

**NIT ● CONTINUED FROM 8**

Allen started in place of Muhammad and White. Moore, whose chronic back problems forced him to quit the team for a while last year, received lower back massages from a trainer during timeouts late in the game.

The dismissals of White and Muhammad left Cincinnati with just nine players in uniform. That included Brandon Miller, a preseason walk-on, and Connor Barwin, a freshman tight end on the school's football team who volunteered to help two months ago when the Bearcats didn't have enough healthy players to scrimmage.

The Bearcats led 37-33 in the second half when Kelley hit a short jumper

and stole a pass under the Cincinnati basket and drove the length of the court for another hoop. He followed that with a 3-pointer and then scored on a putback after another turnover.

Cincinnati tied it three times after that, the last time at 59 with 2:22 to go on a basket by Hicks. But that was the last touch for Hicks.

A layup by Kelley with 48 seconds left put USC ahead for good.

It was finally the end of the road for Cincinnati, which lost its coach shortly before the start of the season and was plagued by injuries.

The ruling on White and Muhammad was announced less than two hours before the game and shortly before a televised news conference in which former Bearcats

coach Bob Huggins was introduced as Kansas State's new coach.

Huggins' former assistant, Andy Kennedy, served as interim coach this season and is a candidate for the permanent job. He's also believed to be a finalist in Mississippi's coaching search. Cincinnati officials last week hired a consultant to help narrow their search.

Cincinnati fans chanted their support for Kennedy and gave him three standing ovations — when he came onto the court before the start of each half, and when two fans who participated in a free-throw shooting contest during a timeout held up signs saying, "Hire Andy."

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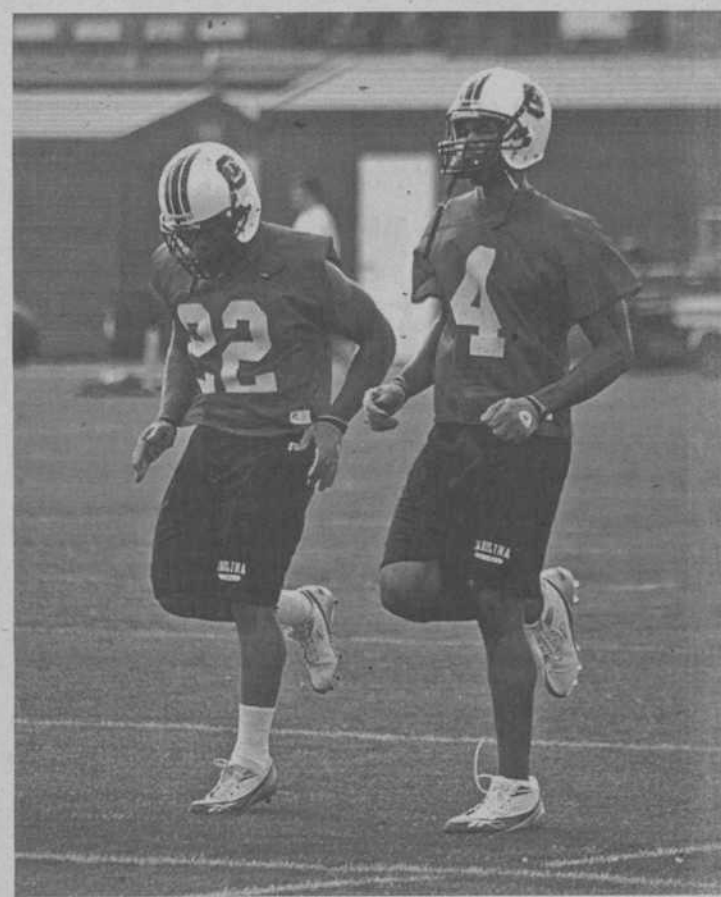
**RECEIVERS ● CONTINUED FROM 8**

offensive side of the ball, and a deep pass to Brown. Beecher was able to sustain a long drive downfield thanks to a couple of long passes and hard running from tailback Bobby Wallace. Fellow redshirt freshman quarterback Cade Thompson also looked sharp by recognizing a few blitz packages quickly and hitting Wallace as his safety valve. Thompson did, however, throw the only interception of the scrimmage, to cornerback Fred Bennett.

"I think Cade and Tommy are coming along real well," Rice said. "They're doing a decent job throwing the ball. They just got to learn to read coverages a little more, but I think they'll be fine, also."

In addition to an improved running game from Wallace, Cory Boyd and last season's starter, Mike Davis, it will be imperative for another wide receiver to take pressure off of Rice if the Gamecocks hope to contend for the Southeastern Conference title next season. Rice is already expecting plenty of double- and triple-team coverages.

"I have no doubt that (the receivers) will be able to do it. McKinley, Murdock, (tight end) Jared Cook and



Juan Blas / THE GAMECOCK

**USC wide receiver Sidney Rice jogs with running back Bobby Wallace during spring practice March 12.**

also Noah Whiteside are going to do a decent job on the other side of the ball, whichever side they're on," Rice said. "Also having Cory Boyd back in the backfield is going to be a big plus."

USC will scrimmage Saturday at 10:30 a.m. at Williams-Brice Stadium. USC coach Steve Spurrier

said the practice is "open to the public, anybody that wants to come out, we'd appreciate it."

"We'd like to have some people in the stands when our guys are playing," Spurrier said. "Everybody come out Saturday."

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**GREEN ● CONTINUED FROM 8**

monster 12, a tournament-record.

The Island Green is stressful enough, but the 18th hole provides no reprieve. The final hole is a 447-yard dogleg-left par four. There is a massive body of water on the left side of the hole that starts at the tee box and continues all the way to the green.

The tee shot is difficult enough, because, to have a decent approach shot, a player must hit the ball left enough to keep it in the fairway, but too far left,

and the ball is in the water. The water is again in play for the approach shot to the green.

These two final holes guarantee a dramatic finish. You can almost see the pressure and tension in the contenders, on the final day, as they put the ball down on the tee. It is the easiest test to show which one will have the mental fortitude to dial it in, and to reach deep down for that extra push it takes to finish on top.

The Players Championship is great because it is the most

egalitarian of all the big tournaments. The course does not favor the long-ball hitters or any player that may have a certain strength in one area of his game that can overshadow a certain weakness.

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**BASEBALL ● CONTINUED FROM 8**

would see of the lead. As quick as Furman's offense had been, USC came back to tie the game. After an error and some smart batting, the Gamecocks produced their first run off of a sacrifice fly by Giesler; it was his first of two RBI for the game.

In the top of the second inning it looked as though Honeycutt might not be cut out to take on the Paladins. He walked the first batter, junior infielder Joe Daysh. After Daysh stole second, a fielder's choice moved him to third. Tanner decided it was time to have a word with his young pitcher.

"I thought he was trying to be too perfect," Tanner said. "I told him that now we needed to be competitive because the bullpen was getting ready to warm up. And you know, he responded."

After that meeting, Honeycutt's pitching picked up, and the Gamecock defense responded to his lead. Honeycutt retired the next two batters, and in the third he allowed one hit and walked one batter before retiring three batters in a row, striking out two of them and getting the other to line out to senior second baseman Chris Brown. Honeycutt finished with five strikeouts in six innings pitched and earned the win.

As Honeycutt responded to Tanner's words on the defensive end, in the bottom of the second inning the offense gave him some room to breathe. After a single, Kline stepped up to the plate and knocked the ball deep to right field for a two-run homerun.

The rest of the game was just short of flawless for USC. Honeycutt stayed on top of the Paladins offense,

and Furman did not score another run in the game until he was taken out in the top of the seventh.

USC had hot bats to match Honeycutt's arm and by the sixth inning had put together a lead that was insurmountable for the Furman offense. On top of Giesler's two RBIs, Brown added two runs himself and two RBIs. Kline's early homerun gave him two RBIs, and he added two runs as well.

"We're seeing the ball good," Giesler said. "So, we just keep getting hits."

That was a modest assessment of the Gamecocks' bats ended up with. The defense stayed solid for the entire game, and Furman contributed to its own demise with six errors.

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**GATORS ● CONTINUED FROM 8**

the Gamecocks have some reason to be confident this weekend. USC has won its last four home series against Florida. The Gamecocks are the SEC's top fielding team, and third baseman Neil Giesler leads the SEC in batting average (.480) and hits (36).

To have success against Florida, Tanner believes USC simply needs to continue to build on the progress the team has made so far.

"We're going to focus on what we do best," he said. "We have to continue

to pitch well and hope our offense stays consistent. We've turned the corner a bit offensively, and that's a big key for us."

The Gamecocks are seventh in the SEC in batting average (.304), but they are in the top half of most other offensive categories. USC is also one of the most-disciplined teams at the plate, striking out a league-low 83 times.

Recently, USC has begun to heat up at the plate. During the past ten games, the team is averaging more than nine runs per game. During this span, the Gamecocks are 9-1.

The Florida series will begin Friday at 7 p.m. and will match junior southpaw Arik Hempy (1-1, 3.27) against Florida right-hander Bryan Ball (4-2, 3.72). Saturday's 4 p.m. game appears to have the makings of a pitcher's duel with freshman sensation Mike Cisco (2-0, 1.29) squaring off against UF right-hander Augenstein (5-1). The 2 p.m. Sunday game will feature junior lefty Forrest Beverly (4-1, 4.15) against a currently undetermined pitcher from the Gators.

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