

SPORTS

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2009 • SECTION C

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ON PAGE A1: How Shelley Smith assembled a championship soccer team

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

EYES ON THE PRIZE



Hammond quarterback David Nidiffer drills Wednesday in preparation for the state championship game. Nidiffer has thrown for 2,030 yards and 30 touchdowns.

C. ALUKA BERRY/CABERRY@THESTATE.COM



Heathwood Hall's Morgan Whalen leads the team with 44 catches for 678 yards, and has 110 tackles on defense.

FILE PHOTOGRAPH/THE STATE

Hammond and Heathwood carry rivalry to the title game

By AKILAH IMANI NELSON
ainelson@thestate.com

Today, the rivalry is moot. Today, the football teams of Hammond and Heathwood Hall have more on their minds than bragging rights. When the two teams take the field at Charlie W. Johnson Stadium for the SCISA Class 3A championship Friday, their decades long rivalry is incidental.

"The guys know who we're playing, but it's not something we talk about. It's not something we're going to focus on," Heathwood coach Rip Blackstone said.

"The rivalry game was Week 9," Hammond coach Erik Kimrey said. "This is the last game of the season, and it's not about a rivalry. This one is about a championship."

Kimrey's Skyhawks (11-1) are looking for the team's fourth consecutive title. To get it, they will have to defeat a Heathwood Hall (12-0) team that is angling for its first undefeated season and state title since 2004.

In October, the Highlanders took the 5-mile bus ride to Hammond's Edens Stadium and posted a 10-7 victory that was among the biggest

HAMMOND VS. HEATHWOOD HALL

WHAT: SCISA Class 3A state championship

WHERE: Charlie W. Johnson Stadium, Columbia

RECORDS: Hammond 11-1, Heathwood Hall 12-0

SEE PRIZE PAGE C3

COLLEGE BASKETBALL | USC 78, La Salle 68

USC holds off La Salle

Gamecocks fall behind early, but rally despite an off night from Devan Downey

By SETH EMERSON
semerson@thestate.com

CHARLESTON — After three games, two trends are becoming evident about this year's version of the South Carolina basketball team:

It doesn't necessarily need its star to have a huge game, and it has the ability to turn a close game into a runaway.

Both of those were on display in Thursday's 78-68 victory against La Salle in the first round of the Charleston Classic.

Star guard Devan Downey was held to 10 points, and he might have been better off in the second half hanging out with NBA legend Joe Dumars, who was in the crowd to see his son, a freshman for South Florida, whom USC will play tonight.

Instead the Gamecocks were

spurred by numerous players during a 30-5 run that started at the end of the first half and gained steam in the second half.

"The lead going from two to six shouldn't make that much of a difference," La Salle coach John Giannini said. "But the game felt different quickly."

For a half, South Carolina (3-0) seemed in trouble. La Salle's size, and a lack of scoring from USC saw the Gamecocks trail for more than 19 minutes.

The Gamecocks got back in the game late in the half. Then they ran away with it to start the second half.

It was reminiscent of USC's previous game, a 24-point victory against Georgia Southern. In that game, the Gamecocks trailed much of the first half, then took

SEE USC PAGE C6



USC's Austin Steed blocks a pass intended for LaSalle's Kimmani Barrett during their game Thursday in Charleston.

GRACE BEAHM/THE CHARLESTON POST AND COURIER

DOLPHINS 24, PANTHERS 17

Dolphins, Williams run past Panthers

Delhomme's recent struggles resurface as Miami sinks Carolina to 4-6

By CHARLES CHANDLER
cchandler@charlotteobserver.com

CHARLOTTE — Yet again, the Carolina Panthers couldn't capitalize on a chance to square their record, but this might have been the defeat that finally extinguished their playoff hopes.

Just as they had done in losses to Buffalo and New Orleans, the

Panthers dropped two games under .500 Thursday night with a 24-17 loss to the Miami Dolphins at Bank of America Stadium.

For a moment — just a moment — there was hope that Jake Delhomme's desperate high lob into the end zone as time expired might somehow be caught by a teammate in the end zone. But the Dolphins batted the ball away.

The Panthers fell to 4-6 and face a difficult closing schedule that includes the Saints, Vikings and Patriots.

Miami improved to 5-5.

SEE PANTHERS PAGE C7

Let's hold off on crowning Swinney, Tigers

DABO SWINNEY HAS this championship thing figured out. Minutes after it became apparent this past Saturday that Clemson needed to beat Virginia to clinch the division title, Swinney put everything in perspective.

He talked about how Clemson has not accomplished a thing this season. Truth is, Clemson has not done anything under Swinney — so far — that it did not do under Tommy Bowden in his nine-plus seasons as coach.

Until Clemson clinches the ACC Atlantic Division champi-



Ron Morris

Columnist

rmorris@thestate.com
(803) 771-8432

onship with a victory against Virginia on Saturday at Death Valley, Swinney, his players and the Tigers' fan base needs to keep the champagne boxed in crates. Do not even put it on ice.

Why? Because, frankly, we have all seen this before: Clem-

son on the verge of greatness; Clemson falling just short.

Give Bowden full credit for putting Clemson in position to challenge for ACC titles season after season. Also pin the blame on him for never being able to push his team over the top.

From Bowden's first season of 1999 through the final season of ACC play without divisions, Clemson finished second in the standings twice — 1999 and 2000. Since divisional play began in 2004, the Tigers have been bridesmaids twice.

SEE SWINNEY PAGE C4

CAVALIERS AT TIGERS

WHO: Virginia (3-7, 2-4 ACC) at Clemson (7-3, 5-2 ACC)

WHEN: 3:30 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Memorial Stadium

TV: ABC

RADIO: ESPN Radio 93.1 FM

LINE: Clemson by 21

INSIDE: Clemson run-blocking is improving. **C4**

THESTATE.COM/TIGERS: Read Paul Strelow's Pawssitive Press blog updated daily