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Elliott Caldwell walks to the plate. His walkup music plays as he settles into the batter's box with a runner in scoring position in a tie ball game. He rears back and smacks a ball into the outfield, bringing in the run and giving the Gamecocks a lead.

That sight wasn't seen much last year and it's one the Gamecocks are getting used to at the start of this season.

Caldwell missed 23 games last season because of a back injury. He had a batting average of .254 in 39 games and drove in 14 runs.

But, this year he has started hot despite the frigid temperatures. In six games played, he is batting .476 and has shown up in big situations.

"I can't take any of the credit," Caldwell said after going 4-of-4 in South Carolina's 5-2 win over Furman on Tuesday, Feb. 17.

"I got to thank God for everything tonight. He's been there the past year with everything that's been going on with my back and it's amazing what he's doing in my life."

Against Furman, he had four hits in four at-bats and had three RBIs en route to the win over the Paladins.

Caldwell has attributed his hot start to being able to consistently take batting practice. Last season, he couldn't get hit consistently with his injury and now he is able to take as many practice swings as he wants because he's healthy.

"I feel one hundred percent; my back isn't giving me any problems," he said. "I hit in the cage every day and I'm doing my exercises for my hip and back to make sure I stay healthy all year. It's really beneficial to get in the cage with no injury. To get in the cage to get my swings in (is) something I want, something I need. It's been playing into the games."

Before the season started, the position in left field was an empty patch of grass. But the way Caldwell has started the season that patch of grass may soon belong to him.

Head coach Chad Holbrook hasn't officially given the everyday starting position to Caldwell, but he has started the senior outfielder in the outfield four of the six games this year.

Caldwell said while he's competing for the starting role, he knows he has talent behind him who can cause intense competition. Patrick Harrington is a senior vying for that position as well.

"There are a lot of guys that are playing well right now," Caldwell said. "I'm just trying to be the best teammate I can be. It's early on in the season, so a lot of things can happen between now and when it really counts. I'm just trying to keep playing hard and keep playing the best way I can."

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Caldwell has proven to be a solid hitter in the top of the order and wants to continue to help the team win. He is a senior who transferred from Spartanburg Methodist to become a Gamecock. Since his first season was last year, he has not been on a team that has gone to



Omaha, which is his ultimate goal.

<http://spursandfeathers.com/sports/wbkb/2014-15/releases/caldw...>

He said that's the end goal and no matter if his hot bat continues to keep him in the starting lineup or not, he just wants to win.

"I've never won anything in my life," Caldwell said. "I'm a senior. I'm getting old. I'm trying to win. That's all I care about. I've gotten second, I know how second feels and I know how last place feels. I'm just trying to win. That's all I care about."

****Story by Collyn Taylor/Photo by Allen Sharpe****