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For uneven Gamecocks, quarterback Thompson a steadying hand



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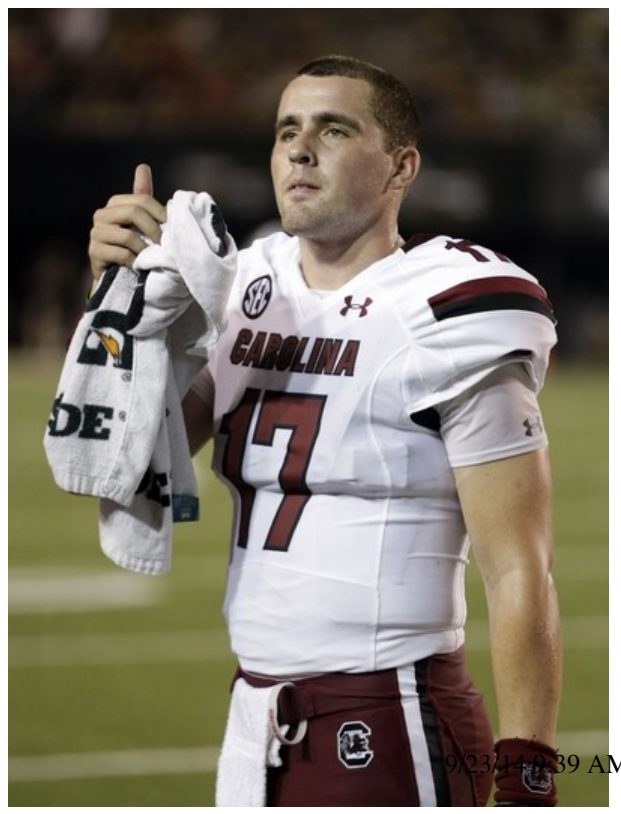
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COLUMBIA - Dylan Thompson hasn't just been a quarterback for South Carolina - he's been a rock.

And that's not a reference to the senior signal-caller's less-than-fleet scrambling ability in the backfield. Through four somewhat uneven games for No. 13 USC, Thompson has been one of the few Gamecocks to earn regular praise from head coach Steve Spurrier, a former Heisman Trophy-



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South Carolina quarterback Dylan Thompson gives a thumbs-up late in Saturday's 48-34 win over Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tenn. Mark Humphrey/AP

himself with a reputation for being quite demanding of the players he puts behind center.

That was even the case in the wake of last weekend's 48-34 victory at Vanderbilt,

a game in which South Carolina (3-1, 2-1 Southeastern Conference) allowed the Commodores to return two kickoffs for touchdowns, and run up and down the field in the final minutes. Afterward, Spurrier was unrelenting in his criticism of both his players and coaching staff. But when the subject turned to Thompson, his tone was considerably more measured.



"Dylan's doing fine. He's doing fine," Spurrier said Sunday. "His protection was not real good early in the game at times. Our receivers were not all real good a lot of the game. . But Dylan is playing well. He's playing well."

The numbers back that up. Thompson stands second in the SEC in total passing yards behind Texas A&M's Kenny Hill, is tied for third in passing touchdowns and ranks fourth in average passing yards per game. The Boiling Springs native is 88-for-142 for 1,140 yards this season, with three interceptions and 11 touchdowns. He accounted for four touchdowns at Vanderbilt, throwing for three scores and running in another from 1 yard out.

And it could have been better. A long pass to Shaq Roland early in the game went through the receiver's hands, and what appeared a 26-yard pickup to Rory Anderson was negated because the tight end had stepped out of bounds at the 1. Thompson also overthrew Damiere Byrd on a deep route, and occasional high misses are one reason he stands 10th in the league in pass efficiency.

"I've got to take responsibility for that," Thompson said after the Vanderbilt game. "Any time we've got guys open, I've got to hit them, regardless of any other circumstance. I've got to be sharper."

He gets that chance Saturday, when USC hosts Missouri (3-1) at 7 p.m. at Williams-Brice Stadium. Thompson started last year's game at Missouri for the injured Connor Shaw but was replaced in the third quarter. Shaw led USC to a comeback victory in double overtime.

Missouri game. The live three-hour show, which features Chris Fowler, Lee Corso, Kirk Herbstreit and Desmond Howard, will be aired nationally beginning at 9 a.m. It will broadcast from the Horseshoe on the USC campus.

"We're always fired up to get those guys here," Spurrier said. "... I heard there was a good chance they would come if us and Missouri won. But I guess only one of the two had to win for them to come. That will be added to the excitement here on campus the day of the game. Look forward to seeing those guys. They've been very good to us."

Missouri was upset by Indiana last weekend. Saturday will mark the seventh time "GameDay" has visited USC, and the Gamecocks own a 3-3 record in those games. The most recent was in 2012, when USC beat then-fifth-ranked Georgia, 35-7. The program was also on site when South Carolina beat then- No. 1 Alabama, 35-21, in 2010.

Kentucky kickoff

USC's game at Kentucky on Oct. 4 will kick off at 7:30 p.m. and be aired on SEC Network, the school announced. It will be USC's third appearance this season on SEC Network, following the opener against Texas A&M and last weekend's victory at Vanderbilt.

Kentucky (2-1, 0-1) was off last weekend, and hosts Vanderbilt on Saturday.

USC has won three straight against the Wildcats, including 35-28 in Williams-Brice Stadium last season.

The Gamecocks won, 38-17, in their most recent trip to Commonwealth Stadium in Lexington, Ky., in 2012.

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Hank Sizemore · University of South Carolina

Great chance this weekend to show marked improvement against a good Missouri team. Go Gamecocks!

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