

SPORTS



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Woodmont volleyball wins state title

Kamryn Jackson

Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

The stakes for Woodmont girls volleyball were higher than the tallest building in the state of South Carolina.

The Wildcats entered their Class AAAA-D2 state title matchup with North Myrtle Beach as the underdogs. The Chiefs were the defending champions, while Woodmont hadn't tasted a championship in any sport in 47 years.

That drought came to an end on Nov. 6 when Woodmont defeated North Myrtle Beach at Dreher High School in a five-set thriller to win the program's first state championship.

"This feels absolutely incredible," said Woodmont coach Haleigh Horgan. "This team has worked so hard and truly trusted the process and their training. I am so proud, and this is going to be something we all remember for years to come. To bring this back to the school is a dream."

The Wildcats got off to a hot 4-0

start in the first set, but would eventually fall short, 27-25. But Woodmont would storm back to take the next two sets (25-21, 25-18) and gain the 2-1 lead. The Chiefs opened the fourth set with a quick 5-0 start and would win 25-20.

Sophomore phenom Mallory Mizell led the Wildcats with 24 kills. Junior setter Riley Gross had a whopping 53 assists, and senior libero Lauren Smith had 30 digs.

The fifth set was reminiscent of a ping-pong match, as both teams consistently traded points. But in the end, a power tip to the deep corner from Mizell would seal the win, giving the Wildcats a 15-13 victory.

"The fifth set was point for point, which can be so tough," Horgan said. "But what amazed me was how our players continued to play with joy. During the last timeout, I prayed for my athletes to have calm spirits and trust in their training and in each other. They went back in, controlled what they could, and won a state championship."



The Woodmont Wildcats celebrate during a match on Oct. 29.

ALEX MARTIN/GREENVILLE NEWS

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South Carolina guard Raven Johnson is introduced during the 2024 NCAA championship game in Cleveland.

KIRBY LEE/USA TODAY SPORTS

Johnson at the helm of quest for 4th title

5th-year South Carolina point guard looks to lead program

Lulu Kesin

Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA — Seven. Seven. Seven. That's how Raven Johnson taps in.

Breathe in seven times. For each breath, hold it for seven seconds. Let it out for seven.

The serenity helps amplify her grit. Still and unmovable in order to be relentless and unconquerable.

Her pre-game breath work centers her as she prepares to lead South Carolina women's basketball at a steady but rapid pace. The fifth-year point guard is tasked with preserving the history of coach Dawn Staley's program, trying to become the second team in NCAA history to reach six straight Final Fours.

"Raven is Raven," Staley said. "She understands what we want. I don't have to say much to Raven ... I think she knows me well enough to know what we want out there on the floor."

What Johnson means to Staley, USC

Johnson's final chapter projects as her greatest leadership challenge. After Chloe Kitts tore her ACL, Johnson is the

only returning starter for Staley on a 10-person roster.

And South Carolina isn't alone among the elite. They aren't even favorites. No. 1 UConn wants to repeat. No. 3 Texas wants revenge. No. 5 LSU is hungry to end a 17-game losing streak against South Carolina, and No. 4 UCLA hopes to prove last season wasn't a fluke.

Johnson's quest to hoist the hardware a third time in her South Carolina career will require all she's got. But if she's proven anything, it's that she has quite a bit.

"Raven's a winner," Staley said, "and she was a winner before she got to South Carolina."

How Johnson has responded to adversity

Johnson's greatest weapon is beneath the surface, behind her constant smile.

It's her toughness, her trademark tranquility. She's learned it takes tenacity to respond to intensity with calm.

This inner strength overcame a torn ACL as a freshman very early in the 2022 national championship season. And the scoffs from Iowa's defense in

the 2023 Final Four. And the agony of a national championship loss in 2025.

It's the force that allows her to exhaust offenses or throw a one-handed dart to her teammate for a game-winning shot.

"I am very strong-minded," Johnson said. "I think I can handle anything honestly."

Johnson doesn't know what life is like without an SEC regular season title. Staley has had Johnson for 50% of her 30-win seasons.

"She is the best in the business ... everybody would love to have a Raven," said Winston Gandy, Staley's former assistant and now Grand Canyon's coach. "We don't make it, let alone win (2024 title), without her."

Johnson had 'revenge tour'

Johnson has played 2,652 minutes at South Carolina, coming away with a victory in 109 of 114 career games. Fans spoiled by success have a belief that bouncing back from a defeat is easy but Johnson confirms it's a misconception.

"You like the highs high but when

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Staley: UConn series is important

Lulu Kesin

Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA — South Carolina women's basketball won't play UConn this season, the first time in 11 seasons but will resume the rivalry in 2026 and 2027.

"It's important," Gamecocks coach Dawn Staley said Nov. 6 about adding the series back on the schedule. "We've been accused of ducking and all that crap. Like, come on, we played UConn for the past 11 seasons, now is time to duck? We could have ducked 7, 8, 9 years ago."

It was announced on Nov. 5 that the Gamecocks will play the Huskies in Uncasville, Connecticut, on Nov. 24, 2026, at Mohegan Sun Arena in the Basketball Hall of Fame Women's Showcase.

A day later, it was revealed that South Carolina and UConn will play in 2027 in the Ally Tipoff at the Spectrum Center in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Staley confirmed that the reason why the series contract was not renewed for this season was because the Big East shifted to 20 conference games, which made it hard to schedule. UConn already had a non-conference contract to follow through with Tennessee and Notre Dame.

The online discourse that Staley referred to came after it was announced the two teams wouldn't play this season, just after UConn beat South Carolina twice in 2024-25. The Gamecocks lost at home in February then

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South Carolina coach Dawn Staley looks on during practice on April 5 in Tampa, FL. NATHAN RAY SEEBECK/IMAGN IMAGES

Lawrence, Jaguars have to keep emotions in check

Juston Lewis

Jacksonville Florida Times-Union
USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

Jacksonville Jaguars quarterback Trevor Lawrence's voice didn't shutter or shake when he said it.

He stood in the post-game press conference room inside the bowels of EverBank Stadium after his team pulled off a 17-10 victory against the Houston Texans on Sept. 21 and was asked about the chippiness between the two teams.

Lawrence acknowledged that the two teams don't like each other and had a statement that the Texans later took exception to.

"We're not going to get bullied," he said.

When the two teams met on Dec. 1, 2024, Lawrence was knocked out of the game by a late hit from linebacker Azeez Al-Shaair.

An ensuing brawl occurred and Lawrence was forced into a multi-week concussion protocol which, eventually, led to him missing the rest of the season after he got shoulder surgery for a separate injury.

"People are in their feelings about playing football. We play football," Al-Shaair said, responding to the comments made by Lawrence. "Nobody's trying to bully nobody or all that weird stuff. We're just trying to play the game hard."

The intensity is already turned up in a division game. But the ri-

valry between the Texans and the Jaguars continues to grow with each meeting. Now, Lawrence and the Jaguars are going to try to go to Houston and secure a needed victory to keep pace in the AFC South race.

"It's going to be a physical, competitive game. I mean, every week is, but especially in your division," Lawrence said. "We kind of know that that's what it's going to be like, and we've got to keep our composure, stay focused, stay locked in on the details, that's what matters."

Trevor Lawrence, Jaguars' offense continues to find ways to win ugly even with injuries

The Jaguars made a trade at the deadline to add wide receiver Jakobi Meyers to their roster. It's needed, because several of their pass catchers are on the mend.

Rookie Travis Hunter is on the injured reserve list and won't be back until Nov. 30 at the earliest.

Brian Thomas Jr. suffered an ankle injury against the Raiders and missed practice earlier in the week. Dyami Brown had to leave the game with a concussion and remains in the protocol.

Still, the Jaguars found a way to gut out a much-needed road win.

"The things in the second half that hurt us in the first half, the penalties and some of the motion things, we just sharpened up all

those," Lawrence told reporters during his weekly media availability.

Lawrence completed 23-of-34 passes against the Raiders for 220 yards with an interception. He didn't throw any touchdown passes, but he ran for two touchdowns.

They turned to their rushing attack, churning out 151 yards in the win and relying on it when they had to score in overtime.

"It's a cool feeling when you can run the ball that many times and obviously you are expecting to throw it eventually as a quarterback and then you just keep running and keep getting positive yards," Lawrence said.

Against the Texans, they'll likely have to gut out another victory. Houston's defense ranks No. 1 in the league in points per game (15.1) and yards per game (267.4). They're unmovable and have been standouts in a disappointing season for the reigning back-to-back AFC South champs.

"They do what they do, and they do it well. Obviously, they have wrinkles," Lawrence said. "They have game-plan things that they throw in every week that might be a little bit different. But I'd say overall their scheme has been pretty consistent throughout the years and throughout this coaching tree."

The Jaguars will travel to face the Texans on Nov. 9 at NRG Stadium with kickoff at 1 p.m.



Flynn, Morell win Ingles Athletes of the Week for Upstate

Kamryn Jackson

Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

Jada Flynn of Chesnee girls golf and Caden Morell of T.L. Hanna football won the Upstate Ingles Athlete of the Week for Oct. 27 - Nov. 2.

Flynn won the girls voting with 76 out of the 158 votes cast. Katie Labrie of Boiling Springs volleyball was the runner-up with 69 votes.

Flynn finished second in the individual standings, shooting 71 at the SCHSL girls golf state championship

Caden Morell had 3,403 out of the 4,767 votes to win the boys poll. Ty'Qwon Booker, of Broome football, was the runner-up with 1,205 votes.

Morell had a 78-yard kickoff return for a touchdown as time expired to beat Greenville, 27-23.

Kamryn Jackson covers high school and college sports for the Spartanburg Herald-Journal, Greenville News, Anderson Independent Mail, and the USA TODAY Network. Please email her at KEJackson@gannett.com for story ideas, updates, stats, and follow her on X, formerly known as Twitter, @Kamxja

Johnson

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the lows do get low, it's hard to try to get over that hump," Johnson said.

Relearning how to mirror with a guard, glued to their hip as a defender after reconstructing a shredded knee was difficult but Johnson did it. Still she was spiritless after the 2023 Final Four loss that season.

She found herself stuck in a mind-numbing rhythm, replaying the mix-tape of her lowest moments. Her 3-point shooting was questioned, with

Iowa allowing her to dribble uncontested at the top of the key.

She eventually forced herself to recognize the potential within the pain. She improved her shooting and catapulted South Carolina to its first undefeated season and third title in 2024.

"She got past it and went on her revenge tour," her mother Kia Johnson said. "She actually completed it, which was the craziest thing. She called it out, she spoke the season into existence."

The criticism regarding Johnson's offensive production didn't stop when she won another title. She dropped from 8.1 to 4.9 points per game last year, but she tried to keep her mind quiet, un-

fazed.

For Johnson, the WNBA could wait a year

The Gamecocks' bid to repeat crashed into UConn's brick wall last season.

Silence lingered in the South Carolina locker room but Johnson fielded questions about her future, adding salt to a fresh wound. Either option was a challenge, carving out a spot in a 156-person league or pursuing a third national championship.

"Raven Johnson will have a home in the WNBA," Diana Taurasi, the WNBA

all-time leader in points, said on the broadcast during the Final Four. "She's (one of) those players that aren't the top three in college then get to the WNBA and there's this value she has, she can do all the things, all the things you need to win a championship and to compete."

But there's unfinished business in Columbia. Two rings aren't enough for her.

"I'm just trying to leave on the winning aspect," Johnson said. "Getting back to the Final Four and getting back to the championship, trying to win it."

Lulu Kesin covers South Carolina athletics for The Greenville News and the USA TODAY Network.

Staley

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again in the national championship game, both by more than 20 points.

"It's a great competition for us and for

women's basketball," Staley added.

Before the 2025 title game, Staley was undefeated in national championship games and had previously become the first coach to beat UConn's Geno Auriemma in a championship game.

Staley, who is in her 18th season, didn't win against Auriemma until

2020. South Carolina won four straight from 2021-24.

What is Dawn Staley's record vs Geno Auriemma?

Staley is 1-1 against Auriemma in national championship games and 5-10

against him overall, winning four straight from 2021-24.

Overall, the Gamecocks are 5-11 in the series, which is tied 2-2 in neutral site games. South Carolina beat UConn in Columbia in 2024, part of its undefeated season that ended with a national championship win.

SPORTS ON TV SUNDAY, NOV. 9 (ALL TIMES EASTERN)

AUTO RACING

12 p.m.

ESPN2 — Formula 1, São Paulo Grand Prix, São Paulo, Brazil

COLLEGE BASKETBALL (MEN'S)

1 p.m.

ESPN — Indiana vs. Marquette, Chicago

2 p.m.

ESPN2 — Texas A&M at Oklahoma State

4:30 p.m.

SECN — VMI at Missouri

6:30 p.m.

SECN — Southern Miss at South Carolina

8:30 p.m.

ESPN — Washington at Baylor

COLLEGE BASKETBALL (WOMEN'S)

3 p.m.

ESPN — USC vs. N.C. State, Charlotte, N.C.

4:30 p.m.

FS1 — Florida State at Connecticut

COLLEGE FIELD HOCKEY

12 p.m.

BTN — Big Ten Tournament, Championship, Teams TBD, Bloomington, Ind.

COLLEGE SOCCER (MEN'S)

2 p.m.

ACCN — ACC Tournament, Quarterfinals, Teams TBD, at campus sites

4 p.m.

ACCN — ACC Tournament, Quarterfinals, Notre Dame-North Carolina winner at Virginia

6 p.m.

ACCN — ACC Tournament, Quarter-

finals, Teams TBD, at campus sites

8 p.m.

ACCN — ACC Tournament, Quarterfinals, Teams TBD, at campus sites

COLLEGE SOCCER (WOMEN'S)

12 p.m.

ESPNU — ACC Tournament, Championship, Stanford-Virginia winner vs.

Notre Dame-Duke winner, Cary, N.C.

2 p.m.

BTN — Big Ten Tournament, Championship, Washington-Wisconsin winner vs. Michigan State-UCLA winner, St. Louis

ESPNU — American Conference, Championship, South Florida-Rice winner vs. UTSA-Memphis winner, Lakewood Ranch, Fla.

2:30 p.m.

SECN — SEC Tournament, Championship, Mississippi State-LSU winner vs. Vanderbilt-Georgia winner, Pensacola, Fla.

COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL (WOMEN'S)

12 p.m.

ACCN — Virginia at Pittsburgh

4 p.m.

ESPN2 — Utah at Baylor

4:30 p.m.

BTN — Penn State at Illinois

5 p.m.

ESPN — Tennessee at Kentucky

GOLF

3 p.m.

GOLF — PGA Tour, World Wide Technology Championship, Final Round, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico

HORSE RACING

12 p.m.

FS1 — America's Day at the Races

NFL FOOTBALL

9:30 a.m.

NFLN — Atlanta vs. Indianapolis, Berlin

1 p.m.

CBS — Regional coverage, Jacksonville at Houston, Buffalo at Miami, Cleveland at N.Y. Jets or New England at Tampa Bay

FOX — Regional coverage, New Orleans at Carolina, N.Y. Giants at Chicago or Baltimore at Minnesota

4:05 p.m.

CBS — Regional coverage, Arizona at Seattle

4:25 p.m.

FOX — Regional coverage, L.A. Rams at San Francisco or Detroit at Washington

8:20 p.m.

NBC — Pittsburgh at L.A. Chargers

NHL HOCKEY

1 p.m.

NHLN — Chicago at Detroit

PICKLEBALL

6 p.m.

ESPN2 — PPA Tour, World Championships, Farmers Branch, Texas

SOCCER (MEN'S)

6:30 a.m.

CBSSN — Serie A, Sassuolo at Atalanta

8:30 a.m.

FS2 — U17 World Cup, Japan vs. Portugal, Doha, Qatar

10 a.m.

CBSSN — Scottish Premiership,

R