special day for me," Balkman said. "I just wanted to have fun."

Odom said Balkman did everything a really good basketball player is supposed to do.

"The thing I like the best of all, is that he is developing into a quality defender," Odom said. "He did really well, more than held his own."

But it was a 3-pointer in the first half that really showed it was Balkman's night. The ball drew iron and bounced high up in the air before coming back down in the cylinder.

"He played like a lion tonight,

he played his heart out," said USC junior guard Tre' Kelley. "He gave us everything he had tonight. That's the definition of leaving it out on the floor."

ESPN's Brad Nestler told Balkman after the game, that his performance was the best one he'd seen all year, a compliment that made Balkman speechless.

"That mean's a lot to me for him to say that," Balkman said.

But it was a second half shot by Balkman that seemingly put the USC win in motion. Up by five with over 14 minutes left, Dwayne

BASKETBALL ● 13

Alex Riley
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

The only things Renaldo Balkman wasn't involved with on the floor of the Colonial Center Tuesday night was the halftime show and the cleanup following the game.

The junior from Tampa poured in a career-high 28 points while grabbing another career-high 16 rebounds to lead USC past Alabama 67-56, the third straight win for the Gamecocks.

"Tremendously, tremendously proud of our basketball team and the effort they gave tonight," said

Softball team plays host to Winthrop in home opener

Carly Reed
THE GAMECOCK

The Gamecocks softball team will play its home opener in a double-header against Winthrop today.

USC advanced to the championship round of the Worth Invitational last week, but were knocked off by Eastern Carolina University.

This will be Winthrop's first game of the season.

"The more games we play the more confident we feel," USC coach Joyce Compton said. "We play our best against every team... everyone is a threat."

Compton has led her team to 13 NCAA tournaments and has been awarded the SEC Coach of the Year twice.

Freshman pitcher Christie Hamilton made her successful debut in the recent Worth Invitational where she threw 12 strikeouts against Florida Atlantic University.

Even with four freshmen on the team, Compton has the same expectations for them as she does with the rest of the girls.

"Our goal is to take it one step at a time," Compton said. "We want to go to the (NCAA) tournament and the World Series. That's our goal year after year."

Hamilton started three games for the Gamecocks last week, coming away with a 2-1 record and a 1.02 ERA. Senior Melanie Henkes has given up only three hits in eight innings pitched this season.

The Gamecocks are led on the offensive side by shortstop Lisa Longo, who has started all five games and is batting .400.

The Winthrop Eagles were chosen first by the Big South Conference's preseason poll and are returning seven starters from last year. The double-header will begin at 3 p.m. on Wednesday.

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecocksports@gwm.sc.edu



Katie Kirkland / THE GAMECOCK

The Gamecocks' double-header with the Eagles begins at 3 p.m.

Reflections on our final week of intramural hoops madness

All jokes aside, most play-time basketball team names still stink

One week remains in the intramural basketball season, and I have yelled at the refs only once. Even then it was uncalled for.

I'm not sure what happened. Maybe the refs took to heart what I said earlier this year and got better. Or maybe I took to heart what they told me.

The refs are just students doing the best they can. I can forgive the bush-league calls, because they forgive some of the bush league stuff that is printed in this paper.

Remember the caption for the Tiger Burn photo a couple of years ago? I'm not going to repeat it but, although funny, it was way out of line.

Sometimes we at the paper make mistakes. Sometimes intramural refs make mistakes, too.

The only difference is that the refs get paid more per hour than we do here at the paper, so we can justify our screw-ups. OK, the last part of that last sentence was a lie.

I think I hit a nerve with a lot of people with the column I wrote last month bashing the refs. Luckily, to this point, I haven't been the target of any ridiculously biased calls, yelling matches or barbed-wire bats. Maybe they're saving all that for the playoffs, but I doubt it.

Refs aside, I haven't been too impressed with the originality of team names, at least in my league. Some of the other leagues have caught on to the naming process, though.

Some of the best names from all of the leagues: Cocky Jockeys (apparently the women's equestrian team), Pelvic Splanchnics (last place in the CoRec league, but who cares with a name like that?), and the IMBaciles (get it?). Special mention goes to Death By Roundhouse, but they lose points because someone else had Chuck Norris'.

The Emerging Maple Syrup Conglomerate is 3-0 and awaiting a final battle with the Blue Devils, who hold one of the most unoriginal team names in the history of intramural sports.

I can't predict a run to the championship game like the one the Short Kids made last year, because some games we shoot like all-stars and the next we shoot like Dick Cheney.

Real quick, and I apologize for not giving the same treatment to other intramural sports, but I'll run through the top-5 teams from each basketball league.

Gold League AKA Former high school stars who couldn't quite cut it at the next level:

1. Hotshots 4-0
2. Clockwork 3-0

PASTENAU ● 13



STEPHEN PASTENAU
Third-year print journalism student