

Carrera returns to form in leading USC over Alabama



Willie T. Smith III, wtsmith@greenvillenews.com 2:40 p.m. EST January 14, 2015



(Photo: Jeff Blake-USA TODAY Sports)

COLUMBIA – Although only in its third Southeastern Conference game, beating Alabama was a must-win for the University of South Carolina.

After dropping its first two conference games, including one at home against Florida, USC could not afford to drop another league contest in Columbia and expect to have a chance to finish high enough in the standings to have a chance at postseason play.

Enter junior forward Michael Carrera, who gave the Gamecocks the boost they needed in Tuesday night's 68-66 victory over the Tide.

Carrera, who entered with an average of 4.8 points and 4.1 rebounds, had been a non-factor since suffering a concussion early in the season that kept him out of action for three-and-a half weeks.

A crowd favorite due to the energy and enthusiasm he displays on the court, Carrera returned to that persona against the Crimson Tide and it couldn't have come at a better time for USC.

"He played strong," USC coach Frank Martin said of Carrera. "He was fully engaged in what we were trying to do. Outside of that one breakdown late in the game, when we had a four-point lead, we got them late in the shot clock and his man drives it from the left wing and he hand checks.

"Outside of that he made every other play to help us win. I'm real happy for Michael. We need him. We need his energy. We need his charisma, enthusiasm. We need him playing like he played today for us to be a good basketball team."

FINAL	1	2	Score	
ALAAlabama Crimson Tide (12-4)	25	41	66	
SCAR South Carolina Gamecocks (10-5)	30	38	68	Final

Carrera came off the bench and scored 12 points, second only to Tyrone Johnson's 13, and tied for the team lead in rebounds with eight in 21 minutes of action.

He also didn't shrink from the physical nature of the game as the Gamecocks out-rebounded their talented Alabama counterparts 33-23.

"That's what I do," said Carrera. "I go on the court, I get my rebounds and try to help my team win. I wasn't trying to get in anyone's face, I was just trying to help us win the game."

The win improved South Carolina to 10-5 overall and 1-2 in the SEC, while Alabama fell to 12-4 and 2-1, respectively.

According to the Anzoategui, Venezuela native, the physical nature of the game was right in the Gamecocks wheelhouse.

"We're used to it," said Carrera. "We go out in every single practice and that's how we play. We are a physical team. We do a lot of hard practicing. It was a physical game."

Martin was excited to have the old Carrera back for the night and hopes his play continues.

"All those plays he made coming down the stretch there, the last two weeks he falls down," said Martin. "Well, he didn't fall down (Monday) in practice and he definitely did not fall down in the game (Tuesday)."

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