



## BEN SOMERA

*2nd Year as Head Coach  
4th Year at South Carolina  
Southern California, 1995*

Ben Somera is in his second year as head coach of the South Carolina volleyball program after spending two seasons as associate head coach. He took over the reigns from his wife, Nancy, in June 2007 after she made the decision to pursue a business opportunity. Somera coordinates the recruiting efforts of the Gamecock staff and oversees training of the middle blockers and outside hitters.

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. The Gamecocks have gone 42-46 (.477) during his three years on staff and are 20-36 (.357) in Southeastern Conference matches. Included in the SEC victories was 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.

In 2007, Somera's squad went 14-15 overall but turned things around toward the latter part of the season. The squad 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.

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, one of his setters, new 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 Pacific-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 Conference 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 11-year-old son, Sam, and a 7-year-old daughter, Maile.





## DAMIAN ELDER

***3rd Year as Assistant Coach  
3rd Year at South Carolina  
Fresno State, 2002***

Now in his third season with the Gamecocks, Damian Elder was named assistant coach for the program in March 2006. Elder has become the Gamecocks' top assistant, helping lead the staff's efforts in recruiting, practice management and instruction.

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 Division I State Volleyball Championships.

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



GAMECOCK VOLLEYBALL 2008 STAFF



## LAURA COLLINS

***1st Year as Assistant Coach  
1st Year at South Carolina  
Oregon State, 2004***

Laura Collins is in her first 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 Carolina head coach Nancy Somera at Oregon State, will work with the Gamecocks' setters while also help with recruiting and administration.

"I am excited to not only work with Laura again but to give one of my ex-players the opportunity to make volleyball a career," said Somera. "Laura has great playing and coaching experience that will benefit our program in many ways. Having played for me at Oregon State, she will arrive in Columbia with a working knowledge of our systems and procedures in the gym which will get her up to speed very quickly."

Collins still ranks third on the Beavers' all-time assists chart with 3,786 and 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 spot on the *ESPN The Magazine* Academic All-District third team 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.





## SHANNON PALLARDY

***1st Year as Director of Volleyball Operations  
3rd Year at South Carolina  
USC Upstate, 2006***

Shannon Pallardy is in her third year overall with the South Carolina volleyball, now presiding in the role of director of operations. She served as a full-time assistant coach in 2007 while also working on her master's degree. During the 2006-07 academic year, Pallardy was a graduate assistant and team manager for the Gamecocks. She performs many administrative tasks for South Carolina, such as coordinating team travel.

Pallardy is working toward a master's in exercise science and completed a summer-long internship with Gatorade in 2007 prior to taking on her role as a full-time assistant coach. She came to South Carolina after earning her Bachelor of Science in interdisciplinary studies with a concentration in physical education and an emphasis in psychology from USC Upstate in May 2006.

A four-year member of the USC Upstate Spartan volleyball team, Pallardy compiled 2,922 assists (third-most in USC Upstate history) and 573 digs during her career. As a junior and senior, she was the squad's starting setter, picking up All-Peach Belt Conference honors in her final season. She also earned PBC Specialist of the Week honors on three occasions during those two seasons. Volleyball was not her only sport in Spartanburg, as Pallardy also earned four letters in basketball and one in cross country as a sophomore. Pallardy holds the Spartans' Division II-era record for three-point shooting, making over 40 percent of her tries from behind the arc.

Pallardy received numerous other honors as a Spartan, including the NCAA Sportsmanship Award in 2005 and the school's highest GPA award for the 2004-05 academic year. Additionally, she was a member of the Chancellor's Honor Roll for several semesters, the Peach Belt Presidential Honor Roll in both volleyball and basketball, made the National Dean's List and was tabbed USC Upstate Female Athlete of the Year in 2005-06.



## KRISTIN BELZUNG

***1st Year as Graduate Assistant  
1st Year at South Carolina  
Northern Iowa, 2006***

Kristin Belzung is in her first season as a graduate assistant for the Gamecock volleyball program. Belzung will assist with practice and help out with many of the administrative tasks for the team.

Belzung comes to Columbia from Northern Iowa, where she was a standout setter for 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 environmental health.



## **Dawn Ellerbe** **Sports Marketing**

Dawn Ellerbe is in her fourth year as marketing director for varsity sports. She directly oversees the promotional efforts of volleyball and four other sports. Prior to joining the athletics department, Ellerbe worked at the Colonial Life Arena in marketing and public relations. An alumna of South Carolina and 2000 Olympian, Ellerbe was a volunteer assistant track and field coach for the Gamecocks from 2001 to 2004. A four-time NCAA champion, six-time All-American and five-time SEC champion, Ellerbe received her bachelor's degree in journalism from South Carolina in 1996. She earned her master's in communication from Wyoming. A native of Long Island, N.Y., Ellerbe is a member of the South Carolina Athletics Hall of Fame and is on the board of directors for the United Way of the Midlands.



## **Kelly Lewis** **Event Management**

Kelly Lewis is in her 15th year with Gamecock athletics. Lewis manages event operations for volleyball, as well as several other sports at South Carolina. Lewis was the event coordinator for 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.



## **Earleen Michels** **Academics**

Earleen Michels joined the South Carolina athletics department in July 2003. She is the academic counselor for volleyball, women's basketball and equestrian, and performs other C.A.R.E.S. (Carolina Academic Resources & Enrichment Services) duties assigned to the academic counseling staff. Prior to South Carolina, Michels taught for 10 years in the Midlands/Greater Columbia area and worked in

the state office of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, a non-profit organization interfacing with South Carolina public and private middle schools, high schools and colleges. She also worked overseas one year with KIMAG, the Military Advisory Group to the Korean Army. In Skaneateles, N. Y., Michels worked as an EMT with the all-volunteer ambulance team, SAVES. The Indiana native graduated from Purdue with a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education. After two years of field experience, Michels returned to Purdue and received a Master of Science in education. Michels has a daughter, Christina, and a son, Doran.



## **Koby Padgett** **Media Relations**

Koby Padgett is in his second 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 acted as the media coordinator for the 2007 NCAA Women's Rowing Championships. 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** **Sports Medicine**

Erin Pettinger is in her first year as an assistant athletic trainer at South Carolina, where she works with the Gamecock softball and volleyball teams. She spent five years at Duquesne, working with the Dukes' baseball, women's basketball, lacrosse and volleyball teams during her tenure. A graduate of Nebraska, 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 tennis teams. The Beatrice, Neb., native is a member of the National Athletic Trainers' Association and is an approved clinical instructor.



## **Val Sheley** **Administration**

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.



## **Andrea Taylor** **Sports Medicine**

Andrea Taylor works as a graduate assistant in the South Carolina sports medicine department, and she will serve as the Gamecocks' athletic trainer in 2008. Taylor received her bachelors of science in kinesiology in May 2008. While in University Park, Taylor worked with the volleyball and field hockey programs, traveling with both teams. She is pursuing her masters in athletic training.



## **Jon Vaden** **Strength & Conditioning**

Jon Vaden is in his second year as a full-time assistant strength and conditioning coach and in his fourth overall with the Gamecocks. He is responsible for the volleyball, men's and women's tennis and track teams. 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 was also an intern for the Liberty football program. Vaden is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) through the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) and holds the title of Conditioning Coach Certified (SCCC) through the Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches Association (CSCCA).





Official Volleyball of  
The University  
of South Carolina

Molten is the Official Ball of the NCAA®  
Men's and Women's Volleyball Championships  
NCAA® is a trademark of the National Collegiate Athletic Association

**molten®**  
*For the real game*

[moltenusa.com](http://moltenusa.com)

1-800- 477-1994

Trademarks owned by Molten Corporation or Molten USA, Inc. © 2007 Molten USA, Inc.