

USC knocks off Hilltoppers to advance in NIT

After several close calls in SEC tournament, team wins handily against Western Kentucky

Alex Riley
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

After a season that featured white-knuckle, down-to-the-wire basketball, USC finally got an easy win when it mattered. The Gamecocks knocked off Western Kentucky in the opening round of the National Invitational Tournament, 74-55.

"All I want to do is get this program to the level it deserves to be at," USC coach Dave Odom said. "We're not there yet. But we're close. We just got to keep going, keep pushing."

The Hilltoppers (23-8) came in without their second-leading scorer in Courtney Lee, who

averaged more than 17 ppg. The lack of scoring threw the team's offense off, and the Gamecocks cashed in.

USC forced 23 turnovers, including 17 steals, both season highs. The Gamecocks also picked up eight blocks, six of which were credited to Brandon Wallace.

"They were able to play well defensively, and I was very proud of that," Odom said. "We have plenty of time to get back now. We need some rest."

Junior guard Tre' Kelley said his team normally executes on defense. "We got it going in the second half, we got up on those guys, forced a lot of turnovers into fast break points," he said.

While USC's defense played well with minimal time to recover from the Southeastern Conference Tournament, the offense that had been lacking in the Florida game also came to play against WKU. Four Gamecocks scored in double-digits, including a surprise performance from Antoine Tisby, who finished with 16 points and seven rebounds.

"We had hoped that (Tisby) would give a consistent performance like that every night, but we hadn't been able to find that," Odom said. "Maybe now he's in the twilight of his senior year, maybe now he'll lead us to the championship."

The Hilltoppers never led in

the game, but they managed to close the gap to six points at the 7:47 mark. After that, a 16-4 USC run snubbed any chance of a comeback.

Tarence Kinsey and Kelley's veteran leadership provided the primary cog for that run. Kinsey, who finished with a game-high 23 points, knocked down five 3-pointers, along with Kelley's 13 points and six assists.

"They played with a passion out there," Kelley said. "They want to keep playing and get back to New York and win that thing at Madison Square Garden."

Kelley, who played no less than

NIT ● 9



Katie Kirkland / THE GAMECOCK
USC guard Tarence Kinsey makes a no-look pass in Wednesday's victory over Western Kentucky.

USA thanking lucky stars after South Korea tops Japan with rally

Despite early controversy, World Baseball Classic is good change from Roid Rage

In the annals of U.S. international sports competition, this one will be remembered for a very long time.

Jong Beom hit a two-run double in the eighth inning to put South Korea ahead of Japan in a quarterfinal World Baseball Classic game.



TODD GREEN
Graduate student

Maybe you're asking yourself why that moment would be so important to the U.S. team. For the U.S., who lost to the South Korean squad, a South Korean victory against Japan meant that the possibility of reaching the semifinal round of the tournament remains open.

Actually, had Japan won the game and scored seven runs, the U.S. team would still have been able to advance. If Japan had won, but scored less than seven runs, the U.S. would have been eliminated. And this would all be a moot point unless the U.S. beats Mexico in its final second-round game.

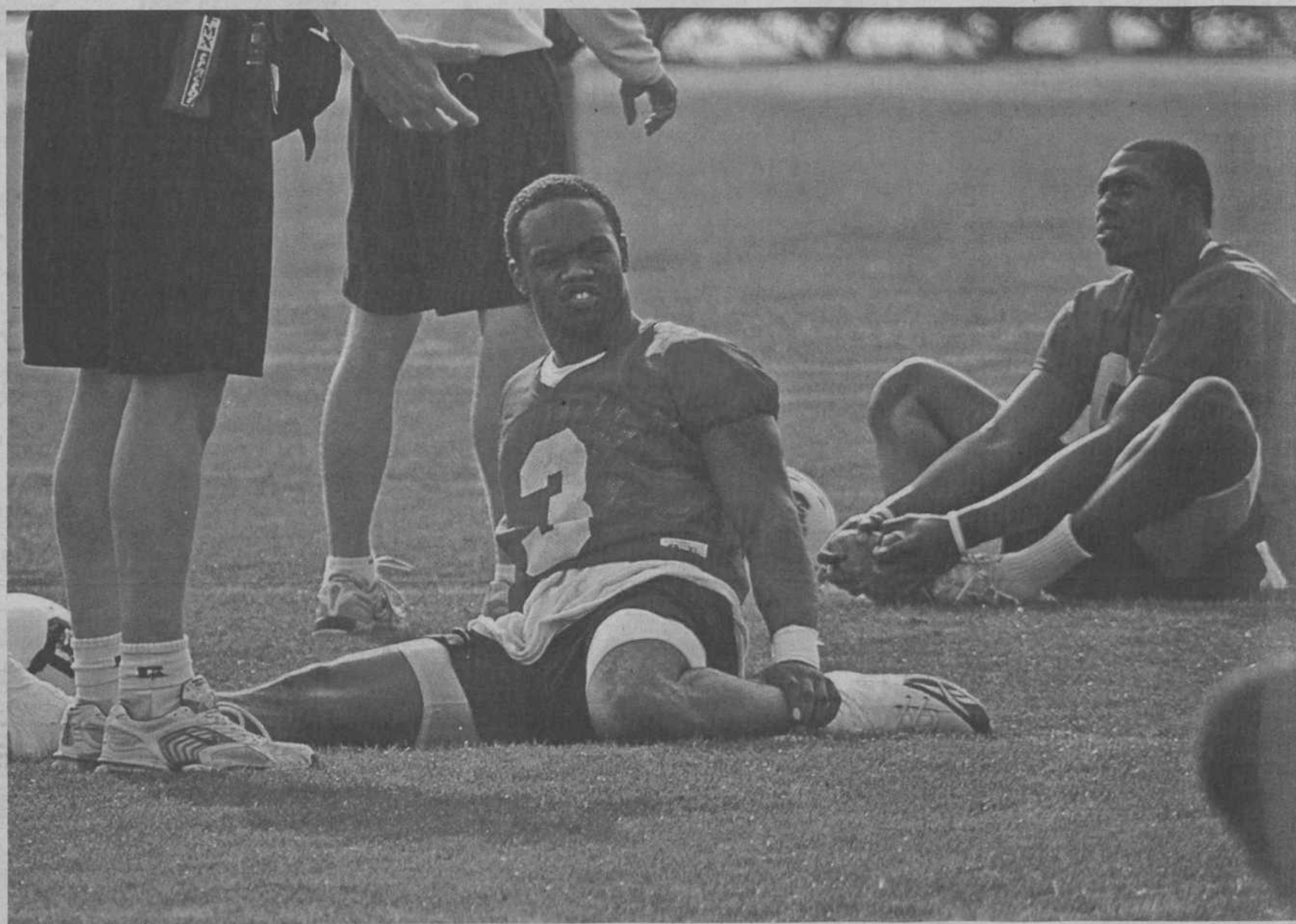
The tiebreaker system for the World Baseball Classic is enough to make a Harvard mathematician feel dazed and confused. There are other strange rules for the competition as well.

Pitchers have to leave the game after reaching a certain amount of pitches, with the limit changing each round. Games can also end early if a team is ahead by a certain amount of runs, and games can even end in a tie if neither team can pull ahead after a certain amount of innings.

The inaugural World Baseball Classic has been marred by a lot of controversy. The lead-up to the tournament had all sorts of Major League Baseball stars declaring whether or not they would play, and in some cases having to decide which country to play for. Some players agreed to play and then came down with mysterious toe injuries that forced them to pull out.

The tournament was MLB commissioner Bud Selig's idea. It was an effort to increase passion about the sport around the globe, and presumably to increase the amount of money countries would pay to broadcast MLB games in the future. This didn't stop several MLB managers and owners from grumbling at the prospect of losing some of their top stars

GREEN ● 9



Juan Blas / THE GAMECOCK

USC running back Cory Boyd warms up prior to practice Wednesday. Boyd will return to the lineup in 2006 after missing all of 2005 due to an unspecified athletics department rules violation. USC coach Steve Spurrier said Boyd will be used in the backfield and as a slot receiver.

Boyd's back on field in '06

Gamecocks running back returns to action after missing all of 2005 season

Aaron Salter
THE GAMECOCK

USC began its spring practice this week without a lot of the notable players who played the 2005 season.

Gone are seniors like Lance Laury, Jabari Levey and Josh Brown. Syvelle Newton remains out as he tries to recover from the serious Achilles injury he suffered against Vanderbilt last

fall. Looking over the defensive backfield, there is no Ko Simpson or Johnathan Joseph; the Gamecocks lost both players to the NFL draft.

Most of the hype this week hasn't been about the Gamecocks recent personnel losses, however. It's been about the return of running back Cory Boyd.

Boyd, a rising junior, was kept out of action for the 2005 season for unspecified reasons by head

coach Steve Spurrier.

In Boyd's absence, the Gamecocks relied heavily on freshmen running backs Mike Davis and Bobby Wallace, with senior Daccus Turman getting most of the teams carries in short-yardage situations.

The Gamecocks struggled to a second-to-last finish in rushing yardage in the SEC, beating out only Mississippi in that category, and finished 108th out of 117

Division I-A NCAA schools.

Spurrier says Boyd's return could bring new life to the team's running game.

"Cory Boyd and Mike Davis are running very well," he said. "Mike looks a lot faster than he was last year and Cory's in excellent shape. Those two guys are really running well right now, and Bobby Wallace looks quicker

BOYD ● 9

Baseball throttles Bulldogs, prepares for SEC schedule

Rob Carl
THE GAMECOCK

Another errorless game and 12 hits against the Yale Bulldogs propelled the Gamecocks to an 8-2 victory to cap off their non-conference schedule before Southeastern Conference play begins this weekend.

The No. 9 Gamecocks scored five runs in the first inning of Wednesday night's contest and only allowed the Bulldogs to score

their two runs on solo homers. Senior third baseman Neil Giesler led the team with three hits, and freshman first baseman Justin Smoak led with three RBIs, including a two-run homer in the sixth inning.

"It was a change-up on the inside half, and I hit it the right way fortunately," Smoak said.

Smoak nearly belted his fourth homer of the season from the other side of the plate in the bottom of the eighth inning, but

he flied out to the left-field wall.

On the mound, Will Atwood helped improve South Carolina's record to 15-2 by only allowing three hits in five innings. Atwood's supporting cast in the field played their eighth error-free game this season and dropped Yale to 5-6.

The team's defensive adeptness and consistent batting in recent games has satisfied coach Ray Tanner going into SEC play against Auburn on Friday at 8 p.m. to begin a three-game

series.

"I can't complain with our stance right now," Tanner said.

One of Tanner's concerns, however, is that the team, which has four or five first-year players often starting, has only played one road game.

"The unfamiliarity in being on the road is a concern," Tanner said. "We're headed into a new territory now and have to take it

BASEBALL ● 9