3-27-2015

The Daily Gamecock, Friday, March 27, 2015

University of South Carolina, Office of Student Media

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Weekender
Friday, March 27, 2015
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“I know my children will never have to say, ‘Mom died of ovarian cancer.’”

— Angelina Jolie Pitt on her decision to have her ovaries surgically removed

“We are all devastated about Zayn Malik, but we must soldier on.”

— Boston Mayor Marty Walsh in response to a teenage girl asking why he hasn’t made a statement on the One Direction member’s departure

“You can’t expect anything to go on indefinitely. That’s not what being a human is about.”

— Julian Fellowes, the creator and writer of “Downton Abbey” on next season being the series’ last

“We have to play to our strength, and our strength isn’t always playing fast. It’s playing [calculated].”

— USC women’s basketball coach Dawn Staley in preparation for the team’s game against UNC
As South Carolina senior forward Aleighsa Welch, junior guard Asia Dozier and sophomore center Alaina Coates fielded questions from the media following their 29-point win over Syracuse, the attention quickly shifted to the Gamecocks’ next game. When asked if they would rather face North Carolina or Ohio State in the Sweet 16, Dozier and Coates both turned to Welch, expecting the team’s veteran leader to answer. She did, but smiled before doing so. Welch then gathered her thoughts, and offered a statement that would make a public relations agency proud.

Welch said she and her teammates wouldn’t care whether they faced North Carolina or Ohio St., although a potential showdown with the Tar Heels was the elephant in the room.

The game comes nearly one year after the Tar Heels knocked South Carolina out of the 2014 NCAA tournament in the same round. North Carolina also defeated the Gamecocks in December of 2013.

Now just two wins away from a trip to the Final Four, South Carolina is focused entirely on just advancing and living to see another day in the NCAA tournament. But the fact that the Tar Heels ended South Carolina’s season one year ago isn’t lost on the Gamecocks’ minds, either.

“T h e y ’ r e competitors,” Staley said. “They know what happened last year. They know this team ended our hopes of advancing further than the Sweet 16.”

Though 12 months haven’t even completely passed since the last battle between the two teams, a lot has changed in Chapel Hill.

For starters, legendary head coach Sylvia Hatchell has returned to the sidelines after missing the 2013-2014 season with leukemia.

Additionally, former Tar Heel Diamond DeShields, who scored 19 points in North Carolina’s 65-58 win over South Carolina last March, has since transferred to Tennessee.

North Carolina might be a different team in terms of player and coach personnel, but the Tar Heels are by and large the same team stylistically, Staley says.

Hatchell’s teams love to force turnovers and constantly try to run the floor as frequently as possible, in an attempt to speed the game up.

When the Tar Heels get running, they can be hard to stop. Sophomore guard Allisha Grayleads the Tar Heels with 15.9 points per game and sophomore forward Stephanie Mavunga has become more of a
threat as the season’s progressed, both with her scoring and rebounding.

For Staley, it’ll be important for the Gamecocks to dictate the pace of the game and play at its own pace.

“We’ve got to play to our strength and our strength isn’t always playing fast,” Staley said. “It is playing calculating. Playing fast when we need to. Setting up, getting that ball down to our post players when we have to play in the half court.”

An efficient performance on offense for South Carolina would go a long way in slowing down North Carolina’s fast-paced style of play. The Gamecocks enter Friday’s contest having just played two of its more impressive games offensively. South Carolina shot 64.2 percent in its win over Savannah State and registered an impressive 97 points in its rout of Syracuse.

Down the stretch, several teams have packed the paint against the Gamecocks, forcing South Carolina to earn its points from the perimeter. South Carolina abused Syracuse’s defense when it tried that strategy and Staley knows her team’s ability to hit outside shots will be key for the remainder of the season.

“Outside shooting is going to be key,” Staley said. “I think in order for us to continue to have the type of success that’ll we’ll have, because they’re going to do something with our post players. I think the more outside shots we hit, the more opportunities our bigs will get.”

Now, with a chance to move one step closer towards a Final Four appearance, the Gamecocks are ready to handle business against a team that ended their dream one year ago.

“I’ve been waiting for this game, waiting for revenge,” South Carolina junior guard Khadijah Sessions said. “The time is now. Just ready for it. Just ready for me and my teammates to go out and prove what we should have proved last year.”
Know the opponent: North Carolina

Brennan Doherty
@BRENNAN_DOHERTY

Here’s everything you need to know about South Carolina’s Sweet 16 opponent

Opponent: North Carolina (26-8, 10-6 ACC)

NCAA tournament seed: No. 4

NCAA tournament history:
National Championships: 1 (1994); Final Four appearances: 3 (1994, 2006, 2007); NCAA tournament appearances (26)

Last game: In a game full of runs, comebacks and emotions, North Carolina topped fifth-seeded Ohio State 86-84 in Chapel Hill on Monday night. The Tar Heels looked destined to run away with a blow-out victory, leading by 18 points come halftime. But the Buckeyes showed some bravado and tied the game in the final seconds before North Carolina freshman guard Jamie Cherry hit the game-winning jump shot for the Tar Heels.

Best win: Like South Carolina, North Carolina plays in a very talented, but tough conference, and the Tar Heels played several ranked teams. To date, South Carolina’s best win is arguably a 71-63 victory over Florida State in February. Ranked No. 7 at the time, the Seminoles are now the No. 2 seed in the Greensboro region.

Last head-to-head matchup: South Carolina lost to North Carolina 65-58 in the Sweet 16 of the 2014 NCAA tournament in Stanford, California. Diamond DeShields, who has since transferred to Tennessee, led the Tar Heels with 19 points. South Carolina’s poor shooting performance forced it to play in catch-up mode for the entirety of the night, as the Gamecocks never held a lead.

Player to watch for: Now a sophomore, North Carolina guard Allisha Gray proved just how talented she is through an impressive freshman season, and her second season at the college level has been nothing short of great, either. The way Gray plays often times serves as a barometer of how the Tar Heels are doing as a whole. When Gray is in the zone, she has the ability to elevate her teammates’ level of play, too. Gray averages 15.9 points per game and is also second on the team in rebounding.

With that said, if South Carolina can slow down and contain the Sandersville, Georgia native, North Carolina should have a tough time scoring against a South Carolina defense that has held opponents to only 34.4 percent shooting.

Look for South Carolina junior guard Tiffany Mitchell, the Gamecocks’ best perimeter defender, to defend Gray.

Head coach spotlight: Now in her 29th season coaching at North Carolina, Tar Heel head coach Sylvia Hatchell is one of the sport’s most admired and respected figures. Hatchell missed the entire 2013-2014 season as she received chemotherapy treatments for leukemia. Even though North Carolina advanced all the way to the Elite Eight without Hatchell around, her value to the Tar Heels is immeasurable. With 961 career wins, Hatchell has more victories than any other active women’s coach and her win total is second all-time behind former Tennessee head coach Pat Summitt. Hatchell has a reputation of being well-liked by her players and some think of her as a mother figure.

By The Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>South Carolina</th>
<th>North Carolina</th>
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<tr>
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Graphic by Bianca Correa | Weekender
Biggest weakness: North Carolina’s one-two punch of Gray and sophomore forward Stephanie Mavunga is very good. The duo combine for 30.4 points and 17.5 rebounds per game. However, the Tar Heels lack the depth needed to survive a bad performance by either player. Junior forward and Columbia, South Carolina, native Xylina McDaniel has been injured since December and with her out, North Carolina lacks a reliable scoring option outside of Gray and Mavunga.

If either of those players struggle against South Carolina, the Tar Heels might be in trouble.

How South Carolina can take advantage:
At this point in the season, there are no secrets. Everyone pretty much knows what each team’s strengths and weaknesses are and what you see on film is most likely what you’ll see on the court. For South Carolina, the scouting report says that the Gamecocks’ frontcourt and depth are their strengths.

South Carolina can and should depend on both of those strengths against North Carolina.

While Mavunga is the Tar Heels’ tallest player at 6’3”, South Carolina has four players 6’4” or taller. The main reason why the Gamecocks’ shoot an impressive 48.3 percent from the field is because they get close and easy looks at the basket. Even when Syracuse tried to create a logjam down low, South Carolina still registered 42 points in the paint.

With the size differential down low between South Carolina and North Carolina, the Gamecocks ought to be able to win the battle in the trenches.

The depth which South Carolina possesses should come in handy as well. Even if the Tar Heels try to push the pace, the Gamecocks have the fresh legs needed to keep up.
3 keys to a South Carolina victory

Top-seed South Carolina won its first and second round NCAA tournament games by an average margin of 31 points, but if history’s taught us anything, it’s Sweet 16 matchup against fourth-seeded North Carolina should be anything but easy. The Gamecocks went 0-2 against the Tar Heels last season and South Carolina’s year came to an end when losing 65-58 to North Carolina last March in the Sweet 16.

Neither team is the same compared to last season, with South Carolina adding depth while the Tar Heels have relied on younger players to carry the load.

Here’s a look at the three keys to the game for South Carolina.

Once North Carolina junior forward Xylina McDaniel suffered an injury in December, sophomore forward Stephanie Mavunga has stepped up in a major way for the Tar Heels. At 6’3”, Mavunga stands as North Carolina’s tallest player, and she’ll have her work cut out for her when going up against a South Carolina frontcourt that features four players 6’4” or taller.

Still, Mavunga has used her size and skills to her advantage this season, averaging 14.5 points per game. Mavunga’s rebounding skills might be her greatest asset, though. Her 9.5 rebounds per game lead North Carolina and Mavunga also blocks 2.6 shots on average, as well.

“She’s a very, very talented post player that can score in a lot of different ways,” South Carolina head coach Dawn Staley said. “She’s deadly on the block. Her outside shot has gotten pretty consistent and when a player gets in a zone like she was last time out, it’ll be really hard. But we’ve got to run a lot of players at her.”

Keeping Mavunga off the boards could go a long way in limiting North Carolina’s possessions, which would force the Tar Heels, a team that shoots only 41.5 percent, to become more efficient when on offense.
It doesn’t take much to get South Carolina junior guard Khadijah Sessions amped up. Whether it be with a big grin after a made basket, or with a deadly stare when getting in an opposing guard’s face, Sessions illustrates her passion out on the court.

With her love of the game as strong as it is, Sessions hasn’t been able to forget about her poor performance in South Carolina’s season-ending loss to North Carolina last season. Sessions was held scoreless, shooting zero of eight from the field in the seven-point defeat in just 24 minutes of play.

“I would love to see them again and knock them out, personally,” Sessions said when the NCAA tournament bracket was released March 16.

She now has the opportunity she wanted, and South Carolina will need Sessions to play her best brand of basketball against the Tar Heels.

An X-factor of sorts, Sessions has the ability to elevate South Carolina’s flow on offense and set the tone on defense when she’s playing well. But at the same time, stagnant performances by Sessions have slowed down the Gamecocks in the past, too.

If Sessions can redeem herself from her last outing against North Carolina, South Carolina could be in for a good game.

Much like the North Carolina men’s basketball team, head coach Sylvia Hatchell’s team has a need for speed. As shown by freshman guard Jamie Cherry’s buzzer-beater against Ohio State last Monday, the Tar Heels might be at their best when the pace is quick and the players are out of position.

The fuel for North Carolina’s high-octane offense is turnovers and poor shot selections by opponents, which means South Carolina must be careful with the ball.

The Gamecocks might be +2.2 in the turnover margin this season, but South Carolina still commits 14.4 turnovers per game and North Carolina has the skill to turn miscues into points.

South Carolina committed 13 turnovers against North Carolina last March, which the Tar Heels scored 14 points off of.

Because of this, South Carolina must play smart on offense, protecting the rock while also working the shot clock to search for the best shot possible.

If North Carolina is forced to play in a half court-oriented game, the Gamecocks have a clear advantage.
Weekend Calendar: March 27 to 29

FRIDAY

SWINGIN’ AT THE BIG APPLE
1000 Hampton St.
Fri, 7 p.m. to 11 p.m., $5-$8
Dance team Richard Durlach and Breedlove in partnership with Historic Columbia present a night of swing dancing at the historic former synagogue and dance hall the Big Apple. Swing dancing lessons are from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m., followed by an open dance session featuring guests from the Palmetto Swing Dance Association.

THE PALMETTO SPORTSMEN’S CLASSIC
1200 Rosewood Dr.
Noon to 8 p.m., $7-$8
Hunting, fishing, boating, camping, hiking and other outdoor activities can all be found at the Palmetto Sportsmen’s Classic. The 31st annual Classic, there will be something for the whole family.

SATURDAY

THE CAROLINA CUP
200 Knights Hill Road, Camden
Sat, Gates open at 9 a.m., Races begin at 1:30 p.m., $30
Hosted at Springdale Race Course in Camden, this will be the 83rd annual Carolina Cup. Over 65,000 fans from all over the southeast gather round to watch the races, bet on horses and showcase their spring fashions. The Carolina Cup is a South Carolina tradition that has become the premier social event of the spring.

WAKA FLOCKA FLAME
Music Farm, 1022 Senate St.
Sat, doors open at 8 p.m., $20-$55
Atlanta rapper Waka Flocka Flame has been called the “king of Southern party music.” Tickets are $20 at the door when presented with a Carolina Cup ticket. Doors open at 8 p.m. The show begins at 9 p.m.

SUNDAY

WILLY WONKA KIDS
Town Theatre, 1012 Sumter St.
Sun, 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., $10
Town Theatre is presenting an exciting, fun musical for the whole family. Over 50 of the area’s most talented kids put on a version of Willy Wonka for the stage.

TRIBAL SEEDS
Music Farm, 1022 Senate St.
Sun, doors open at 7 p.m., $15-17
With opening performances by The Movement and Leilani Wolframtm, reggae group Tribal Seeds will play Sunday night at 8 p.m. iTunes named both of their albums “Best Of” in the reggae genre. Tribal Seeds has performed with artists such as Dave Mathews Band, Jack White, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Jane’s Addiction.

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1. Log onto SSC
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5. Select “Continue”
6. Select Aid Year “USC Columbia 2014-15”
7. Submit

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COREY SMITH
MAR 27

WAKA FLOCKA FLAME
MAR 28

TRIBAL SEEDS
MAR 29

UNE YARDS
APR 2

J BOOG
APR 6

AER
APR 10

FUTURE ISLANDS
APR 13

DELTA SPIRIT
APR 17

WILL HOGE
APR 24

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In the midst of the NCAA tournament, the South Carolina women’s basketball team is hoping that the best memories of this season have yet to come. Nonetheless, this year has already been a historic and memorable one for the Gamecock program. Here’s a look back at five of the top moments from this year up to this point for Dawn Staley’s South Carolina team.

1. Winning the SEC tournament
South Carolina had won the SEC’s regular-season championship two years in a row, but the Gamecocks had never won the conference tournament before this season. That changed when South Carolina won three games in three days in Little Rock, Arkansas, defeating Arkansas and LSU before besting Tennessee in the championship game. The win was South Carolina’s second against the Lady Vols in one season. It further validated the Gamecocks’ status as the SEC’s best, while also securing a one-seed in the NCAA tournament.

2. South Carolina defeats Tennessee at home
Two weeks removed from a loss to Connecticut, South Carolina had a chance to redeem itself with a win against another top-tier opponent on national television. The Gamecocks did just that when defeating Tennessee 71-66. The victory was just South Carolina’s third all-time against Tennessee. Although Tennessee is the most successful program in the SEC’s history, the Gamecocks proved themselves as the conference’s top team this year with the win.

3. A’ja Wilson’s put-back lifts Gamecocks over Duke
Playing in one of its most difficult non-conference games of the season in a big-game atmosphere, the game served as a message of sorts to other teams. It showed that South Carolina has the talent, the energy and the enthusiasm around its program needed to remain among college basketball’s best.

4. South Carolina hosts first two rounds of NCAA tournament
After years of traveling to places as far away as Seattle, Washington or Boulder, Colorado, for the first weekend of the NCAA tournament, South Carolina had the luxury of staying in town for the first two rounds of the tournament this year.

5. Welch, Ibiam, Gaines honored on senior night
When Staley recruited senior forward Aleighsa Welch and senior center Elem Ibiam out of high school, she didn’t have much to show for what she was building at South Carolina. But both players took a risk and decided to come to a program on a rise.

South Carolina’s top 5 moments of the season so far
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