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USC Baseball

Connor Bright: The 'silent assassin'?

By NEIL WHITE

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USC's Connor Bright takes a swing at the ball in game against Bucknell.

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WHEN: Friday, 3 p.m.; Saturday, 4 p.m.; Sunday, 1:30 p.m.

WHERE: Carolina Stadium

RADIO: WNKT-FM 107.5

TELEVISION: None

SERIES: USC leads 1-0

LAST MEETING: The Gamecocks defeated the Colonels 11-3 in 1982

RECORDS: USC 4-0; ECU 1-3 RANKINGS: USC is No. 5 in the Baseball America Top 25

PITCHING MATCHUPS: Friday, USC LHP Jordan Montgomery, Jr., 1-0, 0.00 vs. ECU RHP Brent Cobb, Sr., 1-0, 0.00; Saturday, USC LHP Jack Wynkoop, So., 1-0, 3.60 vs. ECU LHP Tanner Perkins, Sr., 0-0, 3.00; Sunday, USC RHP Wil Crowe, Fr., 1-0, 0.00 vs. ECU RHP Myles Scott, Sr., 0-1, 15.00 ERA

NOTES: USC has not allowed a run in 24 consecutive innings. ... 1B Kyle Martin's fast start includes a .692 average (9-for-13) with seven runs scored, seven RBIs, a .706 on-base percentage, and a 1.000 slugging percentage. ... Grayson Greiner, Jordan Montgomery, Joey Pankake and Hunter Privette are the team captains this season.

Neil White

Discussions of the South Carolina baseball team's big-name class of junior players doesn't always include right-fielder Connor Bright. A month ago when preseason practice began, coach Chad Holbrook described him as a silent assassin.

Four games into the season, Bright is making as much noise as any of his heralded classmates. The No. 5 Gamecocks (4-0) are receiving big production from the low-key Mount Pleasant native.

The 5-foot-11, 175-pound Bright is hitting .467 (7-for-15) with a team-high four doubles and eight RBIs, leading Holbrook to label him the club's most improved player.

"He's a low-maintenance guy who works his tail off and keeps his mouth shut and plays," Holbrook said. "He's awfully fun to coach because of those things. He does the right things off the field, and he has the utmost respect of all his teammates."

Bright said he likes flying under the radar.

"It just fits my personality," Bright said.

He also likes being part of something bigger than himself, as the Gamecocks look to return to the College World Series for the fourth time in five seasons.

USC catcher Grayson Greiner was a teammate of Bright's on a summer travel team starting in their sophomore years in high school.

"He was the same player then that he is now. He just goes about his business and doesn't say a whole lot to anybody," Greiner said. "He's not really flashy, he's just a professional hitter at the plate and a solid defender. He's exactly what you need to be a good team."

A notorious first-pitch fastball hitter, Bright's aggressiveness at the plate proved to be somewhat of a weakness last season. Although he batted a solid .288 with four homers and 22 RBIs in 49 starts, he walked four times in 190 plate appearances. That free-swinging approach kept his on-base percentage to a low .315.

But in 19 plate appearances this season, he has equaled his walks total of four from a year ago, which has lifted his OBP to .579.

“We talked about that a lot in the offseason,” Bright said. “It was definitely something I wanted to work on. It’s rewarded me so far.”

That improvement has Holbrook considering moving him up from the lower half of the batting order, where he batted all of last season.

“He’s quiet, but at the same time, he gets some big hits for us,” Holbrook said. “When the game’s on the line, I don’t know if I’d rather have anybody up at the plate than Connor Bright.”

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