Fall 2017

The Daily Gamecock, 2017 Football Preview

University of South Carolina, Office of Student Media

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For students at the University of South Carolina, a new school year always brings the thrill of a new football season.

With head coach Will Muschamp and quarterback Jake Bentley settling in for their second seasons, students at USC have good reason to be excited for the upcoming season.

Behind the leadership of these two and others, the Gamecocks earned a bid to the Birmingham Bowl last season, finishing 6-7 overall and fifth in the SEC East. This season, the expectations are even higher with the team being selected to finish fourth in the SEC East in the preseason poll at SEC Media Days. The excitement of USC students has rubbed off on Muschamp, who is impressed with the team’s culture and is seeing more buy-in from players. Offensively, the team returns a group of talented veterans, including wide receiver Deebo Samuel and tight end Hayden Hurst, who were both named to the preseason first-team All-SEC by Athlon.

Hurst, a vocal leader, became the first permanent sophomore team captain at USC and set the school’s single-season record for catches by a tight end with 48. Meanwhile, Samuel is coming off a big performance in the Birmingham Bowl, tying USC’s single-game record with 14 receptions for 190 yards against USF.

Defensively, Muschamp and his assistants worked this offseason to earn the commitments of several highly-touted recruits who may see playing time as freshmen, including Jamyest Williams, Sherrod Greene and Aaron Sterling. Linebacker Skai Moore will make his return from injury and Bryson Allen-Williams enters his senior season, providing leadership to these younger players.

As for the schedule, USC will start the season with a tough matchup against N.C. State at the Belk College Kickoff in Charlotte. From there, the Gamecocks are presented with a slew of tough road matchups, including Texas A&M on Sept. 30 and Georgia on Nov. 4. The Gamecocks’ lone FCS opponent is Wofford, which they will face for the first time in five years on Nov. 18.

With the growing excitement for this season, The Daily Gamecock’s sports staff is making an effort to provide more useful information USC students can use while attending games. Enter our “For the students” section, beginning on page 46. The section includes helpful tips on earning loyalty points for tickets, details on what to bring to Williams-Brice Stadium and changes to the most popular tailgating lots at USC.

Whether you’re a senior preparing for your last season cheering in the student section or a freshman gearing up for your first football game, I hope this preview serves you well.

— Carson Mason, Sports Editor
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Bentley ready to lead and learn in second season as starting quarterback

South Carolina quarterback Jake Bentley made the most of an abbreviated season as a freshman last year.

This year, Bentley has the opportunity to play his first full season as the starting quarterback, and Gamecock fans and head coach Will Muschamp are looking forward to it.

“I think he had a really good offseason program before we started spring ball,” Muschamp said. “Then you see the progression in spring, the more that Coach Roper and our offensive staff continued to give him, the better and better he continued to perform and improve.”

According to Muschamp, Bentley is constantly watching tape and hanging out with the offensive line, defensive line and secondary in effort to acclimate himself with the whole squad.

“He understands what it takes to be the quarterback,” Muschamp said. “Those are the things I see, and obviously, he has all the intangible qualities to handle the situation. I am looking forward to seeing him play this year.”

“I’m with Cory Helms and Alan [Knott] all the time,” Bentley added. “Deebo [Samuel] and Hayden [Hurst], I hang out with them a lot. I think we’ve really gotten closer together as a unit and hopefully, it pays off on the field.”

Bentley will have more freedom to call his own plays this season, which Muschamp said will give the 19-year-old a good amount of latitude at the line of scrimmage based on if the team runs a pass, run or pass with a run built in.

“That’s what you’ll see – more of that with us at the line of scrimmage as opposed to tempo,” Muschamp said. “Obviously, we still want to be able to dictate the tempo of the game. To have that luxury at the quarterback position certainly helps, but also the experience around him. The offensive line experience coming back, the skill position experience coming back helps as well.”

For Bentley the biggest thing is executing plays, but he added, “I see a look or I see something that I think could work, I have that freedom. It’s kind of one of those things when it works, it’s good. When it doesn’t work, I get some criticism for that. Overall, I do have some freedom, too.”

Last season, Bentley started the last seven games of the season, including the Birmingham Bowl, going 125-for-190 for 1,420 yards with nine touchdowns. In preparation for the upcoming year, the Opelika, Alabama, native broke down all of his film from last season with Matt Simms.

“We really analyzed every game from last year that I played in and really broke it down, play by play,” Bentley said. “We really focused on what I did good, what I did bad. Tried to learn from it and tried to use what I’ve learned during fall camp.”

Bentley threw just four interceptions in 2016, and his 65.8 percent completion percentage ranks fourth in USC history for a single season, according to GamecocksOnline. With a slew of veteran weapons returning, including NFL hopefuls wide receiver Deebo Samuel and tight end Hayden Hurst, he’s looking to build on that in 2017.

“They all want it,” Bentley said. “I guess my thing is just throw it to the open guy. If they can get open at practice, I know they can get open in the game. That’s the big thing. There are a lot of great receivers.”
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SKAI’S THE LIMIT
STAR LINEBACKER READY TO MAKE UP FOR LOST 2016 SEASON

Carson Mason
@CARSONANNMASON

The news of linebacker Skai Moore’s injury was tough for USC fans to swallow last season. But Gamecocks can exhale this season now that Moore is back and better than ever, according to head coach Will Muschamp.

“I think he had a great spring,” Muschamp said. “He probably feels like he’s been in the best shape he’s been in. He’s up to 225 pounds. He’s moving extremely well. I think I’m expecting him to play extremely well.”

Moore was the Gamecocks’ leading tackler for three straight seasons before missing the entire 2016 season with a herniated disc in his neck that required surgery. Prior to his injury, Moore was named to Athlon’s preseason second-team All-SEC and was a second-team All-SEC selection by the Associated Press and SEC coaches.

He finished his junior year campaign with 111 total tackles, ranking third in the SEC with 9.2 tackles per game, according to GamecocksOnline. Not to mention, he became the first USC player to reach 100 tackles in one season since 2006, recording double figures in six games in 2015.

At 6-foot-2 and 225 pounds, Moore is known for his speed and will remain at the weak-side position this season. Senior Bryson Allen-Williams and sophomore T.J. Brunson will start beside him.

“It’s a lot of talent, I mean, between us three,” Moore said. “We’re going to run around and hit. Good amount of experience. I think we have a lot of talent. It’s going to be a special year, definitely, at linebacker for us.”

Muschamp hopes the pair of seniors — Moore, who was a team captain his junior year, and Allen-Williams, who is known for his vocal leadership — can help guide the five freshman linebackers who joined the squad this season, including Sherrod Greene, Davonne Bowen, Cole Davis, Alex DeLoach and Sean McGonigal.

“They are two very well-respected guys within the locker room,” Muschamp said. “They are two experienced players and productive players as well. In order to be a leader, you got to be a productive guy. You can’t be a guy running your mouth all the time but not make any plays. Those guys do lead by example by how they prepare, how they practice and how they go about their business, but they are very productive.”

Moore is itching to take his first in-game snap in more than a year during the Gamecocks’ season opener against NC State at Bank of America Stadium. He’s fared well in the Queen City before, snagging two interceptions in the season opener against North Carolina there in 2015. His interception of quarterback Marquise Williams’ pass on a fourth and goal from the 8-yard line helped secure USC’s 17-13 win.

“I was just watching your friends, your teammates running around there doing what they love. I love the game, so [sitting out] was difficult,” Moore said. “I tried my best just to motivate them and get them through, but I’m happy to be back, for sure.”

Daniel Hou / THE DAILY GAMECOCK
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Senior linebacker Bryson Allen-Williams, known as a vocal leader on the Gamecocks roster, looks to implement his leadership abilities in Will Muschamp’s second season at the helm in Columbia.

With the current roster holding only 13 seniors, Allen-Williams will lead the pack among what is expected to be a young, talented squad this fall. In addition to Allen-Williams, key returners on the team include quarterback Jake Bentley, running back Rico Dowdle and tight end Hayden Hurst.

With the return of linebacker Skai Moore from an injury that left him redshirted in the 2016 season, Muschamp said Moore’s and Allen-Williams’ abilities on the field will help mold to the roster as a whole.

“Skai and Bryson Allen are two guys that have played a lot of football,” Muschamp said. “They are two very well-respected guys within the locker room. That means a lot. They are two experienced players and productive players as well ... Those guys do lead by example by how they prepare, how they practice and how they go about their business, but they are very productive.”

Allen-Williams noted that senior leadership will be a key component for success this season in addition to having a steady buy-in from players into Muschamp’s system.

“Not having flux between year-to-year, that’s actually helping us out a lot,” Allen-Williams said. “We have an established culture, we have a direction that we’re trying to go in, and people aren’t going to differ from that. We have senior leadership, guys who are stepping up to take charge of the team, we’re running the team. We want it to be a big family ... [and we want to] lay down the foundation for the program moving forward.”

Allen-Williams played in every game in 2016, ranking second on the team with 75 tackles, including 46 solo tackles, and 8.5 tackles for loss, according to GamecocksOnline. He showed his defensive versatility towards the end of last season, picking off passes against Clemson in the regular season finale and South Florida in the Birmingham Bowl.

During the offseason, Allen-Williams spent his summer in Columbia, completing an internship with ABC Columbia. His experiences as part of the Beyond Sports program helped him gain a grasp of real-world experiences outside of the gridiron. Those experiences prepared him for gaining new experiences in his final season as a Gamecock, Allen-Williams said.

“The stuff that helps us in football tends to translate in the real world, especially when you’re working,” Allen-Williams said. “Just hard work on the football field translates to hard work in the workplace. That’s the biggest thing for me. Knowing that you could always learn something new, you could always go somewhere thinking that you know everything but you’re not going to get anything out of it. When you go into things with an open mind, you usually end up learning things you didn’t know.”

Nick Papadimas
@TDG_SPORTS

Allen-Williams emerging as vocal leader for young Gamecocks

Bryson Allen-Williams (4) was the Gamecocks’ second-leading tackler in 2016, finishing with 75, behind only D.J. Smith (80).
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When defensive back Javon Charleston first stepped onto the University of South Carolina campus two years ago, he told his roommates he had one main goal: earning a football scholarship. That goal came true after the Gamecocks’ student-open practice at Williams-Brice Stadium on Tuesday when the redshirt sophomore was awarded a football scholarship from head coach Will Muschamp.

“It was a relief, honestly because it was one of my biggest goals coming here two years ago when I stepped on campus,” Charleston said. “It was kind of a relief to get that out the way and just focus on football.”

The official Gamecock Football Twitter account released a video of the announcement, which has received more than 1,000 retweets and counting.

“I watched it a couple times. My Twitter went crazy after that and until recently now, it’s kind of slowing down. I watched it a couple times. People were sending it to me and telling me they were proud of me.”

Charleston’s mom and dad were both present for the announcement, coming onto the field after practice to hug and congratulate him. “I didn’t have any idea, but I did see my dad walk on the field towards the end,” Charleston said. “I was trying to figure out why he was coming on the field. I was trying to signal over to him like ‘No!’ But it was really cool.”

Charleston’s friends and family weren’t the only ones who were proud of the work he put in to earn a scholarship. His teammates also shared their congratulations.

“I was on the field and I’m thankful that he was able to get a scholarship,” offensive lineman Zack Bailey said. “He’s worked his butt off and he’s earned it, so I commend him for all of his hard work and effort. As a scholarship person, seeing guys that are walking on and putting in the time as well as the classroom. A lot of those guys have to keep their GPA to a certain minimum just to keep their like Pell grants and scholarship and things of that sort, so I applaud him.”

Last season, Charleston primarily played on special teams, recording 10 tackles over 13 games. He was moved from wide receiver to defensive back during last year’s fall camp. His best performance came against Missouri, in which Charleston made two special teams tackles for the second-straight week and was named Special Teams Player of the Game.

The 6-foot, 189-pound Charleston earned a letter for his work on special teams last season, and is working with the second safety unit this fall.

Running back A.J. Turner lives in the room next door to Charleston on campus, and said the two talk frequently. He said Charleston is constantly seen working out and attending meetings to learn more about the game, making the scholarship well-deserved.

“Being a very unselfish player he could’ve very well could’ve been like ‘Hey coach, I feel like I should go somewhere else. You know, you’re changing my primary position,’” Turner said. “He’s been a good sport about it and we’re just grateful to have him.”
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Weapons abundant for Bentley, USC offense

Quarterback Jake Bentley will not be in short supply of offensive weapons when he takes the field for his sophomore season.

Along with Bentley, nine starters return to the USC offense, including tight end Hayden Hurst and wide receiver Deebo Samuel, who were both named to the preseason All-SEC team by Athlon.

Hurst is coming off a record-setting season as a player and team leader. He not only set the single-season program record for catches with 48, but also became the first sophomore in USC history to be named a permanent team captain.

As a walk-on who played professional baseball in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization before joining the team, Hurst has a wide range of experiences, which he draws on to help lead the younger players.

“I just try to be the voice of reason,” Hurst said. “I’ve kind of been through some things and seen some things. I’m almost five years older than some of these guys. I try to just keep everybody calm. When you’re an 18-year-old kid and kind of experience some of these things and SEC football, it can be overwhelming.”

Hurst compiled 616 receiving yards on 48 passes last season, averaging 12.8 yards per catch. His longest catch was 47 yards, tying Samuel’s for the longest on the team, and came against Florida on Nov. 12.

“When I just try to do what the coaches tell me,” Hurst said. “I try to be that reliable target for Jake whenever he needs it. I tell him ‘Whenever you’re in trouble, just give it to me. I’ll kind of bail you out.’”

Like Hurst, Samuel put together a standout season in 2016. As a sophomore, Samuel led the Gamecocks with 783 receiving yards on 59 passes, along with six rushing touchdowns. Compared to his SEC counterparts, Samuel ranked second in all-purpose yardage per game with 132, third in receptions per game with 5.9 and fourth in receiving yards per game with 78.3, per GamecocksOnline.

“He’s very dangerous with the ball in his hands,” Muschamp said. “He has really good lower body strength. He can run through tackles, much like a running back with a ball in his hands. We’ve got to find different ways to target him in the game. He needs to be touching the ball 10-15 times.”

One of Muschamp’s biggest concerns with Samuel this season is making sure he stays healthy.

“He’s had some soft tissue issues in high school and at South Carolina,” Muschamp said. “We’ve got a better handle on that administratively as coaches about work capacity and what he can handle, because everyone’s different. We’ll certainly keep an eye on that. When he was healthy last year, he was an elite player in our league.”
Three-way race at running back position

Carson Mason
@CARSONANNMASON

When it comes to South Carolina's offense, most of the starters were determined following spring camp -- except for one position: running backs.

Between Rico Dowdle, Ty'Son Williams and A.J. Turner, the Gamecocks have a three-way battle at the position.

While head coach Will Muschamp said Dowdle will likely start against NC State, he would be confident with any of the backs starting.

“(I am) very comfortable playing all three,” Muschamp said. “All three are quality players, and all three are going to (play). Rico (Dowdle) will probably start the game. Certainly Ty’Son (Williams) is going to be a guy who’s going to spell him. A.J. (Turner) will be in probably the third series of the game. We still have to work through the rotation of things we need to do, but whoever has the hot hand is going to carry us. All three guys deserve to play. All three guys deserve to start, to be honest with you. We’re going to find times to possibly get two of them on the field together.”

Dowdle and Turner both enter their sophomore seasons, while Williams will play his first season with USC after transferring from North Carolina.

Turner received most of the reps last season, making four straight starts to open the year. That is, until Dowdle emerged. The then-freshman Dowdle didn’t see any in-game action until week 5 against Texas A&M, and made his first start against Georgia in week 6. He became the full-time starter two weeks later against Tennessee, recording a season-high 27 rushes in that game and ending the season with six starts under his belt.

Dowdle logged three 100-yard performances, including a career-high 226 yards against Western Carolina on Nov. 19. He led the Gamecocks with 764 total rushing yards and six touchdowns on 133 attempts, becoming the first true freshman to lead the team in rushing since Marcus Lattimore in 2010.

“Knowing that I had help and it wasn’t just me, I didn’t take it into a negative way at all,” Turner said. “It was more help and we’re trying to win. In the SEC, you need more than one back. You need two. We’ve got three. That just makes it all the more better. Everybody’s going to be fresh.”

As for Williams, the redshirt sophomore sat out last season to comply with NCAA transfer rules. He rushed 19 times for 57 yards and caught one pass as a true freshman at North Carolina in 2015.

Williams has South Carolina roots, graduating from Crestwood High School in Sumter, S.C., in 2015. He rushed for 1,058 yards and 14 touchdowns on 194 carries as a high school senior and was considered the top player in the state by ESPN as well as the No. 11 running back nationally.

Turner dealt with mild injuries last season, including a Grade 1 sprained knee he acquired during

SEE BACKS PAGE 14

Ty’Son Williams takes a handoff from Jake Bentley in the spring game.
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Rico Dowdle is expected to start Saturday after starting nine games in 2016.

the Missouri game. He finished second on the team with 497 total rushing yards and three touchdowns. He recorded the longest individual rush of the season at 75 yards against Texas A&M, while also handling kick return duties.

While he would like a bigger role than a third-down, pass-catching pass-protecting back, Turner said he’s willing to do whatever he can to help the team win.

“Ideally, I’d like to see myself doing more because I kind of feel like that I can do more,” Turner said. “Like I said, whatever the team needs. I’m just meeting the team needs cause like I said earlier, we all want to do the same thing, which is win.”

When it’s time to select between the three players, Muschamp said it will all come down to production.

“Who practices the best, prepares the best, who takes care of the ball, who’s the most productive guy,” Muschamp said. “Whoever that guy is that carries the ball a bunch on game day. So, that’ll be determined by them, not me.”

Another area Muschamp wants to see rushing improvement in this season? The red zone.

“The ability to run the ball in critical situations such as the end of the game, in the red zone, and short-yardage and goal line, you’ve got to be able to get the yards you need to get to get out of the game, the half. All those things are important,” Muschamp said. “Put your players in the best situations so they can be successful; philosophically, that’s what we want.”

According to Turner, the three running backs, who are close friends, have discussed the battle for the starting spot and understand they all share the same goal.

“We all want to win so we know what it takes,” Turner said. “We know we have to compete to make each other better. We know at the end of the day, there's only really going to be one or two backs on the field at the same time. That's why we have to compete so you can get that opportunity to showcase yourself, showcase your talent to the coaches and everybody else.”
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# OFFENSIVE DEPTH CHART

## QB
- 19 Jake Bentley
- 12 Michael Scarnecchia

## RB
- 5 Rico Dowdle
- 25 A.J. Turner
- 27 Ty’Son Williams

## WR
- 1 Deebo Samuel
- 89 Bryan Edwards
- 13 Shi Smith
- 18 OrTre Smith
- 6 Terry Googer

## TE
- 81 Hayden Hurst
- 40 Jacob August
- 87 Kiel Pollard
- 3 K.C. Crosby

## LT
- 77 Malik Young
- 74 Dennis Daley

## LG
- 72 Donell Stanley
- 50 Sadarius Hutcherson

## C
- 70 Alan Knott
- 60 Chandler Farrell

## RG
- 51 Cory Helms
- 63 Blake Camper

## RT
- 78 Zack Bailey
- 69 D.J. Park
DE
95 Dante Sawyer
8 D.J. Wonnum
5 Keir Thomas
35 Daniel Fennell

DT
90 Taylor Stallworth
93 Ulric Jones
97 Kobe Smith
99 Javon Kinlaw

CB
7 JaMarcus King
16 Rashad Fenton
3 Chris Lammons
21 Jamyest Williams

N
21 Jamyest Williams
3 Chris Lammons

S
24 D.J. Smith
3 Chris Lammons
17 Javon Charleston
9 Keisean Nixon

WLB
10 Skai Moore
11 Eldridge Thompson

SLB
4 Bryson Allen-Williams
29 Antoine Wilder

MLB
6 T.J. Brunson
44 Sherrod Greene
Hinson’s ‘Sweet’ offseason

Redshirt freshman tight end Evan Hinson may have had one of the busiest springs among players on the USC football team. But it wasn’t because of spring practice.

Hinson, a member of the USC men’s basketball team, traveled with Frank Martin’s Gamecocks to Phoenix, Ariz., to compete in the Final Four of the NCAA Tournament. While he missed the majority of spring practice, Hinson says the Final Four experience gave him takeaways that will translate onto the football field.

“Our camaraderie on the Final Four team is what prepared us to be the Final Four team,” Hinson said. “So, as a team, on the football team, we probably need to get more brotherly, stuff like that ... because that matters a lot.”

Hinson redshirted last season and joined the basketball team following the Birmingham Bowl in November, garnering nine points and five rebounds in eight games. The basketball team was eliminated by Gonzaga in the Final Four, but according to head coach Will Muschamp, Hinson wasted no time getting back to the gridiron grind.

“After the Final Four, he was in our building the next time he could be in there,” Muschamp said. “He’s up over 240. He looks great and runs extremely well. Athletically, he’s a guy who certainly can contribute on special teams, and, depending on how he competes through camp, he should be compete and help us at tight end. We’re counting on him.”

Hinson came to USC after graduating from Deltona High School (Florida) in 2016, where he amassed 465 yards and six touchdowns during his senior season. He also played on the defensive side of the ball, making 35 tackles during his senior year, including eight for loss and five sacks.

As a part of the crowded tight end position — anchored by veterans Hayden Hurst and K.C. Crosby with competition from Jacob August, Kiel Pollard and Kyle Markway — Hinson will have to make big strides to separate himself.

His high school versatility, along with his athleticism as a basketball player and increased muscle mass this spring, puts him in consideration for playing time on special teams and possibly at wide receiver.

“I just try to get in where I fit in. Just do my assignment when they tell me to do it. Just play to my ability. That’s all I’m trying to do,” Hinson said. “Really just me putting it together in the weight room, it just, I just naturally got to be this.”

Carson Mason
@CARSONANNMASON

Evan Hinson (back right) celebrates with teammates after South Carolina’s 77-70 Elite Eight win over Florida in Madison Square Garden.

Victoria Richman / THE DAILY GAMECOCK
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In his second season with the Gamecocks, Bobby Bentley is feeling more comfortable as a coach and a dad.

Along with being South Carolina's running backs coach, Bobby Bentley is the father of starting quarterback Jake Bentley, who is also entering his second season with the team.

“It was probably harder last year knowing that he was lining up and probably wasn't ready,” Bobby Bentley said. “But this year, it's a little bit different for me. I'm able to focus on the running backs even more. I feel more comfortable with a year under my belt as a running backs coach here at South Carolina and in the SEC.”

According to Bobby Bentley, the 19-year-old Jake Bentley has always been a more mature athlete and person than his age suggests. That maturity is helping Jake Bentley thrive under the system of offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Kurt Roper, who has 14 years of SEC coaching experience and is also entering his second season with the Gamecocks.

“I think him being a year older in the system and especially with the way coach Roper coaches him, he has to know all the protections,” Bobby Bentley said. “He has to know all the blocking schemes to make sure he gets all the checks, so coach Roper puts a lot on him. He's got to be mature. He wouldn't be able to handle it.”

Bobby Bentley, a native of Duncan, South Carolina, has deep ties to coaching in the Palmetto State. He served as an assistant coach at James F. Byrnes High School from 1990-94 before being named head coach in 1995. He was named the head football coach at Presbyterian College in 2007, and became the district wide athletic director and public information officer for Spartanburg School District 5 in 2009.

Jake Bentley grew up in a football environment in Duncan, watching his dad coach for the Blue Hose and Rebels. The family moved to Auburn in 2014 when Bobby Bentley became an offensive analyst for Gus Malzahn’s Tigers.

So, how does Bobby Bentley separate the roles of coach and father on the field?

“During practice, I don’t really say much,” Bobby Bentley said. “During the game, I’m probably more of his cheerleader than anything. During practice, I really don’t say much to him. Before practice, I do. I want to make sure I kind of know what he’s thinking on some plays. I kind of ask him just to sort of help me with the running backs too so we’ll know where our read is as far as the progression.”

Jake Bentley isn’t the only quarterback in the Bentley family. Bobby Bentley and his wife, Paulette, have five children, including their son Shuler Bentley, who is the quarterback at Murray State.

“A lot of guys don’t get to have their kids around in college football, like my son Shuler,” Bobby Bentley said. “I'm dealing with him via text message how he's doing. With Jake, I'm right here with him, so it's a blessing.”

Carson Mason
@CARSONANNMAISON

Victoria Richman / THE DAILY GAMECOCK
BOBBY BENTLEY
CAREER TIMELINE

Quarterback
Presbyterian
1986-89

Assistant Coach
Byrnes HS (SC)
1990-94

Head Coach
Byrnes HS (SC)
1995-2006

Offensive Analyst
Auburn
2014-15

Running Backs Coach
South Carolina
2016-
Position preview: Secondary

Head coach Will Muschamp and defensive coordinator Travaris Robinson are known for their proficiency in coaching cornerbacks and safeties.

The duo coached talented secondaries in their tenures at Florida. Defensive backs Vernon Hargreaves III, Keanu Neal, Jalen Tabor, Quincy Wilson and Marcus Maye harassed SEC offenses, and were molded into first and second round draft picks in the process.

The secondary was a weakness for the Gamecocks in 2014 and 2015, but in year one, Muschamp and Robinson were able to get the Gamecocks from 64th to 42nd nationally in passing yards allowed. Now, the secondary is a year older, more versatile and has added several young, gifted players from the 2017 class.

Fresh faces

One of those young players is cornerback Jamyest Williams, who was the crown jewel of the Gamecocks’ 2017 recruiting class. Williams had offers from a majority of major programs in the country. He ultimately decided to stick with the Gamecocks after a late push by SEC rival, Georgia. During his recent media availability, Robinson was asked about Williams and where he would play.

“A really good, talented player,” Robinson said of Williams. “We’re playing him at multiple spots right now.”

Robinson did concede that Williams has primarily been playing at the nickel position. Keisean Nixon and Tavyn Jackson are two other newcomers from the 2017 class who are expected to play a significant number of snaps this season. Jackson was an unheralded recruit from Florida, but the coaches are excited about his potential. He has been fighting off nagging injuries...
Throughout fall camp which has hindered his development.

“...Because of our numbers he’s going to have to play...,” Muschamp said. “He’s a guy we’re still counting on.”

Muschamp had to fend off Tennessee, Georgia, UCLA and others to sign highly-coveted junior college prospect Keisean Nixon.

Nixon was a star during his two years at JUCO powerhouse Arizona Western College, recording 11 interceptions in his short time there. It took longer than the coaches hoped, but he finally made it to campus in early August. He’s a versatile player that the coaches are cross training for both safety and corner.

Asked about Nixon, Robinson said, “He’s a really good player...He’s got a good skillset.”

Nixon is cross training for both corner and safety, but if he wants to see the field early, then he should aim for safety. This is because Muschamp stated without hesitation that Jamarcus King and Rashad Fenton would be the starting cornerbacks during his post-scrimmage press conference on Aug. 19.

Returning players

Fenton started seven games and King started 11 games last year, which provides key experience for a critical position. King said the Gamecocks would be playing a lot of press man coverage this year, which requires very technically sound play from the secondary. It is a high-risk, high-reward style of defense that can only be successfully run when safeties come in and save any mistakes made by the cornerbacks.

Due to shoulder nerve damage, the Gamecocks will be without freshman Jaylin Dickerson, a player Muschamp praised this spring. That means the defensive staff will have to rely on versatile guys like Chris Lammons and Nixon, in addition to veterans like D.J. Smith and Steven Montac to fill out the starting and rotational roles at the safety positions. Lammons started every game for the Gamecocks last season. Though he mainly played at corner and nickel last year, this year he’s been pegged a safety for the time being.

“Right now he’s playing safety,” Muschamp said. “He would be our third corner, and probably our third nickel depending on what package we are in.”

Smith and Montac are going to have an impact at the safety position as well. Smith is a senior who led the team in tackles last season. His experience and leadership will be a huge asset in Muschamp’s second year. Montac is a walk-on who is expected to come off the bench this year and at least match last year’s 39 tackles. Keeping players like Montac healthy is crucial for Muschamp and Robinson this year.

They said they like the players they have, but depth is concerning for the secondary, especially at corner. The coaches are hoping cross training players for multiple positions and managing the rotation will be enough to keep this talented secondary in tact for the duration of the season.
Asking around at a youth football practice in Goose Creek, South Carolina, many kids will tell you the same thing: one day, they hope to play in the NFL.

Brandon Shell was no exception. “It was always a dream when I was younger,” Shell said. “But reality doesn’t set in until you’re going through the whole draft process, and talking to all the teams, and the scouts, and doing all the workouts, so that’s when it all actually, really hit me.”

Shell was selected by the New York Jets in the fifth round of the 2016 NFL Draft, as the 158th overall pick. He proudly represented the flagship university of his home state, South Carolina. One year later, he is already competing for a starting job at right tackle against veteran Brent Qvale.

“I think it’s going pretty good” said Shell. “But at the end of the day, that’s all I can do, is put my best foot forward.”

A lot has changed for the Jets in the year Shell has been with the team. A disappointing 2016 season led to the roster being gutted and a new offensive coordinator in John Morton. With that, came a new West Coast style offense that made a year’s worth of learning plays suddenly irrelevant.

Still, Shell has not let the changes set him back. “The West Coast offense, it’s a lot of verbage” Shell said during Jets camp. “You know, we got a lot more different plays, and different ways to run plays, but you know, I think I’m adjusting to it very well…I kinda actually like it a lot better than the offense we had last year.”

Shell has seen many changes in himself as a player and a person during his time in New York. His physicality has improved, and he’s found a new love for Italian food, but he has not forgotten the most important thing he learned at Carolina. “Stay focused, don’t get down on yourself,” Shell said.

This is a lesson that has been tested from Shell’s very first start as a Jet. He went head-to-head with Cameron Wake, a Miami Dolphins defensive end who is widely acknowledged as one of the best in the league. Wake is best known by Jets fans, however, for leveling quarterback Bryce Petty during Shell’s first start in December 2016.

“Going against him was like, ‘Wow, he actually is what they say he is,” Shell admitted.

But Shell’s dedication to becoming a Pro Bowl-level player led him straight to the film, so he could improve his game for the next matchup. “You gotta find out what their strong points and weak points are,” Shell said. “Once you do that, you just gotta find out little tips that will tell you certain things that they do.”

Many players have the drive and work ethic to attempt to go pro, but Shell is grateful the Jets recognized his talent and wanted to give him an opportunity. “It was kinda wild, because I met with them at the combine, but I didn’t really hear from them after that,” Shell said. “So it kinda caught me off guard, but I was blessed to be put in this opportunity and be in this place to play for this great organization.”

The Jets will open up their season on Sept. 10 in Buffalo against their AFC East rivals, the Bills — quite possibly with Shell blocking on the right.
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STANDOUT FRESHMEN

OrTre Smith

Position: Wide receiver
Hometown: Mount Pleasant, S.C.
High School: Wando High School
Height, Weight: 6-foot-4, 219 pounds
Fun fact: While his mom, Tashia Greene, played volleyball at Clemson from 1989-1990 and hoped he would become a Tiger himself, Smith chose to commit to USC and announced the decision on his birthday.
Expectations for 2017: As the top-rated player from South Carolina in the 2017 class by Rivals and 247Sports, Smith will have a chance to contribute on the field this season and will add depth to the wideout position behind starter Bryan Edwards.
Shi Smith

Position: Wide receiver  
Hometown: Union, S.C.  
High School: Union County High School  
Height, Weight: 5-foot-10, 179 pounds  
Fun fact: Smith didn’t play at the wide receiver position until he attended Clemson’s football camp as a seventh grader. He played as a running quarterback in middle school and is still known for his speed on the field today. Smith was the second-highest rated recruit from South Carolina in the 2017 class by Rivals and 247Sports.  
Expectations for 2017: As a slot receiver, Smith should see a fair amount of playing time this season behind junior starter Deebo Samuel. He turned heads during fall camp, displaying his quickness and agility to wide receivers coach Bryan McClendon.

Jamyest Williams

Position: Defensive back  
Hometown: Dacula, Ga.  
High School: Grayson High School  
Height, Weight: 5-foot-9, 175 pounds  
Fun fact: Williams is no stranger to screen time on national television. He announced his commitment to the Gamecocks live on ESPN last August and played in the nationally-televised Under Armour All-American Game following his senior season.  
Expectations for 2017: Williams was rated as a four-star prospect and the No. 55 overall player in the country, per 247Sports. He chose South Carolina over offers from Georgia, Florida State, Clemson, Alabama and others. He is expected to frequently fill the nickel position, with the possibility of starting at punt returner.

Name: Sherrod Greene

Position: Linebacker  
Hometown: Rocky Mount, N.C.  
High School: Rocky Mount High School  
Height, Weight: 6-foot-1, 223 pounds  
Fun fact: Greene received offers to play for a wide array of schools around the U.S., including Alabama, California, NC State, Charlotte, Old Dominion, Virginia Tech and Maryland.  
Expectations for 2017: Greene has been noted by the coaching staff as an emerging player this fall. He is expected to be the Gamecocks’ No. 4 linebacker, providing depth behind returners Skai Moore and Bryson-Allen Williams.

Name: Aaron Sterling

Position: Defensive line  
Hometown: Atlanta, Ga.  
High School: Tucker High School  
Height, Weight: 6-foot-1, 240 pounds  
Fun fact: Like Williams, Sterling participated in the Under Armour All-America Game in Orlando following his senior season. Sterling committed to Alabama in December 2015, but decided to decommit and open up his recruitment again in September 2016. He announced his commitment to the Gamecocks on National Signing Day.  
Expectations for 2017: Sterling has the athletic tools to be a reliable option up front, especially with the the Gamecocks’ sparse defensive line depth. Defensive line coach Lance Thompson dubbed Sterling as a “pleasant surprise” during fall camp, noting his instinctiveness and ability to quickly pick up schemes.
The South Carolina Gamecocks have the makings of a potent offense in 2017. They have a plethora of exciting weapons for their young, talented quarterback Jake Bentley to spread the ball around to. However, none of that will matter if the offensive line can’t fend off what opposing defenses throw at them.

Offensive line coach Eric Wolford was hired early this year after Shawn Elliott became the head coach of Georgia State. Wolford brings NFL pedigree from his time as the 49ers’ offensive line coach, and is familiar with the program from when he coached at USC in 2009.

Wolford has been working hard to get the offensive line to play at the level he expects. During his media availability in fall camp, he said he still wants to see more explosiveness, but commended his group of guys for working hard in the summer strength and conditioning program.

It sounds as though that hard work is starting to pay off for some of the players, including Donell Stanley, Alan Knott and Cory Helms, saying “their arrows [are] up right now.” Wolford seems to have confidence in the interior of his offensive line.

In addition to Stanley, Knott and Helms, D.J. Park is another player that the coaching staff is excited about. When talking about the guards and centers of the offensive line Muschamp said, “Cory, Alan, Donell, and D.J. have really distanced themselves inside.”

According to Wolford, these players are the most consistent and play the hardest inside -- two traits required of his offensive linemen. Expect to see some combination of these four players at the guard and center spots.

Even with the emergence of these players, Muschamp is still not completely satisfied with where the backups are at.

“Right now, we need more guys to step up,” Muschamp said.

As for the two tackle positions, it looks like Malik Young will be the left tackle, and Zack Bailey will be the right tackle. Bailey is essentially a lock for the right tackle position barring injuries, but Young has some competition that he will need to fend off to maintain his spot.

That competition is coming from Dennis Daley, a Columbia native who enrolled at South Carolina this summer, after attending Georgia Military College for two years. Daley has “left tackle ability” according to Wolford, but Young is still ahead of him.

Wolford heaped a great deal of praise on Young and is pleased with his competitiveness -- a trait he covets in his offensive linemen.

“Malik plays hard. That son of a gun will play hard,” Wolford said.

If Young keeps up his hard-working attitude and remains consistent, it is likely he will hold onto his spot through the season.

Wolford is excited by the progress his unit made in the offseason strength and conditioning program, but it sounds like he is far from satisfied, still searching for consistency, explosiveness and depth.

Wolford has never mentioned having a set group of five starters, and when Will Muschamp was asked about a starting five after a scrimmage he said the unit was “still moving around.”

It’s hard to determine what the initial offensive line group will be. Between the lines of what the coaches have said, it may be Young at left tackle, Bailey at right tackle, Helms at center and Knott and Stanley will be the guards. This lineup seems set to change throughout the season as the coaches move players around to try to find the best combination.
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THIS WEEK’S FAST AND FURIOUS SHOW FEATURES SPEEDY SONGS LIKE “LA GRANGE,” “FREE RIDE,” “SHUT UP AND DRIVE,” AND “DON’T STOP ME NOW.”
Out with the old, in with the new. That is the story of South Carolina's specialist group this season. With veteran place kicker Elliott Fry, long snapper Drew Williams and punter Sean Kelly all graduating last season, the Gamecocks are hoping their young homegrown talent can step up in replacement.

Redshirt freshman Alexander Woznick or redshirt Parker White are listed as the starting place kicker in place of Fry, the Gamecocks' all-time leading scorer.

Woznick showed his upside during the 2016 Annual Garnet & Black Spring Game, kicking three field goals of 47, 48 and 50 yards. During spring and fall camp, Muschamp recreated high-pressure situations in effort to simulate the loud atmosphere of 80,000 fans at Williams-Brice Stadium.

“I could go back to one time he did it during the spring. He basically said ‘Hey, if you miss this, the whole team has to gasp.’ I wasn’t having a good day from the beginning and ended up missing it. Hopefully, I’ll get more chances like that. He’ll put more pressure on as the fall goes on.”

Redshirt freshman walk-on Parker White has emerged as a contender and is battling with Alexander Woznick for the starting kicking job.

“I think it’s great. I think it brings out the best in both of them. They’ve done a good job,” Hutzler said. “It’s been good. I think competition any time is a good thing.”

White went to Wando High School in Mount Pleasant, where he was a two-time Special Teams Player of the Year. He walked onto the squad in January after not participating in football during his freshman year.

“It’s neat, man,” Hutzler said. “You hear great stories about walk-ons all the time across the country. To have a guy come in, you know, a South Carolina kid, a Carolina-made kid that comes in and steps into a role and takes advantage of it and competes and does a lot of things for you is exciting at any position. He’s done a good job.”

Redshirt sophomores Joseph Charlton and Michael Almond were in a tight race for the starting punter job throughout the entire fall camp. While Almond made his first career punt in the Birmingham Bowl against South Florida on Dec. 29, Charlton is listed to start against NC State. Almond, who walked onto the team in 2015, said he was initially very nervous to make the start, but his performance proved otherwise. In two punts, he averaged 44 yards, with his longest traveling 48 yards. South Florida, which averaged nearly 10 return yards per punt in 2016, was held to two total yards against USC.

Like the punter position, the long snapper starting role was up for grabs. The Gamecocks listed Ben Asbury or Harrison Freeman as the starter for the spring. Asbury, who walked onto the team in 2015 after playing as a tight end at

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Berry College in Rome, Ga., won the role for the season opener as a redshirt junior. Freeman, a redshirt freshman, walked onto the team and took a redshirt year last season. Asbury went through his second spring practice with the Gamecocks, giving him a slight leg up on the competition.

“Drew [Williams] is a huge asset for us as far as in coverage and reliability with the snap,” Muschamp said. “We need to make some strides as far as special teams are concerned.

As for return duties, the Gamecocks seek to make a major improvement from last season, in which they totaled 825 yards in 32 kick returns and 89 yards in 14 punt returns. For starting kick returner, the Gamecocks listed wide receiver Deebo Samuel, who averaged 26.9 yards per return last season, including a 100-yard return for a touchdown. Behind Samuel, is running backs Rashad Fenton.

For punt returns, Chris Lammons is listed as the starter after carrying most of the duties last season and leading the team with an average of 7.9 yards per return. Fenton, who made two punt returns last season totaling eight yards, is listed as the backup punt returner.

Regardless of who starts, the specialists are a tight-knit group and want to see each other succeed, Almond said.

“You can ask any of the other specialists it doesn’t matter who’s playing,” Almond said. “We’re all for each other. ... I didn’t have a problem waiting for my turn or anything like that.”

“There’s definitely some big shoes to fill. Like I said, we have a really talented group of specialists. We should be alright. We’re all really confident this season.”

Joseph Charlton will start at punter in the season opener against NC State after battling with Michael Almond for the starting spot this fall.
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SEPT 30 TEXAS A&M
OCT 7 ARKANSAS
OCT 14 TENNESSEE
OCT 28 VANDY
NOV 4 GEORGIA
NOV 11 FLORIDA
NOV 18 WOFFORD
NOV 25 CLEMSON
Shi Smith’s speed earns him start in slot for NC State opener

After his National Signing Day ceremony in February, wide receiver Shi Smith said he expected to find playing time in the slot, in addition to the kick return game.

According to The State, Smith will get the start in his first college game when USC takes on N.C. State on Saturday. The speedy Smith will get most of his work from the slot, while returners Deebo Samuel and Bryan Edwards will get starts on the outside.

Smith’s speed has stood out on the practice field, just like it did during his days at Union County High School. At SEC Media Days in July, Samuel said Smith was the fastest player on the roster, and the freshman’s speed has impressed head coach Will Muschamp and quarterback Jake Bentley as well.

“He’s an electric guy who can make some plays with the ball in his hand,” Muschamp told The State. “Shi’s development puts more speed on the field and anytime you do that you put stress on the defense.”

Bentley added, “He’s still getting everything down to play as fast as he can but you can definitely see the speed he has.”

Smith played fast against high school competition at Union, racking up 22 touchdowns in his final two seasons despite playing in a run-focused offense as a senior.

The 5-foot-10, 179-pounder was considered the Palmetto State’s top prospect by ESPN, but was rated below former Wando standout OrTre Smith by 247Sports. OrTre enrolled at USC in January as the more hyped prospect of the two, but it’s been the smaller Smith making big waves.

Before his signing in February, Shi compared his game to that of Samuel, saying that his 6-foot-4, 219-pound teammate OrTre plays more like Edwards. Both Smiths will have to compete for targets with several offensive weapons, including returning wide receiver Randrecous Davis and tight end Hayden Hurst.

But it’s Shi who will get the first shot to prove himself as a true freshman.

River Rat Brewery has announced the September opening of a 49-person capacity rooftop bar. The new rooftop bar will offer views of downtown Columbia and Williams-Brice Stadium, home of USC Gamecocks (just in time for football season).

While you are here, you can enjoy the return of our popular seasonal brews, as well as join us for games in the beer garden, Taco Tuesdays, Wing and Pint Night, Trivia Thursdays, and more! **GO COCKS!!!**

**If you are under the age of 21, it is against the law to buy alcoholic beverages. All South Carolina regulations enforced.**
After a much improved 2016 under then first-year head coach Will Muschamp, the South Carolina defense looks to continue to make strides this season. Let’s take a look into what to expect from the Gamecock defense in 2017.

Muschamp and Robinson effect
Muschamp is known to be a defensive-minded football coach. He and defensive coordinator Travaris Robinson have been together since Muschamp’s coaching days at Florida. Robinson followed him to Auburn as well. They have assembled strong defenses together and could have another one this season with a more experienced group of Gamecocks.

A strong secondary
Returning starters and new star-potential hopefuls, the Gamecock secondary is projected to be solid. Upperclassman cornerbacks Jamarcus King (senior), Chris Lammons (senior) and Rashad Fenton (junior) all return for the Gamecocks. King and Fenton will work the outside this season, while Lammons transitioned to safety this offseason. That leaves an open spot for Jamyest Williams, one of South Carolina’s top recruits, to make a splash at cornerback. Look for Williams to play in the nickel position a majority of this season. D.J. Smith also returns as the Gamecocks’ top safety. This unit has a lot of experience plus a fresh face in Williams with a ton of potential, giving them the opportunity to excel in the SEC.

Moore returns to help out a thin linebacker unit
Moore is back. After a much-anticipated return from a neck injury that cost him his entire 2016 season, linebacker Skai Moore is set to return for the defense. Moore led the team in tackles from 2013 through 2015 and has 11 career interceptions, which is three shy of South Carolina’s career record. He is a production machine, and his return couldn’t come at a better time, considering South Carolina’s thin linebacker depth. Moore will start alongside senior Bryson Allen-Williams and sophomore T.J. Brunson. Regaining Moore is already a step up from the 2016 unit. This year’s starting linebackers will be strong, but the backups are unproven and shaky.

Defensive line will struggle
Last season’s top pass rusher Darius English is gone, and so is his counterpart Marquavious Lewis. English led the team in sacks with nine and was the only player on the team with more than two. Who is going to have to pick up where English left off as a pass rusher? Look for 6-foot-4, 251-pound D.J. Wonnum to turn some heads as a pass rusher. Wonnum flashed a ton of potential as a true freshman last season, finishing with 1.5 sacks, 32 tackles and 3.5 tackles for loss. With a year of experience under his belt, should only improve on the defensive line. Seniors Dante Sawyer and Taylor Stallworth also return to help the Gamecocks improve on their 21 total sacks last season.

Overall, the defense should be much improved this season for the Gamecocks. They have proven talent in the secondary, some playmakers at the linebacker position and hopeful potential at the defensive line. If all goes well and key starting players stay healthy, the Gamecocks could be one of the more feared defenses in the SEC.
Gamecocks in the NFL

Jerell Adams
New York Giants Tight End 2012-15

Rory Anderson
Buffalo Bills Tight End 2011-14

Damiere Byrd
Carolina Panthers Wide Receiver 2011-14

A.J. Cann
Jacksonville Jaguars Offensive Guard 2011-14

Jadeveon Clowney
Houston Texans Defensive End 2011-13

Jared Cook
Oakland Raiders Tight End 2006-08

Pharoh Cooper
Los Angeles Rams Wide Receiver 2013-15

Mike Davis
Seattle Seahawks Running Back 2012-14

Patrick DiMarco
Buffalo Bills Fullback 2007-10

Bruce Ellington
Houston Texans Wide Receiver 2011-13

Stephon Gilmore
New England Patriots Cornerback 2009-11

Melvin Ingram
San Diego Chargers Linebacker ‘07, ‘09-11

Alshon Jeffery
Philadelphia Eagles Wide Receiver 2009-11

Isaiah Johnson
Tampa Bay Buccaneers Safety 2015

T.J. Johnson
Cincinnati Bengals Center 2009-12

Johnathan Joseph
Houston Texans Cornerback 2005

Marquavious Lewis
Buffalo Bills Defensive End 2015-16

Captain Munnerlyn
Carolina Panthers Cornerback 2006-08

Corey Robinson
Detroit Lions Offensive Tackle 2012-14

Connor Shaw
Chicago Bears Quarterback 2010-13

Brandon Shell
New York Jets Offensive Tackle 2012-15

Darian Stewart
Denver Broncos Safety 2006-09

Ryan Succop
Tennessee Titans Placekicker 2005-08

D.J. Swearinger
Washington Redskins Safety 2009-12

Devin Taylor
New York Giants Defensive End 2009-12

Brandon Wilds
Cleveland Browns Running Back ‘11, ‘13-15

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Welcome to a Healthy Carolina: Wellness Kickoff
Student Engagement Week continues with a display of health and wellness resources on campus. Apply to be a Changing Carolina Peer Leader, sign up for a cooking class & win prizes.

#MoveMoreCarolina
Healthy Campus Initiatives launches their physical activity campaign #MoveMoreCarolina this week to promote getting active on campus. Head over to the farmers market for giveaways & games.

Healthy Tailgating
Football season is upon us. Before you make your Saturday tailgating plans, come to the farmers market to get information about ticketing & get tips for healthier tailgating at Willie B.

#MoveMoreGetFit
There are so many ways to get fit on campus. Join us at the farmers market as we highlight some of our campus partners and get some tips on starting your fitness journey.

#MoveMoreStressLess
Physical activity is a great way to relieve or even prevent stress. This week’s market focuses on the resources available on campus to help you stress less.

Gamecocks Stay Informed
Don’t be fooled by fake news, come to the market and learn how to get accurate health information.

World Mental Health Day
Come celebrate World Mental Health Day at the farmers market. Learn about resources we have on campus that will help you live your best life like the CALM Oasis, our resident therapy dog and FREE stress consultations for students.

Relationship Violence Awareness Month
This week the market staff is teaming up with SAVIP to honor Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Stop by to learn more about the events happening on campus throughout the month of October.

Homecoming
Get into the Gamecock spirit this week at the Healthy Carolina Farmers Market.

Flavors of Fall
Join us for fall recipes that feature seasonal produce.

That’s Amore! Italian Night
Love Italian flavors? This is the class for you.

Meat-Free Meals
Meatless meals can be a great, low-cost option for vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike! Note that the recipes in this class may not be vegan.

Cleaning Out the Pantry
Learn how to make quick, healthy recipes with pantry items you already have.

Fast Food Swaps
Ditch the extra fat and calories that come with fast food. Come learn to make healthier versions of your favorite fast food dishes.

Healthy Holiday Swaps
Maintaining a well-balanced diet during the holidays can be challenging. Join us to learn how to lighten up your holiday recipes.
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<td>Alabama vs. Florida St., Ohio St.</td>
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Gamecocks earn All-SEC awards

Carson Mason @CARSONANNMASON

With the first University of South Carolina football game of the season in just over a week, preseason predictions are in full swing.

The Gamecocks had four players selected to the 2017 Preseason Coaches All-SEC Football Teams, which were announced on Aug. 23.

Tight end Hayden Hurst and linbacker Skai Moore were named to the first team, while offensive lineman Zack Bailey and wide receiver Deebo Samuel were named to the third team.

Samuel was selected not only as a wide receiver but also as an all-purpose threat. Reigning SEC champion Alabama led the conference with 15 selections, while eight schools have five or more.

Last season, the Gamecocks had two players — Mason Zandi and Elliott Fry — selected to the coaches’ preseason teams, and finished the season with zero players selected by the coaches to All-SEC teams.

Hurst was also selected to the preseason Athlon’s All-SEC first team and is a second-team selection by the media. The 6-foot-5, 250-pound junior compiled 616 receiving yards on 48 passes last season, averaging 12.8 yards per catch. His longest catch was 47 yards, tying Samuel’s for the longest on the for the season, and came against Florida on Nov. 12.

“For me, I just try to do what the coaches tell me,” Hurst said. “I try to be that reliable target for Jake [Bentley] whenever he needs it. I tell him ‘Whenever you’re in trouble, just give it to me. I’ll kind of bail you out.’”

Like Hurst, Moore will return to the field this season with high expectations. The 6-foot-2, 218-pound redshirt senior missed the entire 2016 season due to a surgically-repaired herniated disk in his neck. He is the most decorated player on the USC team, being named to the 2015 All-SEC second team by the Associated Press and Coaches.

Head coach Will Muschamp is not only excited about the return of Moore’s talent, but also his leadership skills to help guide the younger linebackers.

“Skai and Bryson Allen [Williams] are two guys that have played a lot of football,” Muschamp said. “They are two experienced players and productive players as well. In order to be a leader, you got to be a productive guy. You can’t be a guy running your mouth all the time but not make any plays. Those guys do lead by example by how they prepare, how they practice and how they go about their business, but they are very productive.”

Bailey, who is known as the Gamecocks’ top offensive lineman, was a member of the Coaches SEC All-Freshman Team in 2015 and was named to Athlon’s Preseason All-SEC third team this season. After making 15 starts in a row at the left guard position, the 6-foot-6, 311-pound junior is slated to start at right tackle this season.

Similar to Bailey, Samuel put together a standout season in 2016. As a sophomore, he led the Gamecocks with 783 receiving yards on 59 passes, along with six rushing touchdowns. Compared to his SEC counterparts, Samuel ranked second in all-purpose yardage per game with 132, third in receptions per game with 5.9 and fourth in receiving yards per game with 78.3, per GamecocksOnline.

“He’s very dangerous with the ball in his hands,” Muschamp said. “He has really good lower body strength. He can run through tackles, much like a running back with a ball in his hands. We’ve got to find different ways to target him in the game. He needs to be touching the ball 10-15 times.”
PRESEASON ACCOLADES

ZACK BAILEY
Third-Team All-SEC (Coaches)
Third-Team All-SEC (Athlon)

JAKE BENTLEY
Davey O’Brien Award Watch List
Maxwell Award Watch List

RICO DOWDLE
Doak Walker Award Watch List

HAYDEN HURST
Mackey Award Watch List
First-Team All-SEC (Coaches)
Second-Team All-SEC (Media)
First-Team All-SEC (Athlon)

ALAN KNOTT
Rimington Award Watch List

SKAI MOORE
Bednarik Award Watch List
Butkus Award Watch List

DEEBO SAMUEL
Biletnikoff Award Watch List
Maxwell Award Watch List
Hornung Award Watch List
First-Team All-SEC (Coaches - WR)
Third-Team All-SEC (Coaches - AP)
Third-Team All-SEC (Media)
First-Team All-SEC (Athlon - AP)
Second-Team All-SEC (Athlon - KR)

ANTOINE WILDER
Wuerffel Trophy Watch List

Deebo Samuel was named to eight preseason award watch lists and teams.

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Q&A with Technician sports editor Andrew Schnittker

The Gamecocks open the regular season against NC State in the Belk College Kickoff at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte. Kickoff is set for 3 p.m. on Sept. 2. The Daily Gamecock sports staff caught up with Technician sports editor and football beat writer Andrew Schnittker to preview the game.

1. Can you break down NC State’s quarterback situation? How will it impact the season opener against the Gamecocks?

“Redshirt junior Ryan Finley is the starter. He came in last year as a grad transfer and put up a solid, if unspectacular, season. Jalan McClendon is the more mobile QB and will get a few carries, particularly in bad weather games (see: Notre Dame during Hurricane Matthew last year), but the NC State QB job is Finley’s.

Finley had a 60.4 completion percentage last season for 3,055 yards, 18 touchdowns and eight picks. He was coming into a new team with a new offensive coordinator, so those are definitely solid numbers all things considered. However, in year two, with a year under his belt, NC State needs Finley to take another step if this team is going to live up to its potential. That means pushing the ball downfield more in particular.

Finley was ninth in the ACC last year in yards per attempt at 7.6, and he’s going to need to improve in terms of stretching the field if the Pack wants to beat teams like Louisville, Florida State and Clemson this year. He certainly has the weapons to do it, with a deep receiving core that includes Kelvin Harmon and Stephen Louis as holdovers from last year, and JuMichael Ramos and C.J. Riley returning from injury, along with a pair of versatile options in all-purpose back Jaylen Samuels and slot receiver Nyheim Hines. Finley has, by his own admission, been working on his deep ball this offseason.

Now’s the time to see that in action, and that will need to start against South Carolina. The Gamecocks have an athletic secondary, however, so he will also need to be careful with his decision making and not sling the ball downfield with reckless abandon. Finding a middle ground will be important. Harmon is excellent at going up to make contested catches, so he figures to be a big part of the game plan for this one.”

2. There aren’t many holes in the NC State defense. What are the keys to defending Jake Bentley and his arsenal of young offensive weapons?

“Defense is definitely the strength of this NC State team, particularly the front seven, and especially the defensive line. NC State has four starters in the trench that could very well hear their names called at the NFL draft in April. Bradley Chubb is a potential top-15 pick and one-man wrecking crew coming off the quarterback’s blindside, and he had a season last year that easily could have earned him an NFL draft spot. Chubb was tied fourth in the country in tackles for loss with 21 and 14th in sacks with 10. Kentavious Street is no slouch in the pass-rushing department either.

This NC State defense is excellent at stopping the run, ranking third in the country in rush defense last year. Justin Jones and BJ Hill clog the middle of the line, and linebackers Airius Moore and Jerod Fernandez help out in that department as well. Inside runs definitely aren’t the way to go against the Wolfpack.

In terms of defending Bentley and the Gamecocks, the one defensive question mark for this NC State team is the secondary, which lost three starters from last year. It’s going to be important for the pass rush, led by Chubb, to be strong in this game, and not give Bentley time to get set and pick his throws. If the Pack can stuff the run and force Bentley to make hurried throws by pressuring him, making life easier on its inexperienced defensive backs, that’s the recipe defensive coordinator Dave Huxtable is probably looking for in this one.”

3. What will the Wolf Pack’s run game look like without Matt Dayes?

“So much of the talk around what this NC State team is capable
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4. Fill in the blank:

NC State will win if ______________. NC State will lose if ______________.

“NC State will win if this team plays its game and executes. There’s very much a “something to prove feel” to this group for NC State. The national media has hyped this team up a lot, and for good reason. This team showed in games against the national champions in Clemson and perennial contender in Florida State last year that it has the talent to go toe-to-toe with anyone. Unfortunately, mistakes and a lack of execution in big moments cost the team a victory in both cases. Most of the starters from last year are back, and there’s a sense of unfinished business and desire to show they can finish in those moments this year.

On paper, I think NC State is the better team here. If the pass rush can get to Bentley, the run defense picks up where it left off last year, and this is the first act of Finley taking a step forward and leading this offense to the next level, I think NC State can get [this] done.

NC State will lose if they take this game lightly, or play sloppy and make unforced errors. While NC State is the better team on paper, South Carolina is certainly no slouch, and the Pack needs to take them seriously. The Pack need only look to its in-state rivals to see what fooling around here could mean. Two years ago, an 11-1 North Carolina Tar Heels team dropped its first game of the season in this very venue against the Gamecocks, a cautionary tale for the Pack.

While the Pack played well against teams like Clemson and Florida State last year, it also brought sloppy play and mistakes that resulted in two losses in games the Pack had no business losing against East Carolina and Boston College. That’s not to compare the Gamecocks to those two teams, but if the Pack is serious about living up to its potential, this is a game it needs to win. That means focusing on the field and executing its game plan, however. Losing focus getting caught up in the national hype train, or looking ahead to bigger games down the road in ACC play could easily cost the team a victory here.

Week one is not about earning a ranking, what happened last season, or what could happen later this season. It’s about getting a win against the South Carolina Gamecocks, and that’s where the Pack’s focus needs to stay.”

Follow Schnittker on Twitter @aschnitt53 and read his coverage of the Wolf Pack at technicianonline.com/sports/.
The Gamecocks’ first SEC opponent on the road comes against Missouri at 7 p.m. on Sept. 9. In the past five meetings between these teams dating back to 2012, USC holds a 3-2 advantage, including a 31-21 victory last season at Williams-Brice Stadium.

The Daily Gamecock sports staff caught up with Columbia Missourian sports reporter Alec Lewis to preview the game.

Q: Like South Carolina head coach Will Muschamp, Barry Odom will be entering his second season with the team. How do you think Missouri will take a step forward this year?
A: “I think Missouri will take a step forward in many respects because it is Barry Odom’s second year. Unlike Will Muschamp, Odom had never held the head coaching position in college. He was a defensive coordinator, so leading a team in 2016-17 was a unique experience. Odom shuffled defensive schemes (and coaches) but settled on them towards the end of 2016, so I think another year with the same group will benefit the defense. I also think another year with the fast-paced offense manned by offensive coordinator Josh Heupel will really allow Missouri to take a step forward.”

Q: The Missouri defense ranked among the nation’s worst in all four major categories last season. What are the keys to defending Jake Bentley and his arsenal of young offensive weapons?
A: “The keys to defending Jake Bentley and his weapons are to limit them out the perimeter, which will be difficult for Missouri. The Tigers lost their top two cornerbacks to graduation in 2016 -- first team all-SEC corner Aarion Penton and John Gibson -- so the current group is very young. Sophomore corner Demarkus Acy will be critical in limiting Bentley, as will linebacker-safety hybrid and Kansas State transfer Kaleb Prewitt. I also think applying pressure on Bentley will be critical, and Missouri’s new-look defensive line under first-year defensive line coach Brick Haley will be important. Senior defensive end Marcell Frazier and junior defensive tackle Terry Beckner Jr. (who is coming off of two ACL years) will need to probe prove critical in that area.”

Q: Conversely, the Missouri offense has a slew of starters returning, including quarterback Drew Lock. What do you expect from him this season? How will he fare against USC’s defense?
A: “Not only does the Missouri offensive have a slew of offensive starters returning, but the team has all of their offensive starters returning. Drew Lock will benefit from another year under Heupel, but he’ll also benefit from sophomore running back Damarea Crockett. Last year, Crockett ran for the most yards of any Missouri freshman running back in history. His progression, as well as Lock’s progression and repore with returning receivers J’Mon Moore, Johnathon Johnson and Dimetrios Mason should allow Missouri to put up a really solid fight against the Gamecocks.”

Q: What is your prediction for the game and why?
A: “Missouri has the home field advantage in this one and although I do believe Bentley and Deebo Samuel will exploit the Missouri secondary, I also think Lock and Crockett will prove too much. I think the Tigers are going to knock off South Carolina in a really high-scoring affair. I’ll predict it, 35-31.”

Follow Lewis on Twitter @alec_lewis and read his coverage at https://www.columbiamissourian.com/sports/.
Q&A with *Kentucky Kernel* sports editor Chris Leach

Carson Mason
@CARSONANNMASON

The Gamecocks host SEC East opponent Kentucky in their home opener at 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 16. The Wildcats have defeated the Gamecocks for three straight meetings dating back to 2014, including a 17-10 win in Lexington last season.

The Daily Gamecock sports staff caught up with Kentucky Kernel sports editor Chris Leach to preview the game.

Q: The Wildcats recorded the second-most rushing yards in program history last season. What is expected from All-American Benny Snell and the Wildcats’ run game this season?

A: “Obviously expectations for Benny Snell are big. Many expect Snell to be a workhorse running back who could threaten the century-yard mark in any game. As for the running backs behind Snell, the Cats probably won’t have as much depth as they did last year, but A.J. Rose and Sihiem King should provide valuable snaps for the offense. King played well in UK’s spring game while Rose has performed well in practice coming off his redshirt year. I don’t think the run game will be as good as it was last year, but it will still be good enough to get the job done and open up the field for the passing game.”

Q: Quarterback Stephen Johnson led the way in an upset over Louisville to end the regular season last year. How can he build on that performance this season? What did he do in spring practice to fortify his position as the No. 1 starter?

A: “I think what Johnson needs to do to build off last season is limit his turnovers. He went 5-3 in games he started last season, and a big way he can fortify his starting job is limit his turnovers.”

Q: The Kentucky pass rush has proven to be potent in the past, but there are still some question marks with the defensive line. What are the keys to defending USC’s dynamic offense?

A: “The first key, and a key defensive coordinator Matt House emphasizes a lot in scrimmages, is stopping the run. That will be difficult due to UK’s lack of depth on the defensive line and Rico Dowdle’s emergence, but if the defensive line can stop the run and pressure Jake Bentley, I think UK’s defense will be just fine. The secondary is headlined by preseason All-SEC third-teamer Mike Edwards, and if the pass rush can cause Bentley to throw some sloppy passes, that could be the difference maker in a close game. However I think all of that will be difficult for UK’s defense to do, especially in only their third game.”

Q: What is your prediction for the game and why?

A: “27-24, South Carolina. South Carolina will be a difficult opponent for the Cats, especially on the road, but honestly this game could go either way. I just think having home-field advantage, especially in the first home game of the season, will overwhelm the Cats a and they could make costly mistakes. However, if the Cats walk into South Carolina with 2-0 record and lots of confidence, I could see them pulling it off, but initially I think USC will be too much to overcome.”

Follow Leach on Twitter @chrisleach250 and read his coverage of the Wildcats at http://www.kykernel.com/sports/.
My friend had too much to drink, so I suggested we get something to eat instead of going to the next bar.

#WhatWouldCockyDo

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Changes coming to popular tailgate lots

Memorial tailgating lot has been the staple of tailgating for University of South Carolina football games for years. This season, it will be under new ownership, changing from Morrison Memorial, LLC to Viral College Entertainment, LLC.

According to new operator Alex Waelde, the lot will undergo a multitude of positive changes. One of the most important for Waelde was reducing lines at the entrance and bathrooms. He said the lot will have approximately 15 portable bathrooms this season, which is more than double the amount it had last season.

“For starters, last year I think there was like seven bathrooms on the property,” Waelde said. “I’m putting a minimum of 15 this year. Quite frankly, they won’t even know which one to pick to go to.”

Waelde, who also runs the fraternity lots, will implement a wristband policy this season in an effort to reduce waiting at the lot’s entrance.

“The spot owners are just going to pick up wristbands and they can give them out to whoever they want,” Waelde said. “That way, when you’re coming up to Memorial Lot, whenever you decide to get there, you’re not waiting in line. You can just hold up your wrist and walk right in ... identical to how they do it in the fraternity lots.”

Fast food will also be available at Memorial Lot this season with a tent selling a limited Chick-Fil-A menu, including chicken sandwiches for $5 with cash or credit card.

There will be a new private security company working at the lots this season and approximately two to six law enforcement officers will be present on the property on game days.

With the new changes, Waelde said the lot is expected to sell out before the Gamecocks’ home opener on Sept. 16, and encourages students to purchase them before space fills up.

“We sold 180 spots in 12 hours,” Waelde said in an Aug. 22 interview. “When I tweeted out that the spots were on sale, literally the website crashed. Like the server crashed ... I think we have 30 spots left. The last time I checked it was 31. We’ve still got a month before the first home game ... We’re about to fill up and when we’re full, we’re full.”

In addition to Memorial Lot, upgrades will be made to the lots dubbed “the fraternity lots.” Waelde said the biggest change is that all 16 fraternities are going to be on one property, instead of two.

Similar to Memorial Lot, there will also be food vendors, ATMs and “triple” the amount of bathrooms on the lot this season.

“It’s going to be a really nice grass area in the back and then there’s concrete in the front,” Waelde said. “Honestly, it’s certainly going to be something a lot nicer than what it’s been in the past.”
How to get a student ticket

Carson Mason
@CARSONANNMASON

When most students arrive to Carolina, the biggest question they have is, “How do I get tickets to football games?” The answer is by attending other sporting events at USC.

Not all university students can receive free football tickets, so the USC Athletics Department set up a points-based loyalty program to determine who receives priority. Students who attend athletic events will receive points, increasing their chances to get tickets for popular sporting events, including football, men’s and women’s basketball, and baseball.

Students can track their points by logging on to the Student Account Manager website. Point totals are updated on a weekly basis.

Depending on their year at USC, each student receives an automatic amount of points. Freshmen receive three points, sophomores receive four points, juniors and graduate students receive six points, and seniors receive eight points. Additionally, students receive 10 percent of the points they earned in the previous school year.

So, how many points is each athletic event worth? Non-conference football and basketball games are worth two points, while all SEC football and basketball games are worth one point. All other sports, outside of football and basketball, are worth one point each. There are also points specials throughout the year, including each sport hosting a double rewards game for students.

Here are the step-by-step instructions for getting a football ticket, according to Gamecock Rewards:

1. Request a ticket on the Student Account Manager for the specific game you want to attend.
2. Receive a ticket. You should be notified of this via email.
3. Attend the event. When you enter the game, a staff member will scan your CarolinaCard to make sure the ticket is on there. For football, this step is crucial. If you’ve claimed a ticket and don’t get it scanned, you could lose access to all student tickets for the rest of the season.

For more information, follow @GamecockRewards or email screward@mailbox.sc.edu.

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Tailgating and the Cockabooses

For many, it’s not a real Saturday in the South without tailgating. From the Fairgrounds to the Memorial lots, which got an upgrade this offseason, there is no shortage of Gamecocks getting ready for kickoff. Family and friends come together to play cornhole, chow down on some Bojangle’s chicken and enjoy the company of their fellow Carolina fans.

While some are content to just run some music through a Bluetooth speaker and toss around an old football, others go above and beyond. Nowhere is this seen better than in the famous Cockabooses. Converted from actual train cars, these deluxe tailgate spots (they can cost hundreds of thousands) line the back of Gamecock Park at Williams-Brice Stadium. They often feature big-screen TVs, kitchens and picturesque views of the stadium.

“Sandstorm”

One of Gamecock football’s newest traditions, “Sandstorm” has quickly become a fan favorite. The Finnish techno beat started to catch on at Williams-Brice in the 2000s and has quickly become a critical part of gameday. Fans jump up and down to the beat while waving their rally towels and chanting “U-S-C” before kickoffs and during moments of peak intensity in the game. It’s a sure-fire way to make the crowd part of the game itself.

“2001”

There’s a reason South Carolina football’s entrance is ranked among the best in the nation. It’s a battle not to get chills as the soundtrack from “2001: A Space Odyssey” builds within Willy-B along with the energy of the crowd. The whole thing crescendos as our beloved mascot, Cocky, makes his grand entrance and the team runs onto the field.

And this season fans will have a new aspect of this time-honored tradition to enjoy. Pyrotechnics that shoot 20-foot
flames have been added to the grand opening.

The Mighty Sound of the Southeast
From pre-game to post-game, the Carolina Band can bring you to your feet, win, lose or draw. Their pregame show features class medleys such as the university’s old fight song, and they bring you a unique halftime show every game. They also help keep the crowd hyped throughout the game with spirit chants and songs from the stands. Make sure to play close attention so you can catch on to which chants go with each down on both offense and defense.

And a secret only true Gamecocks know is to stay in the stadium until other fans have left to see the band’s real closing performance. They play out the last stragglers with a rendition of “Amazing Grace” and a final singing of the alma mater, “We Hail Thee Carolina.”

The Alma Mater
No matter the score, Gamecocks always end football games by coming together to sing the university’s alma mater, “We Hail Thee, Carolina.” The coaches and players gather in the east end zone in front of the student section as fans in the stands put their arms around each other. Together, the crowd sways in time and sings along. The tradition culminates with the song’s final line, “Here’s a health, Carolina, forever to thee!” Students and alumni raise their right hand as if offering a toast to the university.

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One of the most beloved Gamecock football traditions is getting an upgrade this season.

The University of South Carolina Athletics Department has added pyrotechnics to the Gamecocks’ “2001” pregame entrance in an effort to fire up fans before the game. The pyrotechnic additions include four new units that produce 20-foot flames as players run onto the field to the theme song from “2001-A Space Odyssey.” Eight carbon dioxide jets were also added, creating suspense with 20- to 25-foot smoke columns.

The USC football team first displayed the upgraded “2001” entrance at its practice at Williams-Brice Stadium on Tuesday. The athletics department opened the practice to USC faculty, staff and upperclassmen in a show of appreciation.

According to Pyrotechnico FX show producer Justin Pruett, the Gamecocks are the only NCAA team utilizing pyrotechnic effects on a massive scale for football games. Similar equipment is mostly used in the NFL, Pruett said.

“What makes a great entrance is everything that South Carolina does when they come out of that tunnel,” said SEC Network analyst Matt Stinchcomb. “They’ve got a fantastic soundtrack in the ‘Space Odyssey.’ The fans get wound up and they’re into it. It’s got really everything you’re looking for in a great entrance. It’s almost as if wrestling took its cue from South Carolina.”

Along with the fiery entrance, students got to listen to the new in-stadium DJ, who blasted energetic hip-hop music through the sound system. The DJ’s booth was near section 10 in the right corner of the lower-deck bleachers, but his bass-bumping tunes could be heard all around Williams-Brice.

“It won’t take away anything from what our band does at the game,” head coach Will Muschamp said of the DJ. “Our band does a fantastic job with the excitement they bring to our football team and to our game-day experience. It will not affect anything that our band does on game-days. It’s more of a pregame activity for our players, which we played music in those situations anyway.”

Gamecock fans who weren’t able to attend practice Tuesday will be able to see the in-stadium upgrades in the home opener against Kentucky at 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 16.
BIRTHDAYS

Ty'Son Williams RB
Sept. 4

DJ Smith DB
Sept. 8

OrTre Smith WR
Sept. 11

Mon Denson RB
Sept. 25

Ryan Green OL
Sept. 26

Steven Montac DB
Sept. 26

Randrecous Davis WR
Sept. 27

MJ Webb DL
Oct. 10

Bryson Allen-Williams LB
Oct. 16

Caleb Kinlaw RB
Oct. 17

Daniel Fennell DL
Oct. 18

Chris Smith DB
Oct. 27

DJ Wonnum DL
Oct. 31

Jaylin Dickerson DB
Nov. 2

Zack Bailey OL
Nov. 8

Bryan Edwards WR
Nov. 13

Chavis Dawkins WR
Nov. 15

Jake Bentley QB
Nov. 23

CJ Freeman RB
Nov. 26
Top 10 essentials for attending games at Williams-Brice

Carson Mason
@CARSONANNMASON

1. Carolina Card
Your Carolina Card acts as your ticket to getting into all USC sporting events, including Gamecock football games. If you’ve claimed a ticket via Student Account Manager, make sure you get it scanned at the game or you could lose access to all tickets for the rest of the season. For more information on how to receive free football tickets from the USC Athletics Department, see page 49.

2. Cowboy boots
Welcome to the south, ya’ll! Cowboy boots are the go-to shoe choice at football games for female students. Paired with a black or garnet dress, cowboy boots are a comfortable form of footwear that will survive those long hikes from the tailgating lots to the Williams-Brice entrance. Pro tip: Wear long thick socks with your boots to avoid getting blisters.

3. Black dress
The black dress is not only a fashion staple for everyday life but also for Gamecock football games. Female students love pairing black dresses with cowboy boots and other accessories to create a comfortable yet stylish gameday look. Garnet dresses, jerseys and USC t-shirts are also popular gameday apparel options.

4. Gamecock Polo
For male students, a Gamecock polo is equivalent to the black dress for female students at football games. It’s a classic apparel option for USC football games. From black polos to different logos, the University Bookstore sells a wide variety of polos at affordable prices.

5. Clear bag
Beginning last year, the USC Athletics Department has implemented a clear bag policy for all ticketed athletic events. The policy, which will continue this year, limits the size and type of bags that are accepted into sporting events, including football games. The approved bags include clear plastic, vinyl or PVC bags that do not exceed 12” x 6” x 12,” one-gallon clear plastic freezer bags, small clutches and bags no larger than 4.5” x 6.5.” Certain medical items are allowed but must undergo inspection at specified gates.

6. Gamecock face tattoos
Temporary Gamecock tattoos are an easy and affordable way to accessorize at football games. They won’t get in your way when you’re jumping up and down and waving your rally towel during Sandstorm. Plus, they look great in up-close pictures and selfies. Packs are available at the University Bookstore.

7. Cold beverages
Columbia isn’t dubbed “famously hot” for nothing. It’s crucial to stay hydrated during the first month of the season when temperatures are still in the high 80s to low 90s. Along with sweet tea and other refreshments, make sure to bring a jug of water to your tailgating party.

8. Bojangles
Students love chowing down on fried chicken, seasoned fries and made-from-scratch biscuits before, during and after USC football games. Not to mention, washing it down with a large sweet tea. With a store at 1130 Bluff Road, Bojangles is located within walking distance of Williams-Brice stadium. The 4,300-square-foot restaurant is open on Saturdays from 5:30 a.m. - 10 p.m.

9. Visor/Sunglasses with a strap
Don’t let the sun ruin your view of the Gamecock football action on the field. Sunlight and visors are key for witnessing all of the gridiron action, especially during day games in the early months of the season. No matter what time the game starts, visors became an increasingly popular accessory among male fans during coach Steve Spurrier’s tenure.

10. Corn hole
Corn hole is the classic college football tailgating competition and is widely popular in the Memorial Lot near Williams-Brice. The game, also called bags, dummy boards, bean bag toss or Baggo, involves players take turns throwing bean bags at a raised platform with a hole at the end. Throwing the bag in the hole scores three points, while throwing one on the platform scores one. Play continues until a team or player reaches 21 points.
Russell House watch party brings gameday spirit

Mary Ramsey
@MCOLLEEN1996

It's another year of wishing and waiting for a Gamecock home game, but that doesn't mean students are doomed to watching the season opener alone.

The Russell House University Union is hosting a watch party for the season opener against NC State this Saturday. Kickoff is set for 3 p.m., but it's recommended those looking for a good seat arrive early. The Russell House Ballroom and Theater are the main locations for the parties. Overflow rooms will also be open throughout the Russell House.

In addition to watching the game, students can also enjoy free food and games. Those wishing to take in the excitement in a more intimate setting can find the game on ESPN.

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University of South Carolina

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For USC football players, using social media during the season comes with more risk than reward, said head coach Will Muschamp. “We talked about the positive impact it can have in marketing your brand, but we also talked about the negative impact it can have, and when you press send, it’s over,” Muschamp said.

Muschamp said he isn’t enforcing a strict social media ban this season, but is encouraging his players to be smart and use good judgement online. “Our guys just need to be smart,” Muschamp said. “We don’t want to talk about our football activities on the Internet. That’s no one else’s business; what happens here stays here. Our guys understand that. I just ask them to use good judgment. I’m not going to be the Twitter police; that’s not something I care to do. I let our guys use good judgment and make good choices and decisions.”

While most of the players, including quarterback Jake Bentley, are going offline for the season, there are still multiple must-follow accounts to stay updated on the team and get your daily Gamecock football fix. Check out our favorite Twitter accounts below:

Name: Justin King
Handle: @JustinKing
Followers: 21,700

Justin King was hired as USC’s Associate Athletics Director for New and Creative Media in February. King plays a key role in developing the social media accounts and oversees the production of graphics and video content. In just a few months on the job, the USC grad has drawn widespread attention for his stunning videos and promotional graphics. If you’re looking to get excited for the upcoming football season, King is a must-follow.

Name: Will Muschamp
Handle: @CoachWMuschamp
Followers: 274,000

Keep your eyes peeled for the legendary “#SpursUp” tweets from South Carolina head coach Will Muschamp. The
tweets signal a recruit has committed to the Gamecocks and garner buzz from online communities of Gamecock fans. Muschamp is also known to tweet updates on former Gamecocks who are succeeding in the NFL. He may not be the Twitter police, but his own social media game is pretty strong.

Name: Cocky
Handle: @Cocky2001
Followers: 37,500
USC’s beloved mascot is as active on Twitter as he is on the dance floor. Follow to see which sporting events Cocky will be attending and to get an inside look at the life of the legendary USC mascot.

Name: Gamecock Athletics
Handle: @GamecocksOnline
Followers: 246,000
The official Twitter account for Gamecock Athletics is a one-stop shop for updates, videos and highlights of every USC sport from football to swimming and diving.

Name: Marcus Lattimore
Handle: @MarcusLattimore
Followers: 257,000
The former USC wide receiver and fan favorite is now a head coach at Heathwood Hall Episcopal School in Columbia. Follow for updates on his personal life, new coaching gig and of course, Gamecock football memories.

Name: DailyGamecock Sports
Handle: @TDG_Sports
Followers: 3,337
For updates and articles on USC football and other sports, follow The Daily Gamecock Sports’ official Twitter account.

Name: Gamecock Student Rewards
Handle: @GamecockRewards
Followers: 4,947
To earn football tickets and other prizes, including Under Armour apparel, students must collect points by attending USC athletic events. The Gamecock Rewards’ Twitter account is a helpful resource for students looking to maximize and cash in on their points. It not only reminds students of upcoming games, but also shares point specials where students can earn double or triple the original point value for a game.

If you or someone you know is a victim of sexual assault or relationship violence, call 803-777-8248*

sc.edu/stopsexualassault

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Breaking down the football schedule

The Gamecocks open the season against NC State on Sept. 2 and begin conference play at Missouri in Week 2 on Sept. 9.

Week 1
Opponent: NC State
Date: Saturday, Sept. 2
Time: 3 p.m. ET
Location: Bank of America Stadium, Charlotte, NC
TV info: ESPN

Things to know: The Gamecocks will face NC State in the Belk College Kickoff to open the season. In 2015, the Gamecocks played UNC at the same location, earning a 17-13 win and handing the Tar Heels their only loss of the regular season. The Daily Gamecock staff chatted with Andrew Schnittker, the sports editor and football beat writer of NC State’s Technician, to see what he expects of the Wolfpack in the season opener.

Week 2
Opponent: Missouri
Date: Saturday, Sept. 9
Time: 7 p.m. ET
Location: Faurot Field, Columbia, MO
TV info: ESPN 2

Things to know: The Gamecocks defeated the Tigers 31-21 last season at Williams-Brice Stadium. Like head coach Will Muschamp, Barry Odom is entering his second season with the team. Quarterback Drew Lock returns as the starter for the Tigers, hoping to utilize a slew of new weapons. Conversely, the Missouri defense has some question marks, ranking among the nation’s worst in all four major categories last season.

Week 3
Opponent: Kentucky
Date: Saturday, Sept. 16
Time: 7:30 p.m. ET
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: SEC Network

Things to know: After facing Missouri on the road in the second week of the season, the Gamecocks will play their home opener against the Kenutcky Wildcats at Williams-Brice Stadium. The Athletics Department announced the game as a “Black Out,” encouraging students to wear all black apparel, matching the football players’ uniforms for that game. The theme was made to coincide with Columbia being a central location for the eclipse on Aug. 21. “Coach Muschamp wanted to do something special for the home opener,” said Eric Nichols, senior associate AD for marketing and branding. “We will have several types of black shirts available at our retail outlets that can be worn for the game and throughout the season.”

Week 4
Opponent: Louisiana Tech
Date: Saturday, Sept. 23
Time: TBA
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Bulldogs will acclimate a new quarterback into the starting role for the fourth straight season. Sophomore duel threat J'Mar Smith will take over for Ryan Higgins, hoping to lead Louisiana Tech to its fourth consecutive nine-win season under coach Skip Holtz. The last time these two teams faced was over 20 years ago on Sept. 16, 1995, with USC earning a 68-21 win.

Week 5
Opponent: Texas A&M
Date: Saturday, Sept. 30
Time: TBA
Location: Kyle Field, College Station, TX
TV info: TBA

Things to know: Since 2014, the Gamecocks have lost three straight meetings with the Aggies, including a 24-13 loss at Williams-Brice Stadium last season. When the two teams met last year, the Gamecocks were still rotating between starting quarterbacks, while the Aggies’ offense was solidified with starter Trevor Knight. Now, the tables have turned. Jake Bentley is the Gamecocks’ No. 1 starter and the Aggies will bring in a new quarterback this fall, who will likely be determined early in the season. Their options include senior Jake Hubenak, who was Knight’s backup last season, redshirt freshman Nick Starkel and highly-touted true freshman prospect Kellen Mond.

Week 6
Opponent: Arkansas
Date: Saturday, Oct. 7
Time: TBA
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: TBA

Things to know: Prior to this matchup, the Gamecocks last faced the Razorbacks in 2013, earning a 52-7 win. Quarterback Austin Allen will look to get back to his performance in the first half of last season, including three straight wins over Louisiana Tech, TCU and Texas State to open the season. Arkansas finished with a 7-5 regular season record last season, qualifying for the Belk Bowl, but losing to Virginia Tech 35-24.

Week 7
Opponent: Tennessee
Date: Saturday, Oct. 14
Time: TBA
Location: Neyland Stadium, Knoxville, TN
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gamecocks defeated the Tigers 31-21 last season at Williams-Brice Stadium. Like head coach Will Muschamp, Barry Odom is entering his second season with the team. Quarterback Drew Lock returns as the starter for the Tigers, hoping to utilize a slew of new weapons. Conversely, the Missouri defense has some question marks, ranking among the nation’s worst in all four major categories last season.

Week 8
Opponent: South Carolina
Date: Saturday, Oct. 28
Time: TBA
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gamecocks face their SEC East rival for the first time since 2016, when the Gamecocks lost to the Gamecocks 46-14 in Columbia.

Week 9
Opponent: Vanderbilt
Date: Saturday, Nov. 4
Time: TBA
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gamecocks have not played the Commodores since 2012, when the Gamecocks defeated Vanderbilt 41-10.

Week 10
Opponent: Georgia
Date: Saturday, Nov. 11
Time: TBA
Location: Sanford Stadium, Athens, GA
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gamecocks have not played the Bulldogs since 2014, when the Gamecocks defeated Georgia 23-10.

Week 11
Opponent: Missouri
Date: Saturday, Nov. 18
Time: TBA
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gamecocks have not played the Tigers since 2015, when the Gamecocks defeated Missouri 31-21.

Week 12
Opponent: Georgia Tech
Date: Saturday, Nov. 25
Time: TBA
Location: Bobby Dodd Stadium, Atlanta, GA
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gamecocks have not played the Yellow Jackets since 2014, when the Gamecocks defeated Georgia Tech 29-27.
Knoxville, TN
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gamecocks’ biggest upset win last season came at Williams-Brice Stadium over Tennessee, which had a preseason top 10 ranking. The Vols didn’t live up to all of the preseason hype last season, finishing with a 9-4 overall record. This season they are ranked No. 24 in the Preseason USA Today Coaches’ Poll and will look to acclimate a new quarterback and offensive coordinator into the system.

Week 8 — BYE WEEK

Week 9
Opponent: Vanderbilt
Date: Saturday, Oct. 28
Time: TBA
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: TBA

Things to know: USC opened last season on a positive note with a 13-10 nationally-televised win over Vanderbilt in Nashville. The Commodores, who finished 6-7, 3-5 (SEC), played in a bowl game for the first time in three years at the end of last season. Quarterback Kyle Shurmur returns for his junior season after combining for four touchdowns and 689 passing yards against Tennessee and Ole Miss to end the season.

Week 10
Opponent: Georgia
Date: Saturday, Nov. 4
Time: TBA
Location: Sanford Stadium, Athens, GA
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gamecocks will enter this game having lost to the Bulldogs for two straight meetings. Like USC quarterback Jake Bentley, Georgia quarterback Jacob Eason will return for his sophomore season with a slew of offensive weapons — both old and new. The Gamecocks limited Eason to 29 yards and one touchdown in their matchup last season, but running back Nick Chubb carried the majority of the offensive load with two rushing touchdowns. He and Sony Michel are returning for their senior seasons.

Week 11
Opponent: Florida
Date: Saturday, Nov. 11
Time: TBA
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gators will look to defend their SEC East crown for the third straight season, but they’ll have to do so with a new quarterback and defensive coordinator. The Gamecocks lost 20-7 to the Gators in Gainesville last season in what was quarterback Jake Bentley’s first test on the road after three straight wins at home. With former USC head coach Steve Spurrier and current head coach Will Muschamp both having coached at Florida, this matchup is definitely one to circle on your calendar.

Week 12
Opponent: Wofford
Date: Saturday, Nov. 18
Time: TBA
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: TBA

Things to know: These two Palmetto State teams last faced in 2012 with the Gamecocks taking a 24-7 victory in Columbia. The Terriers, coached by Mike Ayers, are the Gamecocks’ sole FCS opponent this season. They finished 10-4 overall with a 6-2 record in the Southern Conference. The Gamecocks are 19-4 all-time against the Terriers having won 16 straight. Last season, the Terriers’ lone FBS game came against SEC opponent Ole Miss, resulting in a 38-13 loss in Week 2.

Week 13
Opponent: Clemson
Date: Saturday, Nov. 25
Time: TBA
Location: Williams-Brice Stadium, Columbia, SC
TV info: TBA

Things to know: The Gamecocks are hoping to turn the page on a 56-7 blowout loss to the Tigers last season in Clemson. USC has lost three straight Palmetto Bowl meetings to the Tigers, dating back to 2014. After winning the National Championship in January, Clemson was ranked No. 5 in the Preseason USA Today Coaches’ Poll. One of the biggest questions the Tigers face is “Who can fill the role of Heisman Trophy runner-up Deshaun Watson?” Between junior Kelly Bryant, five-star true freshman Hunter Johnson and redshirt freshman Zerrick Cooper, the Tigers aren’t shy of options.

SEC Championship
Date: Saturday, Dec. 2
Time: 4 p.m. ET
Location: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Atlanta, GA
Crossword

Edited by Rich Norris and Joyce Lewis

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ACROSS
1 Draft day announcements
6 In-tents experience?
10 Like some dental floss
14 End of ___
15 Jai ___
16 Wrapped up
17 Artifact
18 Board member?
19 Unites
20 Volleyball players in Dublin?
23 New York's ___ Island
24 Sturgeon delicacy
25 Engineering sch. on the Hudson River
28 Euros in Rome?
32 Deadly snake
35 White House signing memento
36 ___ Trinket, "The Hunger Games" chaperone played by Elizabeth Banks
37 Airport inspectors in Beijing?
42 Cosmonaut Vladimir
43 Partner of abet
44 Most of Ariz.
45 Dance lessons in Madrid?
50 CIA predecessor
51 Drivers' org.
52 Phillies' div.
56 Number cruncher in New Delhi?
59 SALT subject
62 Crab Key villain
63 Mazda MX-5, familiarly
64 Witty tweet, e.g.
65 Novelist O'Brien
66 Bunsen burner
67 Small ticks?
68 Travel aimlessly

DOWN
1 Musée d'Orsay city
2 Still
3 Salsa singer Cruz
4 Spring 2008 "Dancing with the Stars" champion Yamaguchi
5 Potpourri pouch
6 Wedding reception sight
7 Hit the ground
8 Hindu incantation
9 Word with carrier or passenger
10 Floors
11 Abbr. in many addresses
12 Crossed (out)
13 Jr. and sr.
21 Loses it
22 Lute-like instrument
25 Served seconds, say
26 Figure skating event
27 In other words, in other words
29 Novelist Harper
30 Quechua speakers
31 He served as A.G. under his brother
32 "Don't ___ innocent"
33 Port arrivals
34 Pockets for falafel
35 Start to skid?
36 French spa
37 40 Strike
38 Many a Mideast native
39 Appliance maker since 1934
40 Attack
41 Vandalize
42 Mideast native
43 Partner of abet
44 Most of Ariz.
45 Dance lessons in Madrid?
46 Whale of a whale
47 Bob, for one
48 Like peacocks

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By The Mepham Group

8/31/17

Level 1 2 3 4

How to Play
Complete the grid so each row, column AND 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit 1 to 9.

Solutions to today’s puzzle

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