USC's bowl hopes die at Death Valley

By RILLY BAKER
Sports Editor

Solving its best effort for the last game of the season Clemson capitalized on four USC turnovers to destroy the Gamecocks and their bowl hopes 28-9 Saturday. A record crowd of 54,129 watched the rejuvenated Tigers, who had previously lost six times, pull off one of the big upsets in the 74 game series.

"WE WERE prepared," said Clemson head coach Red Parker. "We've had to eat it for a year and I knew we were ready to play."

Parker was referring to last year's 56-20 loss to the Gamecocks in Columbia. In that lopsided game, USC quarterback Jeff Grantz threw a touchdown pass in the game's closing minutes with a 49-20 lead. Parker had been bitter about that score all year.

"That score may have had something to do with us getting ready to play but we wanted to win for this year," Parker said. "Our football team wanted to play well for this year."

Peach Bowl officials were at the game but following USC's loss, an invitation was extended to North Carolina and Kentucky for the Dec. 31 game.

In the first half, the Gamecocks were inside the Clemson 10 yard line three times but managed to score just once. Brit Parrish's 23 yard field goal in the second quarter was USC's lone score.

"Our short yardage play near the goal was poor today," Carlen said. "We didn't punch it in key situations. We've had this problem all year long."

CARLEN ALSO said USC had not anticipated passing 40 times during the game. "They were giving us the pass so we tried to take advantage of it," he said.

"Today we faked the draw and rolled out deep to protect the passer." The game's tempo was established early when Clemson took the opening kickoff and scored on an impressive 81 yard drive in 12 plays. This was the first time the Tigers had scored in the first quarter all year.

Carolina took the ensuing kickoff and appeared to be on their way to tying the game. However, a pass to flanker Stevie Stephens was intercepted in the end zone after being bobbled. Later in the half, USC had first and goal from the four yard line. The Gamecocks sent Kevin Long, a bull type runner, off the right side three consecutive plays but failed to score. Freshmen Steve Dorsey then replaced Long and on fourth down and one yard to go, he was stopped inches short of the goal line.

LATE IN the fourth quarter with Clemson leading 21-3, Tiger quarterback Steve Fuller was apparently trapped for a loss as he attempted to pass. However, the sophomore slipped by several Gamecock defensive linemen on his way to a 27 yard touchdown score.

For his effort, Fuller was selected Clemson's MVP for the game. Phil Logan, who caught a 17 yard touchdown pass for USC's only score in the fourth quarter was named USC's MVP.

USC led in total offense with 385 yards to Clemson's 331 yards but the Gamecocks could not overcome four crucial turnovers and several dropped passes throughout the game.

Prior to the game, Clemson warmed up on the soccer field, adjacent to Frank Howard Field.

"We were very relaxed in the pregame," Parker said. "We didn't want any emotion until we got to the top of the Hill. It was a very casual warmup and if somebody thought he's had, he went over and sat down. You couldn't have done that in the stadium."

CLEMSON was led by running back Warren Ratliff who rushed for 107 yards on 19 attempts despite being bothered by nausea most of the game. Strongback Tracy Perry scored Clemson's two touchdowns in the fourth quarter on runs of three and 12 yards. For the game, he gained 96 yards on 16 carries. Fuller added Clemson's third touchdown in the third quarter on a five-yard run.

Reflecting on the season, Carlen expressed satisfaction in the progress of USC's football program the past two years. "The 13-10 record we've had at South Carolina in the last two years is better than the first two-year record I had at either Texas Tech or West Virginia."

Again, USC must wait till next year

Three weeks ago after USC's 27-7 win over North Carolina State, Gamecock fans were talking of an 8-3 season and a bowl bid. However, besides seeing these hopes vanish in the last two weeks, Gamecock fans saw visions of past decades.

USC went into the Wake Forest game two weeks ago after a week off and were beaten 10-7. To that point, it was the worst loss USC had played all season. Then, against an inexperienced but inspired Clemson team Saturday, the Gamecocks lost more than just a game. They lost their chance for their second consecutive bowl bid and a chance to finish with a 7-4 record.

WHAT HAPPENED to USC the final two weeks of the season will be pondered for weeks to come. Before the layoff, the Gamecocks had momentum. Up to that point, they had lost only three games by a total of 16 points. Two of the losses were to Georgia and Notre Dame, two teams ranked in the nation's top 20.

It's questionable whether the week layoff had anything to do with slowing USC's momentum. It was supposed to give the Gamecocks a needed rest. Instead, it may have hampered their momentum. During this time the Gamecocks were surrounded with praise and the fact that they were being considered by at least four bowls. This may have had a bearing on USC's last two games.

If you could forget about USC's last two games and just consider the first nine, the Gamecocks had an excellent season. Although their 6-7 record they had won decisively and lost close. The only possible letup was against Baylor, when the Bears scored 18 points in the fourth quarter to win 18-17.

IN THOSE nine games, USC played with more pep than enthusiasm than the last two games, when they lacked those attributes. What is frustrating is that they played teams like Notre Dame and Georgia close only to be beaten by Wake Forest and Clemson. These teams didn't have winning records and were two of the worst teams in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

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The Gamecock Sports

Gamecocks stopped short -- again

In one of the more frustrating plays in an extremely frustrating game, USC fullback Steve Dorsey is stopped short of the goal line by Clemson's Willie Jordan (5), Marlon Brown (47), Archie Reese (65) and Jonathan Brooks (84) as Gamecock quarterback Ron Bass (10) looks on. Clemson easily defeated USC 28-9 Saturday. For stories and more pictures, see Sports, page...

Mitch Sherwood
Asst. Sports Editor

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