

# CAROLINA



## 2007 SEASON PREVIEW & 2006 FALL REVIEW

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# TENNIS



# 2007 SEASON PREVIEW

Spring 2007 is being met with much anticipation for the South Carolina women's tennis team, as the Gamecocks return the majority of their starters from a year ago and have added a talented freshman to their roster. South Carolina is sure to make a run at its 13th consecutive NCAA bid and possibly advance to the 16-team NCAA Championships for the first time since 1999.

In 2006, the Gamecocks posted a 12-11 record and endured two of their top four players sustaining season-ending ankle sprains in March. Barring unforeseen injuries, the 2007 USC team has a chance to record a special season in the laurels of Gamecock women's tennis, and simply making the NCAA Tournament is not the top goal for South Carolina this year.

"Our first goal is to make the NCAA Tournament for the 13th straight year, and we want to finish in the top four in the SEC," head coach Arlo Elkins said. "Additionally, we want to be among the final 16 at NAAs and we want to have representation in the NCAA Singles and Doubles Championships."

Carolina returns the 2006 SEC Co-Freshman of the Year and ITA Southeast Region Rookie of the Year with sophomore Gira Schofield. She posted a 25-11 record in her first year at USC and was 14-7 playing exclusively at No. 1 singles. Schofield played every doubles contest at the top slot as well, teaming with two different partners en route to a 19-17 mark. She was ranked the entire spring, peaking at No. 46 in February, and became just the second Gamecock freshman to earn a bid to the NCAA Singles Championship. Her big serve, powerful groundstrokes and all-around game make her a tough out for any opponent in the country. Schofield will be a likely candidate for one of the top three slots in singles again during the spring.

"Gira had an outstanding year in 2005-06 and was one of the top freshmen in the country, which was validated by her being SEC Freshman

of the Year," Elkins said. "We look for improved play from Gira this spring to make us an even stronger team at the top of the lineup."

Natasa Vuckovic was the other half of South Carolina's outstanding freshman duo in 2005-06. Like Schofield, she made the All-SEC Second Team and led the team in singles victories with a 26-15 record. Vuckovic spent nearly the entire spring playing at No. 2 singles, where she finished 11-7 and 6-5 in the Southeastern Conference. She played 12 doubles matches with Schofield at the No. 1 position, going 5-7, and the pair was 13-11 overall. Vuckovic finished with a doubles record identical to Schofield's at 19-17. With one of the top backhands on the team and her deceptive shot-making ability, Vuckovic will compete for a spot in the top half of Carolina's singles lineup.

"Along with Gira, Natasa was the other part of one of the top freshmen tandems in the country last year," Elkins said. "With her added strength and conditioning from last year, Natasa will be a force for us this season."

The Gamecocks' lone newcomer, Ana Marija Zubori, has a strong chance of securing one of the three highest positions in singles following her stellar fall campaign. Zubori churned out a 13-3 slate during the fall and won two singles titles while reaching the final in another. She had a 10-3 record in doubles as well, which will make a valuable contributor across the board for USC. A holder of dual citizenship from Serbia and France, Zubori's game is somewhat similar to Schofield's in that she possesses a great deal of power from the baseline but also has great hands around the net.

"Ana came in this fall as one of the most highly touted freshmen we've had, and she didn't disappoint us with her outstanding play this fall," Elkins said. "Ana also is a player who will give us strength at the top of the lineup, which we need to compete with not only the SEC's best, but the nation's best as well."

South Carolina's trio of seniors, Laura Ganzer, Miranda Gutierrez and Christyn Lucas, will all vie for a place in the bottom half of the singles lineup. Ganzer is coming off a shortened junior season that ended in March when she severely sprained her ankle during a match against Georgia, while Gutierrez and Lucas both dealt with injuries in fall 2005 that prevented them from playing until the spring. All three saw significant action during the fall and appear fully rehabilitated from their ailments.

Ganzer had a productive fall with a 9-4 record in singles matches and she tied with Zubori for the team lead in doubles wins with a 10-2 mark. Her most impressive performance came during South Carolina's home tournament in October when she won the A-2 singles flight by defeating Vuckovic in the championship in straight sets. Additionally, Ganzer won doubles titles at the Southern Intercollegiate Championships and the SEC Fall Coaches Classic.

During her junior year, Ganzer played nearly all dual matches at No. 4 singles and one at the third spot. She played a limited fall schedule and ended the season with an 11-9 record and was 5-4 in duals. Ganzer played doubles with five different partners en route to a 10-12 finish, however, she did go 7-4 playing in dual matches.

"Laura had the best fall she's had since coming here with not only outstanding play but senior team leadership," Elkins said. "Her excellent work ethic and sportsmanship make her an excellent role model for the entire team."

Gutierrez's 12-4 singles record in the fall finished second only to Zubori by one victory. After a slow 1-2 start, Gutierrez rolled through the remainder of the season with an 11-2 slate and a singles title at the Southern Intercollegiate in her respective flight. At the SEC Fall Coaches Classic, Gutierrez fell in her opening-round bout to a contender from Vanderbilt, but she recovered by winning the consolation draw.

Gutierrez was a critical component to South Carolina's success in 2006. After missing the fall, she played in nearly every dual match and finished 11-9. She began the season playing the No. 6 slot and slowly moved up the singles ladder when injuries sidelined her teammates. By the end of the year, Gutierrez was USC's regular starter at four singles. She won a key match at the position for South Carolina in the first round of the SEC Tournament to help the Gamecocks defeat Mississippi and improve their chances for an at-large NCAA bid.

"Miranda is coming off an injury from last year," Elkins said. "She stepped up her game numerous times last year to help us in the middle of the lineup and won some important matches for us. Again this year, we look for Miranda to help pull us through some tough SEC matches."



Senior Laura Ganzer had her junior year cut short by an ankle injury against Georgia. Ganzer returned in the fall to post a 9-4 record in singles and went 10-2 playing doubles.



*Sophomore Natasa Vuckovic led the Gamecocks in singles victories last year with a 26-15 record. She spent most of the spring playing No. 2 singles and has greatly improved her doubles play from a year ago.*

Lucas started the fall with a 2-3 record in singles play, but she bounced back to win four of her final five matches. Her best performance came at the Southern Intercollegiate when she reached the final of her respective bracket. Lucas had a similar doubles record, going 6-3 while teaming with two different Gamecocks.

She missed the majority of 2005-06 because of injuries and did not return to the singles lineup for South Carolina until SEC play began in March. She came back playing No. 6 singles and eventually became the Gamecocks' regular at three. Lucas ended her junior year with a 7-6 record and was 4-4 at No. 3 singles, and she finished 8-9 in doubles.

"Christyn is another player who had injuries that slowed her down last spring and at the beginning of this fall, but she came back with a strong performance at the end of the fall season," Elkins said. "She looks to have her game back to where it was when she was playing in the top three in past years."

One of the Gamecocks' hardest workers and most consistent players is in her junior year, and she is in strong contention for the No. 5 or 6 singles slot. Megan McGavock led the squad in dual match victories in 2006 with a 16-5 ledger and she finished 21-10 overall. McGavock spent most of her time playing No. 5 singles, where she was 12-3 and 5-2 in SEC matches. She posted the third-most doubles victories with a 15-15 record and saw considerable playing time at the top doubles position with Schofield.

In fall 2006, McGavock endured a 0-4 start in singles matches but caught fire when playing in South Carolina's tournament in October. She breezed through the competition, losing a total of just seven games in four matches, and she claimed every second set by a 6-0 score. McGavock won her first two matches at the SEC Coaches Classic to extend her winning streak to six before losing in three sets to post a final record of 6-5. Her doubles play was superb during the fall, as she ended with an 8-2 record.

"Megan has made some of the biggest improvements this fall of any player on the team," Elkins said. "She has proven to be a tough player for anyone to beat. Megan has made not just improvements to her singles play but her doubles game as well. We will need her contribution in both for us to reach our goals."

The final member of South Carolina's eight-member squad is redshirt junior Grace Blakely, who is hoping for a chance at No. 6 singles in the spring. Blakely had a solid 14-7 record overall the season prior and she saw playing time in five dual matches. She won her first career SEC match playing the No. 6 position against LSU and finished 3-2 overall in duals.

Blakely had a similar start to that of McGavock's in fall 2006 by dropping her first three singles matches. She rebounded to win her respective singles flight at the Southern Intercollegiate to end with a 4-3 record. Blakely won every match in straight sets and lost just nine games in her final three matches. Her doubles record was 4-2 playing exclusively with Gutierrez, and the pair won the B-2 flight at the Southern Intercollegiate.

"Grace has played in limited matches, but she continues to work hard in practice and improve her singles and doubles games," Elkins said. "I am confident when she gets her chance in the lineup she will help us in securing a victory."

Doubles play was something Elkins addressed during the fall 2006, as the Gamecocks lost the doubles point in their last seven dual matches last spring. As a result of its hard work, South Carolina went 26-12 in doubles matches this past fall, and USC figures to be capable of winning the doubles point much more frequently in 2007.

The Gamecocks' No. 1 team in the fall consisted of Schofield and Zubori, who were 6-1 playing together. They won their first six matches and claimed a doubles title at the Southern Intercollegiate before reaching the final at the SEC Fall Coaches Classic and losing a close match to a Georgia team in the A flight.

Ganzer and McGavock's 8-1 fall record make them a possible fit for a starting spot in doubles this spring. The duo's only loss came in the quarterfinals of the USTA National Tennis Center Invitational. Ganzer and McGavock won championships at the Southern Intercollegiate and the season-ending SEC individual championships.

Lucas and Vuckovic may have their names penciled in for doubles despite playing in only one tournament together in the fall. They reached the championship match at the one event in which they played and saw some time together last year. Lucas and Vuckovic were 4-2 in 2005-06 with all their playing time coming at the second position. The tandem also boasted a 3-1 mark against SEC teams.

"Our fall doubles play was the best it's been for some time," Elkins said. "At the SEC fall tournament, Gira and Ana got to the final of the top flight, and Megan and Laura won the B flight. We will continue to work hard on our doubles while experimenting with different combinations in an effort to maximize our potential of winning doubles points in dual matches."

Competing in one of the nation's premier women's tennis conferences ensures the Gamecocks a challenging schedule every year. There have been instances in the past where the Southeastern Conference has sent all 12 of its teams to the NCAA Tournament. While 2006 was not one of those cases, eight teams made the post-season event and three went on to reach the NCAA Championships.

Before starting another arduous conference campaign, South Carolina has non-conference matches in 2007 against East Tennessee State, Furman, Winthrop, Davidson, Clemson, N.C. State and Marshall. Carolina begins league play at home against the likes of Mississippi State and Mississippi before traveling to Georgia and Tennessee. USC then takes a break from SEC play by heading to Charleston, S.C., to face College of Charleston. The Gamecocks finish the year with LSU, Arkansas, Auburn, Alabama, Kentucky, Vanderbilt and Florida.

The SEC Tournament will take place over April 19-22 in Lexington, Ky., with Kentucky serving as the host institution. First- and second-round NCAA competition gets underway during May 11-13 at 16 campus sites that will be determined when the field is announced. The NCAA Championships, which includes the singles and doubles tournaments, will be played in Athens, Ga., from May 18-28.

"With our SEC schedule and nationally ranked non-conference teams, we have a tremendous opportunity to compete against the nation's best," Elkins said. "In turn, our schedule gives us a chance to reach our lofty goals of a high team ranking and SEC finish and qualifying individual players for national tournaments."



# 2006 FALL REVIEW & STATISTICS

South Carolina received several impressive performances from its women's tennis team during the fall 2006 season. The Gamecocks also displayed great improvement in their doubles play, as they won several titles at the six tournaments in which they competed.

Sophomores Gira Schofield and Natasa Vuckovic entered the fall ranked among the top 100 nationally in singles, with Schofield coming in at 39th and Vuckovic at 93rd, respectively. The pair also snagged a No. 37 billing in doubles. Both players, along with four others, kicked off the year in Greenville, S.C., at the end of September to compete in the Furman Fall Classic.

Newcomer Ana Marija Zubori emerged as USC's top performer in Greenville, as she posted a 3-0 singles record en route to the flight 3 title. A holder of dual citizenship from Serbia and France, Zubori upended two SEC opponents and one from Wisconsin in winning the championship. The Gamecocks also saw the tandems of Schofield/Vuckovic and Laura Ganzer/Miranda Gutierrez make the finals of their respective doubles flights.

Just two days removed from the Furman tournament, Schofield and Vuckovic were back on the court, this time on the opposite side of the country in Pacific Palisades, Calif. Schofield competed in the qualifying singles draw of the Riviera/ITA All-American Championships and joined with her lone teammate on the trip for doubles. Schofield registered a straight-set victory against one of UCLA's best in Ashley Joelson before losing a tight contest with Jessica Nguyen of Stanford. In the doubles bracket, Schofield and Vuckovic fell to teams from Southern California and Long Beach State.

As Schofield and Vuckovic concluded their stay in California, the rest of the Gamecocks headed to Flushing Meadows, N.Y., to play in a tournament hosted by the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, home of the US Open. Zubori stole the show once again in the Big Apple, nearly winning the flight A singles championship to run her record to 7-1. She breezed through her first four matches against foes from Virginia, Princeton, Yale and Penn before coming up a little short versus Melissa Saiontz from Princeton. The doubles teams of Ganzer/Megan McGavock and Christyn Lucas/Zubori made the quarterfinals of flight A as well.

In mid-October, South Carolina sent Gutierrez and McGavock to the Wilson/ITA Southeast Regional Championships in Chapel Hill, N.C. Gutierrez survived the qualifying draw by downing Tennessee's Zsafia Zubor and Caroline Winebrenner from Kentucky before suffering a setback in the main draw to Amanda Granson of Duke. McGavock lost a competitive match with No. 63-ranked Caitlin Collins from North Carolina in the first round.

After taking a week off, the Gamecocks returned to host the annual Southern Intercollegiate Championships over Oct. 27-29. Rain limited the first day of play to just doubles, and Carolina saw all four of its tandems reach the finals of their respective flights. The following day, Schofield and Zubori won the A-1 draw, Ganzer and McGavock cruised to the B-1 crown, and Grace Blakely and Gutierrez were victorious in the B-2 flight.

USC had equal success in singles play at the Southern Intercollegiate, winning five of the seven singles flights. Zubori raced through her matches in A-1 and Ganzer upended Vuckovic in the championship of the A-2 bracket. McGavock dominated B-2 singles, losing a total of seven games in four matches and she won every second set by a 6-0 score. Gutierrez battled her way to the C-1 title and Blakely won all of her contests in straight sets en route to the C-2 championship. Lucas nearly snagged the B-1 bracket, as she lost in three sets in the final to Neils Barringer from North Carolina State.

South Carolina's final tournament of the fall, the SEC Fall Coaches Classic, took place over the first weekend in November in Peach Tree City, Ga. Most of the Gamecocks' achievements came in doubles, as Ganzer and McGavock won the B draw by defeating foes from Alabama, Georgia and Vanderbilt. In the A draw, Schofield and Zubori reached the championship by upending teams from Florida, Kentucky and Vanderbilt. The USC tandem was defeated 8-6 by Georgia's Yvette Hyndman and Darya Ivanov in the final.

McGavock was the only Gamecock to survive her opening-round match in singles. She downed Jil Hasternath from Auburn and Winebrenner of Kentucky in straight sets before losing in the quarterfinals 7-5, 3-6, 7-5 to Lara Fakhoury of Georgia. Gutierrez managed to win the consolation draw of the D singles and Zubori grabbed a couple consolation victories as well.



Miranda Gutierrez had a very productive fall for the Gamecocks, as she posted a 12-4 record in singles and was 6-4 in doubles. She won her respective singles flight at the Southern Intercollegiate Championships.

## FALL STATISTICS

PLAYER	SINGLES	DOUBLES	COMBINED
Grace Blakely	4-3	4-2	8-5
Laura Ganzer	9-4	10-2	19-6
Miranda Gutierrez	12-4	6-4	18-8
Christyn Lucas	6-4	6-3	12-7
Megan McGavock	6-5	8-2	14-7
Gira Schofield	4-6	8-4	12-10
Natasa Vuckovic	4-3	4-4	8-7
Ana Marija Zubori	13-3	10-3	23-6
TEAM	RECORD		
Blakely/Gutierrez	4-2		
Ganzer/Gutierrez	2-1		
Ganzer/McGavock	8-1		
Gutierrez/McGavock	0-1		
Lucas/Vuckovic	2-1		
Lucas/Zubori	4-2		
Schofield/Vuckovic	2-3		
Schofield/Zubori	6-1		