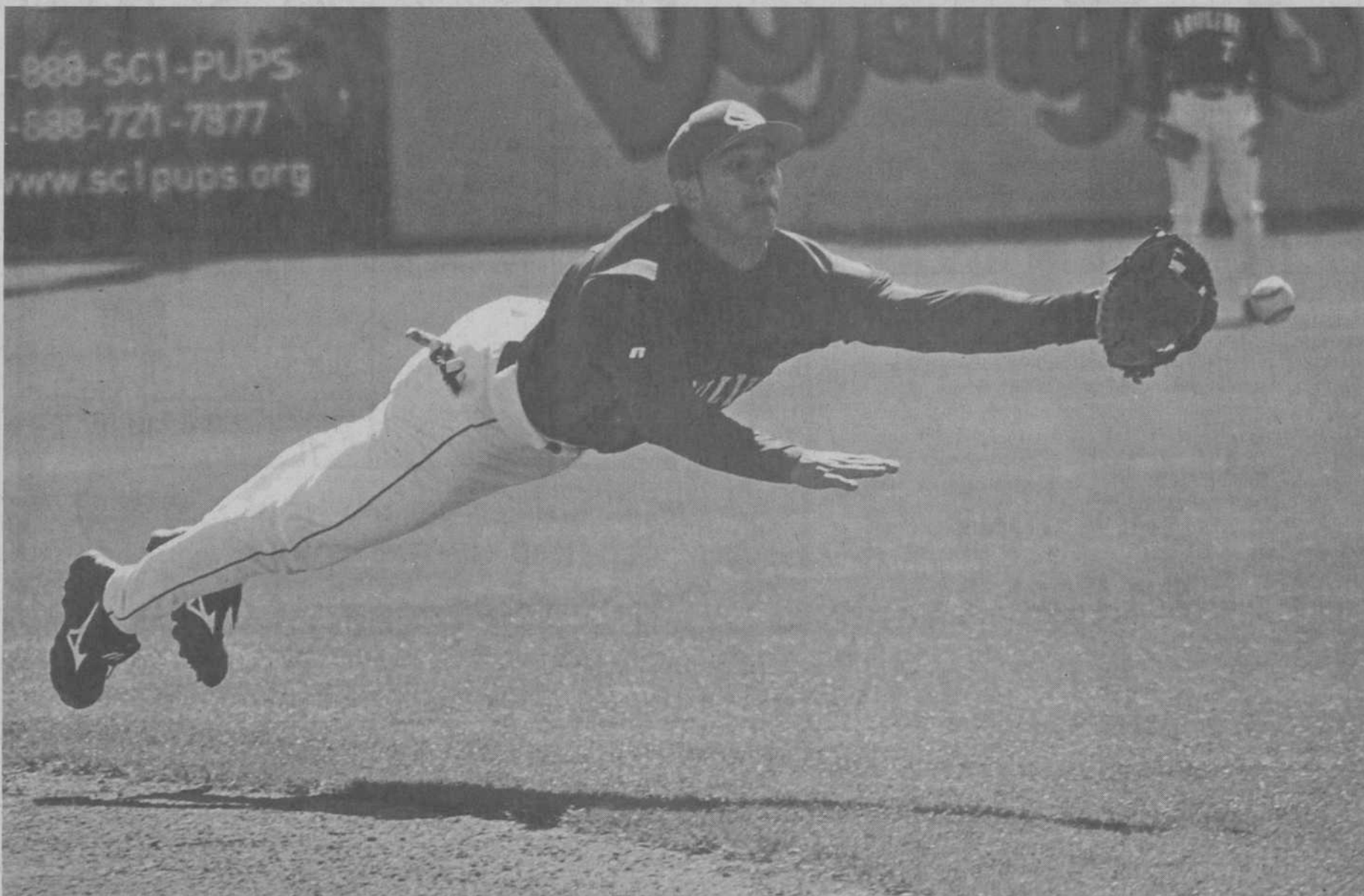


USC prepares for rivalry weekend



Juan Blas / THE GAMECOCK

Second baseman Chris Brown attempts to make a catch during a game against Duquesne last weekend. USC swept the weekend series 3-0.

Gamecocks look to young talent to defeat No. 1 Clemson

Brian Davis
THE GAMECOCK

One of college baseball's most competitive rivalries will resume this weekend when a young, No. 9 USC team combats the No. 1 Clemson Tigers (5-1) in one game at each team's home field.

Clemson's weekend starters will likely be junior Jason Berken (2-0) and junior right-hander Stephen Faris (1-0).

Berken has given up zero runs in nine innings and has struck out 12 batters in his outings. Despite USC's improved hitting performance last weekend, coach Ray Tanner explained that lights-out pitchers will wow hitters.

"When you're facing a guy like Jason Berken, you have to be realistic," said Tanner, whose weekend starters will be junior lefthander Arik Hempy and

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Women's hoops lose in first round

Auburn's Bonner helps USC exit SEC Tournament

The Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — In case USC had any notions of coming back from a 27-21 deficit at the half Thursday, Auburn's DeWanna Bonner scored seven points during a nine-point run to open the period and keep the Gamecocks from challenging.

Bonner, a freshman, scored 25 points for the game as 10th-seed Auburn (14-14) posted a 64-48 victory over seventh-seed USC (17-11) in the first round of the Southeastern Conference Tournament.

"I think this team has played very hungry," Auburn coach Nell Fortner said. "I'm really proud of their focus."

Auburn used its height advantage to shut down the Gamecocks.

Fortner noted that her post players stand 6-foot-4, 6-5 and 6-7.

"That's pretty hard to

score on," she said.

Auburn will face the tournament's No. 2 seed in No. 5 Tennessee at 2:30 p.m. Central Time on Friday.

Auburn opened the game with a 13-0 run that kept the Gamecocks without a point until Melanie Johnson hit a layup with 13:40 remaining in the first half. USC never led in the game.

Gamecocks coach Susan Walvius said she hopes the NCAA Tournament selection committee can overlook Thursday's performance.

"You're going to have days when you don't have a great game," Walvius said.

"We've got a great basketball team and I hope the NCAA will take a look at that."

Johnson kept USC in the game with 12 first-half points, but the Gamecocks never threatened because shots simply would not fall.

The Gamecocks finished 21-72 from the field, 29.2 percent.

"I was concerned about this game because I know how strong Auburn is



Danny Johnston / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Auburn's Sherell Hobbs goes up under USC's Ilona Burgrova during the second half of the SEC Tournament first-round basketball game Thursday in North Little Rock, Ark.

defensively," Walvius said. But she was still vexed by the poor shooting, even though Auburn's height made it tough to shoot in the paint. USC did pull down 19 offensive rebounds.

"You'd think we'd walk out with a W," Walvius said.

Bonner, a first-team

member of the SEC's All-Freshman team, led all scorers with 25 points and pulled down 13 rebounds.

KeKe Carrier, Nitasha Brown and Whitney Boddie finished with 10 points apiece.

Johnson led USC with 14 points, but she scored only 2 points in the second half.

Spring break offers chance for perfect sports getaway

Forget beach — catch jaw-dropping events around entire country

You're standing there wondering what to do with yourself during spring break. You love sports, and more importantly, you relish the thought of the wide-open highway, the great American road trip and freedom. It takes a little research, an insane amount of commitment (not to mention the fact that you must have a few friends to take along) and a large sum of money. But the great sports spring break extravaganza is indeed possible, if only theoretically. The following is your itinerary for an action-packed week.

Saturday March 4, 2006. Hit the road. A quick shot up Interstate 77, and then to I-85, takes you to the heart of Tobacco Road country — Durham, N.C. This should take no more than three-and-a-half hours. Saturday marks the regular season finale and blockbuster ACC showdown between Duke and North Carolina, the best rivalry in college basketball.

Finding tickets to Cameron Indoor may be difficult, but the experience of watching a game in the old gym, a cathedral of college hoops, is something that should be on everyone's list to do before they die. When the game is over, and the crowd is

filing out of Cameron Indoor, there is no time to waste.

Jump in the car, make your way to I-40, merge onto I-95 south, and head on down to Miami. An expert driver should be able to pull this off in less than 12 hours. Sunday is the final round of the Ford Championship at Doral on the PGA Tour.

The Doral tournament has long been known as one of the tour's most exciting non-major events each year. Last year, golf fans were treated to a Sunday pairing of Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson, with Tiger Woods triumphing in the end. The golf course at Doral is known as "The Blue Monster," and for good reason. Watching the sport's greatest golfers humbled by a golf course that has the ability to make them seem like your average weekend hacker, is very entertaining. Miami is a great town, so there is no sense in passing up the opportunity to spend the night and pay a visit to South Beach.

The next day you hit the road for I-77 north; a little more than four hours later you arrive in Tampa, Florida. Baseball's spring training is underway, and what better team to watch than the greatest sports dynasty of all time — the Yankees. The Yankees play the Blue Jays on Tuesday in Tampa. The Yankees' owner, George Steinbrenner, has all but guaranteed a World Series title this year.

The next destination for the spring break road trip is Atlanta,

Major League players step up to plate for World Baseball Classic

Ronald Blum
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TAMPA, Fla. — Asked if he thought Bernie Williams would try to take him out at second base during the World Baseball Classic, Derek Jeter looked at his teammate in a corner of the Yankees' clubhouse.

"Better get down, buddy!" Jeter yelled playfully Wednesday, a day before they turn in

their pinstripes and head to their national teams.

Jeter will put on the red, white and blue for the U.S. team and Williams will play for Puerto Rico. They'll be among 150 or so major leaguers suiting up in the 16-nation tournament, which begins Thursday night U.S. time in Tokyo, when South Korea plays Taiwan and Japan meets China.

Williams doesn't know whether he'd barrel into Jeter in the late innings.

"I'll have to use a lot of caution," Williams said. "Hopefully, the situation will not come."

It's hard to forecast whether players, still getting back into baseball shape, will treat these like spring training games, postseason pressure-cookers or something in between. Yet it sure will be neat

to see Roger Clemens pitching for the United States, Ichiro Suzuki hitting for Japan and David Ortiz slugging for the Dominican Republic.

The United States, the Dominicans and the Puerto Ricans figure to be among the top teams in the tournament along with Japan, Venezuela and Cuba, the defending Olympic

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