

GAMECOCK VOLLEYBALL



Coaches & Staff



HEAD COACH BEN SOMERA



BEN SOMERA

***3rd Year as Head Coach
5th Year at South Carolina
Southern California, 1995***

In his third year leading the South Carolina volleyball program, Ben Somera has seen his squad make great strides during his first two years. The team has rebounded from a string of five consecutive losing seasons to vault back to the 20-win plateau and enter itself back into the national conversation.

Somera's second season stood out in a number of areas. His Gamecock squad recorded the first 20-win season since 2002, going 21-9 while finishing fifth overall in the Southeastern Conference. His squad improved in all facets of the game. Offensively, the Gamecocks boasted of the league's highest hitting percentage, ending Florida's 10-year run as the SEC's hitting champion. Middle blocker Belita Salters led the conference in hitting percentage, ranking in the top 20 in the nation and sixth in South Carolina volleyball history for a single season. Setter Bridget Denson-Dorman led the conference in assists, outpacing first-team All-SEC selection Sarah Rumely from Kentucky by 0.27 assists per set. The Gamecock defense also made big strides, leaping from fifth in digs to second, while five student-athletes averaged over two digs per set.

Salters took home first-team All-SEC honors for her efforts. Three Gamecocks earned American Volleyball Coaches Association All-South Region honorable mention, as Denson-Dorman and Salters were joined by Ivana Kujundzic on the listing. Libero Sarah Cline picked up first-team *ESPN The Magazine* Academic All-District III honors as well.

In 2007, Somera's first squad went 14-15 overall but turned things around toward the latter part of the season. The team, which had no seniors on the roster, captured five wins in their final nine SEC contests, including wins over NCAA Tournament squads LSU and Alabama. One of the standouts for Somera was SEC All-Freshman Team middle blocker Megan Laughlin, who ranked in the top 10 in the conference

in aces while ranking second on the team in blocks and third in kills.

Academically, his teams have succeeded as well since taking over, with the program boasting of a 3.25 grade point average during his four semesters as head coach. Nine players earned a spot on the SEC Academic Honor Rolls in the 2008-09 academic year.

Somera was named associate head coach for Gamecock volleyball in February 2005 after six seasons as

an assistant and associate head coach at Oregon State. While still working under wife Nancy, the Gamecocks pulled out one of the program's biggest wins in history: a 3-1 win over Florida in 2006, which was the program's first against the Gators since 1994. Florida, ranked sixth at the time, is the highest-ranked team South Carolina has defeated in its history, and it marked just the fifth regular-season SEC defeat (at that time) for the Gators since 1991.

As an associate head coach, Somera was instrumental in furthering the development of Shonda Cole during her final two years as a Gamecock, as the outside hitter earned first-team All-SEC and AVCA All-South Region honors after a record-setting 2006 season. Cole became the Gamecocks' career leader in kills per game and attacks while setting single-season school records for kills, kills per game and attacks. She also hit the 30-kill plateau in six matches her senior year, a feat that had only been accomplished once in school history prior to 2006.

While at Oregon State, Somera coached the middle blockers for four seasons and spent two with the setters. Under his tutelage, current assistant coach Laura Collins earned honorable mention All-Pacific-10 honors, and two of his middle blockers finished the season ranked among the top 10 blockers in the Pac-10 Conference. Two other Beavers earned honorable mention and one was named first-team All-Pac-10, while two student-athletes earned spots on the Pac-10 All-Freshman Team from 1999 to 2004. Additionally, seven Beavers received academic praise from CoSIDA and 16 were awarded academic laurels from the Pac-10 while Somera served as a coach.

During his tenure in Corvallis, the Beavers were 77-98 (.440) overall, and he helped lead Oregon State to the NCAA Tournament in 2001 with a 17-12 record and fifth-place finish in the Pac-10. It was the first NCAA appearance for OSU since joining the Pac-10 in 1987 and only its second in school history after first making the





field in 1983. Oregon State finished at .500 or better in one of the toughest volleyball conferences in the country in three of Somera's six seasons on staff. Academically, Oregon State's volleyball program led the athletic department in team GPA in nine of his 15 terms.

Somera's collegiate coaching experience began at Southern California in 1993 as a volunteer coach. He was then promoted to second assistant in 1994 and took the lead in the training and development of the program's middle blockers. While at Southern California, he cultivated three All-Americans at the middle blocker position.

In 1996, Somera left collegiate coaching to pursue a career in sales, but he continued to coach club volleyball. When his wife became the head coach at Oregon State in 1999, Somera returned to collegiate coaching.

Somera hails from LaCrescenta, Calif., and earned his bachelor's degree in political science from Southern California in 1995. Ben and Nancy have an 12-year-old son, Sam, and a eight-year-old daughter, Maile.



DAMIAN ELDER

***1st Year as Associate Head Coach
4th Year at South Carolina
Fresno State, 2002***

In his fourth season with the Gamecocks, Damian Elder joined the staff at South Carolina in March 2006. In June, Elder was promoted to associate head coach, as he helps lead the staff's efforts in recruiting, practice management and instruction. Elder also coordinates the program's sand volleyball efforts, as that sport is up for inclusion on the NCAA's emerging sports for women list.

During his time in Columbia, the Gamecocks have made great strides to return to prominence in the Southeastern Conference. Last season's squad led the league in hitting percentage and ranked second in digs, a vast improvement over the fifth-place finishes in each category a year ago. The team also saw its members pick up five postseason awards, with three earning AVCA All-South Region honorable mentions.

The sand program under development has thrived thus far at South Carolina. In the spring of 2009, the Gamecocks claimed the Commissioner's Cup at the second SEC Beach Volleyball Coaches' Championship at Siesta Key, Fla. The Garnet and Black's Jordan Bradosky and Hannah Lawing finish second in the gold bracket, while Bridget Denson-Dorman and Ivana Kujundzic triumphed in the silver bracket. That bettered the Gamecocks' second-place team finish in 2008's event in Gainesville, Fla.



Elder came to South Carolina from Stanford, where he served for two years as a volunteer assistant coach for the Cardinal's women's program. While at Stanford, Elder assisted on the 2004 NCAA championship staff and helped coach AVCA Player of the Year and 2008 U.S. Olympic Team member Ogbonna Nnamani.

Prior to Stanford, Elder was an assistant coach at Fresno City College in Fresno, Calif., where he helped his team finish second in its conference with a 25-6 (.806) record. From 1996 to 2003, Elder was a head coach at the Fresno Volleyball Club and served as club director from 1999 to 2002.

Elder got his coaching start at Bullard High School in Fresno, acting as the varsity head coach from 1997 to 2000. His teams compiled a 111-19 overall record during his tenure, good for an .854 winning percentage. Bullard H.S. was crowned section champions in 2000 and placed third in the California Interscholastic Federation Division I State Volleyball Championships.

A graduate of Fresno State, Elder earned his Bachelor of Arts in English in 2002.





LAURA COLLINS

***2nd Year as Assistant Coach
2nd Year at South Carolina
Oregon State, 2004***

Laura Collins is in her second year as an assistant coach on the women's volleyball staff at the University of South Carolina. Collins, a former standout for Ben and former Gamecock head coach Nancy Somera at Oregon State, will work with the setters while helping with recruiting and administration.

In Collins' first season in Columbia, the Gamecocks made massive strides in their offense. Setter Bridget Denson-Dorman led the Southeastern Conference in assists and helped the Gamecocks lead the league in hitting percentage, wresting that title away from Florida for the first time since 1999. The transfer setter earned AVCA All-South Region honorable mention honors, becoming the first Gamecock setter to capture an award since Megan Hosp in 2002.

Collins was a standout for the Someras while playing in Corvallis. Her 3,786 career assists still rank third on the Beavers' all-time chart, while the Wisconsin native also earned honorable mentions on the All-Pacific-10 team for three consecutive years. She stands as the only two-time Pac-10 Player of the Week honoree in Oregon State volleyball history. A two-year team captain, Collins also earned a third-team *ESPN The Magazine* Academic All-District honors in 2002.

Since her 2004 graduation with a B.S. in marketing from Oregon State, Collins has coached on the high school, club and collegiate levels in Oregon. She spent six months as an assistant with the Canby Volleyball Club before working with Division

III Pacific (Ore.) for the 2005 season. After a short stint with the Boxers, Collins returned to CVC as the head coach. In 2006 and 2007, she served as the head coach for Hillsboro (Ore.) High School.



KRISTIN BELZUNG

***1st Year as Director of Operations
2nd Year at South Carolina
Northern Iowa, 2008***

Kristin Belzung is in her second season with the Gamecock volleyball program, moving into the director of operations role for the squad. Belzung will assist with practice setup and help out with many of the administrative tasks for the team, including travel and video coordination.

Belzung comes to Columbia from Northern Iowa, where she was a standout setter for the Panthers for four seasons. A two-time first-team All-Missouri Valley Conference selection, she stands fourth in UNI history with 4,256 assists and 11.3 assists per game. Belzung also led her squad twice in aces and helped the team to consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances in 2006 and 2007. She was named the State Farm MVC Tournament MVP in her squad's first of two straight conference tourney crowns. Belzung recorded two triple-doubles in her career, including one in a victory over Clemson in 2006.

An Ankeny, Iowa, native, Belzung was a star in the classroom as well. She earned the State Farm MVC Good Neighbor Award, an honor recognizing athletes for their excellence in academics, sportsmanship and community service. She garnered Dean's List recognition in six of her nine semesters at UNI while earning a spot on the inaugural MVC All-Academic first team. Belzung served as a SAAC representative and participated in the NCAA National Leadership Conference.

Belzung graduated with a bachelors in health promotion/environmental health from Northern Iowa and is pursuing her masters in sport and entertainment management.



Steve Bondurant **Academic Advisor**

Steve Bondurant is in his third year as an academic advisor for South Carolina, as he oversees the baseball, men's soccer and volleyball programs. In addition to those duties, Bondurant also coordinates the Class Check Program for all student-athletes at the university. Bondurant began his position in August of 2007 following a four-year professional baseball career with the Oakland Athletics. He reached as high as Triple-A with the Sacramento Rivercats before retiring due to injury. Bondurant played baseball for the Gamecocks from 2000-03 including serving as captain during his senior year. He compiled a 14-7 career record with a pair of seven-win seasons in 2002 and 2003, helping the Gamecocks to two College World Series appearances and an SEC championship. Bondurant graduated in the spring of 2002 from South Carolina with degrees in marketing and also in management. In addition, he earned his Master's in human resources in 2004. Bondurant and his wife, Emily, reside in Columbia. Emily also graduated from South Carolina and is a former Gamecock cheerleader.



Koby Padgett **Assistant Media Relations Director**

Koby Padgett is in his third year as an assistant media relations director at South Carolina, where he works with volleyball and softball. Padgett spent two years as a graduate assistant at Tennessee, working with the soccer and rowing programs and acting as the media coordinator for the 2007 NCAA Women's Rowing Championships in Oak Ridge, Tenn. Prior to getting his masters in sports administration in 2007, he served as the media relations assistant at Jacksonville University, handling 11 of the Dolphins' 18 sports. Padgett earned his bachelors at Mississippi State in communication in 2003 and worked with the Bulldogs' track and field and cross country programs for two years. The Lexington, Miss., native also served as co-media coordinator at the 2002 SEC Outdoor Track & Field Championships.



Erin Pettinger **Athletic Trainer**

Erin Pettinger is in her second year as an assistant athletic trainer at South Carolina, where she works with the Gamecock softball and volleyball teams. She spent four years at Duquesne, working with the Dukes' baseball, lacrosse and volleyball teams during her tenure. Pettinger earned a master's degree in education with an emphasis on sports administration from the University of Miami in 2004. While serving as the Hurricanes' graduate assistant trainer, she worked with the football and men's and women's tennis teams. She graduated from Nebraska with a B.S. in athletic training in 2002 and worked as a student athletic trainer with a variety of the Huskers' squads. The Beatrice, Neb., native is a member of the National Athletic Trainers' Association and is an approved clinical instructor and a certified athletic trainer.



Belita Salters **Volunteer Assistant Coach**

After spending five years as a player, Belita Salters has joined the Gamecocks as a volunteer assistant coach for 2009. The Lake City, S.C., native holds spots in the top 10 in five career categories and was the ninth player in South Carolina volleyball history to earn first-team All-SEC honors in 2008. Salters graduated in December 2008 from the University of South Carolina in media arts and played professionally in Puerto Rico last spring.



Annie Thomas **Student Assistant Coach**

Annie Thomas begins a new role on the team, working now as a student assistant coach. The past two seasons, Thomas earned letters from the Gamecocks, starting 18 times and playing in 35 matches during her career. She averaged 1.77 kills per set in her career, while also making the SEC Academic Honor Roll twice. A visual communications major, Thomas will assist the staff with video and equipment work among her other duties.



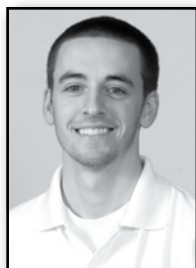
Amber Townsend **Manager**

Joining the support staff as a manager for 2009 is Amber Townsend. A North Augusta High School project, she graduated with honors in May. She played volleyball for six years in the school system there, serving as captain of the Yellow Jackets' team during her senior season. An all-region player two consecutive years, Townsend played club volleyball as well, including joining the Magnum club based out of Columbia last year. Townsend is planning to major in public relations while at South Carolina.



Jon Vaden **Assistant Strength & Conditioning Coach**

Jon Vaden is in his third year as a full-time assistant strength and conditioning coach and in his fourth overall with the Gamecocks. He is responsible for the design and implementation of strength and conditioning programs for women's basketball, volleyball and women's tennis. A native of New Kent, Va., Vaden worked with baseball and men's golf as a graduate assistant at South Carolina. He earned his bachelors from Virginia Tech in 2005 and received a master's in public health from South Carolina in 2007. While at Virginia Tech, he interned with the Hokie football and baseball teams, and, after his graduation, worked as a volunteer strength and conditioning coach for the Liberty football program. Vaden is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist through the National Strength and Conditioning Association and holds the title of Strength and Conditioning Coach Certified through the Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches Association. Additionally, Vaden is CPR, first aid and AED certified.



John Woolf **Sports Medicine Graduate Assistant**

John Woolf works as a graduate assistant in the South Carolina sports medicine department and will work with the volleyball and softball teams. Woolf received his bachelors of science in athletic training from Alabama in May 2008. While in Tuscaloosa, Woolf worked with four different Crimson Tide teams as well as working with a local high school and at a physical therapy clinic. Woolf interned twice with the Carolina Panthers, first in the summer of 2007 before working last year with the 2008 NFC South champions. The Bayonne, N.J., native is working on his masters degree in athletic training at South Carolina.



ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF



Val Sheley **Senior Women's Administrator**

Val Sheley, who has experience as a former student-athlete, coach, athletics director and several other administrative areas, including compliance, academics and student-athlete development, is in her fourth year as senior associate athletics director and senior woman administrator. Her many responsibilities include administration of eight sports and the NCAA compliance office.

Her athletics career started in 1988 when she served as head of men's and women's track and field, then added the responsibilities of assistant athletics director/senior woman administrator at UNC Asheville. From there, she went to the NCAA office working as a legislative assistant for the national organization. Sheley is in her second stint with South Carolina during her college athletics career, having served as an associate athletics director for NCAA compliance at the school from 1995 to 2000. In 2000, she left the Gamecocks to become athletics director at Presbyterian College, where she oversaw the school's 13 athletics programs and facility improvements for three years. During 2003-04, Sheley served as the interim associate athletics director for academic support and career development at Maryland before returning to South Carolina. Sheley has a bachelor's degree from Murray State, where she excelled as a track and field athlete. She earned a master's from Houston and is a graduate of the Sports Management Institute. Sheley was a 1984 Olympic qualifier in track and field for Great Britain. Her husband, Mike, was a track and field All-American and NCAA national champion (4x800-meter relay, 1974 indoors) at South Carolina.



Eric Nichols **Director of Marketing**

Eric Nichols is in his second year as director of marketing for the University of South Carolina athletics department. Nichols oversees all aspects of athletics marketing and serves as the marketing liaison to the athletics ticket office, Web site and video production, as well as Gamecock Sports Properties, Barnes and Noble merchandising, university licensing and communications and Global Spectrum.

Nichols came to Carolina following a successful stint at Vanderbilt University, where he served as the athletic department's Director of Marketing and Promotions since January of 2004. Nichols was at Vanderbilt since 1998, starting as an assistant director of facilities. He was director of game operations from 2000 to 2002 before being promoted to director of online services, a position he held for two years. Nichols served on the athletic department's senior administrative team, the University's eExecutive communications council and was an adjunct professor at Belmont University's master of sport administration program. He is a graduate of Leadership Vanderbilt, a member of the American Marketing Association, the United Way of Middle Tennessee Marketing Committee, has spoken at the NACDA Conference (2007) and has completed an Executive Leadership Class at Vanderbilt's Owen School of Business. He has a bachelor's and a master's degree from the University of Tennessee-Martin, where he also spent time as a graduate assistant coach for women's volleyball. Eric and his wife, Christina, have a daughter, Grace.



Kelly Lewis **Operations and Facilities Manager**

Kelly Lewis is in her 16th year with South Carolina athletics, where she manages event operations for volleyball as well as several other sports. Lewis was the event coordinator for the 2009 SEC Women's Golf Championship, the 1999 NCAA Women's Golf East

Regional and the 1997 NCAA Women's Basketball East Regional and served as the Gamecocks' coordinator for the 1997-2001 SEC women's basketball tournaments. During graduate school at Eastern Kentucky, where she earned her master's degree in sports administration in 1994, Lewis worked as a sports administration intern, a teaching graduate assistant in the physical education department and an assistant coach with the volleyball team. Prior to graduate school, Lewis taught physical education in Aiken and Kershaw counties. A native of Aiken, S.C., Lewis received a Bachelor of Science in physical education in 1982 from USC-Aiken, where she also coached volleyball and basketball.



Mac Credille **Assistant Equipment Manager**

Mac Credille is in his fourth decade with the South Carolina athletics department and has worked with the men's basketball team as the equipment manager since the 1993-94 season. He also assists with women's basketball and volleyball with their equipment as well as helps with the setup of the Volleyball Competition Facility. Credille joined the Gamecock athletics staff in 1977. In

2003, former gamecock head coach Dave Odom presented Mac Credille with the team's Sixth Man Award for his dedication to the men's basketball team. A native of Columbia, Credille is a 1970 graduate of Dentsville High School. After graduation, Credille was on the equipment staff at Spring Valley High School for three years (1970-73). He joined the staff at USC in 1973, working in the equipment issue room at the Physical Education Center. He remained in the position until joining the athletics staff in August 1977. Credille is married to the former Kelly Lee Carlson. They have a son, Robert.



Jenny Hill **Sports Dietitian**

Jenny Hill is in her second year with the University of South Carolina as its sports dietitian. Previously, Hill was the director of sports nutrition at the University of South Florida, where her primary responsibilities were football, team education and establishing nutrition as an essential component in performance as well as overall health. Originally from Holland, Mich., Hill completed her

undergraduate degree in human, food, nutrition, and exercise along with dietetics at Virginia Tech. While at Tech, she competed as a scholarship student-athlete with the volleyball team and worked as a summer intern with Tech's sports dietitian. She also received her master's degree from the University of Florida, gaining experience as a graduate intern in the sports nutrition department. Upon completion of her master's, she obtained her RD (registered dietitian credential).