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## Smith to get first start at free safety

**Avery Wilks**  
GamecockCentral.com Staff Writer



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South Carolina defensive coordinator Lorenzo Ward has rotated several players through USC's two safety spots this season, and he says he'll throw another into the mix this Saturday in Lexington, Kentucky.

Freshman defensive back D.J. Smith will get his first career start at free safety this weekend against Kentucky, Ward announced after Thursday's practice.

"We're trying to get a more physical guy," Ward said. "Chaz (Elder) did a good job of showing range, but I want a guy that's going to go over there and make some contact when he gets there."

Smith, a former four-star prospect, worked at safety in fall camp before moving to cornerback earlier this season to bolster USC's depth at the position.

Smith, who is 5-foot-11 and weighs 189 pounds, has logged three tackles in four games as a backup cornerback this year.

"He's a physical guy, and we've been playing him in the post all week," Ward said. "So we'll see how well he does."

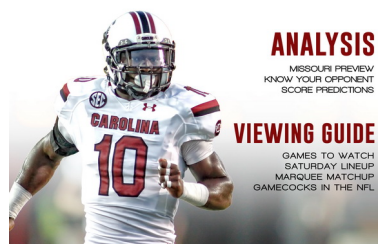
Ward said junior T.J. Gurley will start at strong safety against the Wildcats and that redshirt sophomore Marcquis Roberts will get his second straight start at Mike linebacker.

Roberts surpassed junior Kaiwan Lewis and redshirt sophomore T.J. Holloman last week to claim the No. 1 job at the Mike position. He logged five tackles, including one for loss, in the Gamecocks' 21-20 loss to Missouri last Saturday.

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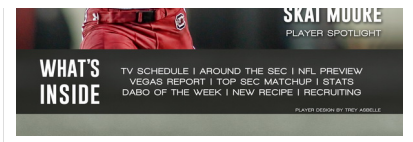
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Saturday.

Ward said the linebackers, like the rest of USC's defense, have been up and down so far, but that they are beginning to play their best football.



"They should be because they are the guys that had the most experience, coming back with starts," Ward said. "But they're still a young group. You're talking about a lot of guys who are sophomores - true sophomores. I couldn't put a lot of heavy expectations on them, but I think they're starting to grow into that role now."

Ward said he was pleased with the way his defense practiced this week, saying that they understand the season isn't over after two losses.

"There will be some other teams to get some losses, so we've got a lot to play for," he said, pointing to SEC Eastern Division race that appears wide open.

After holding Missouri to 21 points and 280 total yards last Saturday, USC's defense hasn't had much to correct this week, Ward said. But the Gamecocks have to get better at finishing after giving up a combined 24 fourth-quarter points to Vanderbilt and Missouri.

"The frustrating part is about how we finish," Ward said. "And again, it's not about how we finished just that game. We didn't finish the Vanderbilt game. We're not finishing. That's something we talked about this week."

Ward said he has also stressed playing faster at the start of games. The Gamecocks gave up opening-drive touchdowns to Missouri, Georgia and Texas A&M and allowed East Carolina to score on its first three possessions.

"We also addressed that we don't start fast," Ward said. "We've got to start fast. We've got to stop teams and not let them score on the first drive. That's been the focus this week, of starting the game off playing fast, and then finishing the game."

#### NOTES.

--- Ward said that senior defensive back Brison Williams' right arm is fine, and that it's getting better every day. Williams has favored the arm in games, but has played through the pain.

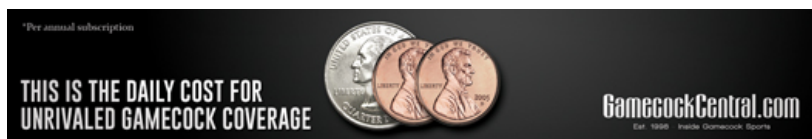
"That kid has a lot of courage to be out playing," Ward said.

--- Ward said that redshirt sophomore Deon Green will play some defensive end against Kentucky. Injuries to David Johnson and Cedrick Cooper have left USC thin at the position, but Ward said playing in the 3-4 formation and sliding Green out to the end position will help.

"If we didn't have the 3-4 package, then it would be a concern," Ward said. "Now that we can play 3-4 and we play a lot of it, then we can get through a ball game with just having one end on the field."

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