

# SPORTS



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## Plan after football



South Carolina offensive lineman Torricelli Simpkins III (76) blocks near LSU linebacker Whit Weeks. KEN RUINARD / STAFF

## USC OL Simpkins aims to be marine biologist

**Lulu Kesin**

Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA — Torricelli Simpkins III faced a challenge.

Simpkins was in fifth grade and with his family at the waterpark. He couldn't swim in the deep end of the wave pool. So, his grandmother's boyfriend gave him a swimming lesson.

His feet kicked, his head dunked and his career path began to form.

Simpkins, now a 6-foot-5, 319-pound offensive lineman, transferred to South Carolina football from North Carolina Central University in January and has immediately impacted the offense as the starting right guard in his final college season.

Embarking on his freshman year of college, Simpkins had to pick a major, so he thought back to where he was the happiest.

"Once I learned how to swim, my mom couldn't get me out of the water," Simpkins said. "I knew (my major) had to be something with that and started learning toward marine biology. I wanted to change the narrative that football

players don't take hard classes."

### Simpkins' backup plan

Growing up in Aiken, South Carolina, before moving to Charlotte, North Carolina, in ninth grade, Simpkins loved football and the Gamecocks, a passion that trickled down to him from his father, uncle and cousins. But as that love grew, so did the expectation his education would be given equal attention.

From the beginning, Simpkins saw how to balance two rigorous careers.

His mother, a chemist, raised three children, and at one point, seven, when she took in four cousins after the loss of a family member. Simpkins wonders how that was possible, but regardless, was inspired.

"You can't just rely on football," his mother told him, insisting he have a backup plan.

Juggling football and classwork at North Carolina Central, a historically Black college, taught Simpkins time management, strengthened his work ethic, and sharpened his goal to become a marine biologist.

"People don't think that Black athletes can be smart, or that they can pursue hard majors and play football, (people think) they just coast through school, I wanted to make sure people couldn't say I (coasted)," said Simpkins.

Biology classes, swimming and football all evoke similar emotions in Simpkins. While extremely rigorous at times, like football, his classwork is rooted in passion.

"When I'm on the field, I'm only focused on one thing with nothing else on my mind, and it feels like that when I'm swimming, just out there living life, it's amazing," Simpkins said. "It's like learning another play. I love it. I want it to be instilled in my brain, that's how science has always been. It sticks with me, just like football."

### The reality of NFL careers for college athletes

Data shows only 1.6% of NCAA football players ever make it to the NFL, and if they do, careers aren't always

See PLAN, Page 2C

## Winless Bengals to face a familiar face

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

It could be all about Andy Dalton again this weekend when the Carolina Panthers meet the Cincinnati Bengals.

Dalton made a smooth transition to a starting role at quarterback for the Panthers, guiding the team to its first win of the season last weekend.

Next, he'll be tasked with beating his former team Sunday afternoon in Charlotte, N.C.

"It's always fun to get the opportunity to go against them," said Dalton, who spent his first nine seasons with Cincinnati after being selected in the second round of the 2011 draft.

Given how the first two weeks went on top of last season for the Panthers (1-2), it's hard to imagine that they're entering a game with a better record than the opponent.

But they are, as the Bengals (0-3) are coming off Monday night's 38-33 loss to the visiting Washington Commanders. Cincinnati's three defeats have come by a total of 12 points.

Cincinnati coach Zac Taylor said this isn't the position the team expected to be in, but he isn't panicking.

"A long season, things can always evolve," Taylor said. "What we do is make sure we don't overreact. Let's really fine-tune how we can actually improve, and not just decide we have to make wholesale changes."

Dalton replaced 2023 overall No. 1 draft pick Bryce Young as Carolina's starter last week. He threw three touchdown passes without an interception in a 36-22 victory at Las Vegas.

"This is just one step, and we got to go back to work and just feel the urgency that the whole group has," Panthers coach Dave Canales said.

Taylor coached Dalton in his first year as Cincinnati's coach in 2019, and said he appreciated Dalton's contributions for the Bengals.

"Always been grateful for Andy," he said. "He led us through a very difficult time. I'm not surprised that he keeps getting opportunities and makes the most of them because of how he prepares and the talent that he has."

The Bengals have concerns far beyond Dalton.

"A new opportunity for this team to prove themselves," Taylor said. "This is a very humbling week. There are a lot of ebbs and flows and right now we're on the downside of that."

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## Staley talks about plan for replacing Cardoso

**Lulu Kesin** Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA — South Carolina women's basketball coach Dawn Staley knows an instrumental part of the 2024 national champions' offense is gone.

Kamilla Cardoso, the 6-foot-7 center who averaged a team-high 14.4 points, is now in the WNBA. When Cardoso missed games last season, junior forward Ashlyn Watkins took her place.

Now Staley is without both, as Watkins, arrested Aug. 31 on charges of first-degree assault and battery and kidnapping, is suspended from team activities. Watkins is scheduled for a court appearance on Oct. 25, and the season opener is Nov. 4 against Michigan.

Staley said Tuesday that it's been hard so far to replace Cardoso.

"We've had go-to post players for the past 10 years," Staley said. "I don't necessarily think we have that right now. We have some younger players that have some potential to be but they haven't had enough experience in practice or games to really deem them that. We don't want to put that on them. Collectively I think we have incredible tal-

ent and right now it's going to have to be a collective effort."

Returning at forward is 6-foot-2 Chloe Kitts, who started 31 games last season. Kitts and Watkins worked in tandem to replace the true center style of play without Cardoso last year. They played more forward-based basketball, rather than flowing the offense through a center camped out in the paint. It was expected that Watkins would do the same this season.

Staley didn't specifically name any players when talking about filling the void of Cardoso.

South Carolina has 6-foot-3 senior Sania Feagin, who averaged 15 minutes, and who Staley said has been vocal throughout practice so far. Cardoso was a clear leader on the team, another layer that is challenging to replace.

Ahdel Tac, who is 6-foot-5, redshirted her freshman year after missing the 2023-24 season with a knee injury. South Carolina's only true center is 6-foot-5 Sakima Walker, who averaged seven minutes last season.

Even the guards have to adjust and contribute heavily given the loss of Cardoso, Staley said.

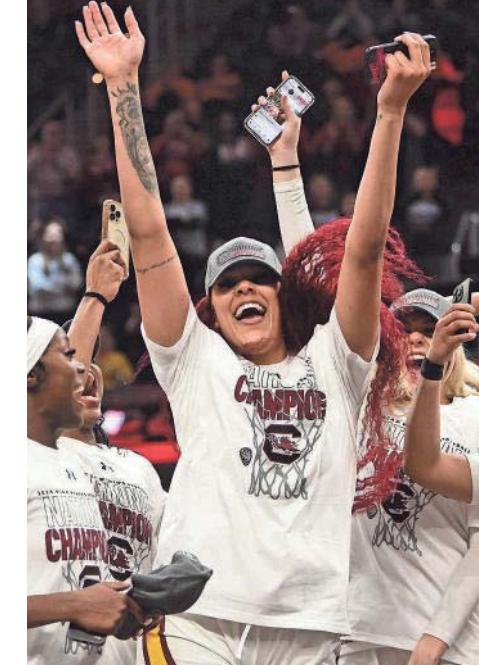
"It's going to be the strength of an entire roster," Staley said.

The Gamecocks added two freshmen Joyce Edwards and Maddy McDaniel in addition to Arkansas transfer Maryam Dauda, a 6-foot-4 forward, who may be involved in a lot of the offense without Cardoso. Dauda is a bit more guard-like than Cardoso was, and shoots the 3-point shot more frequently than Cardoso did.

Edwards, the No. 2 recruit in the 2024 class, is a 6-foot-3 forward from Camden, South Carolina. McDaniel, the No. 14 recruit, is a 5-foot-9 guard from Maryland.

"We really don't take in consideration that they're freshmen," Staley said. "If you separate them from the rest of the pack then they'll feel a little different. We are going to treat them like any other player, like they won a national championship and I think it helps, they keep up with the pace of what we're doing ... they fit right in."

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South Carolina center Kamilla Cardoso, middle, reacts during the trophy presentation after the Gamecocks won the 2024 NCAA Championship.

KEN BLAZE-USA TODAY SPORTS

**MLB LEADERS THROUGH GAMES OF SEPT. 25****American League**

**Batting Average** — Witt Jr., Kansas City .333; Guerrero Jr., Toronto .325; Judge, New York .324; Alvarez, Houston .308; Diaz, Houston .299; Rooker, Oakland .296; Altuve, Houston .293; Kwan, Cleveland .292; Soto, New York .288; Duran, Boston .286.

**Home Runs** — Judge, New York 57; Santander, Baltimore 44; Soto, New York 41; Ramirez, Cleveland 38; Rooker, Oakland 38; Henderson, Baltimore 37; Alvarez, Houston 35; Witt Jr., Kansas City 32; O'Neill, Boston 31; Naylor, Cleveland 31.

**RBI** — Judge, New York 142; Ramirez, Cleveland 115; Rooker, Oakland 110; Naylor, Cleveland 108; Soto, New York 108; Witt Jr., Kansas City 108; Perez, Kansas City 103; Guerrero Jr., Toronto 102; Santander, Baltimore 101; Pasquantino, Kansas City 97.

**Stolen Bases** — Caballero, Tampa Bay 44; Ramirez, Cleveland 40; Chisholm Jr., New York 38; Garcia, Kansas City 37; Duran, Boston 34; Hamilton, Boston 33; Robles, Seattle 33

**Wins** — Skubal, Detroit 18; Rodon, New York 16; Lugo, Kansas City 16; Berrios, Toronto 16; Gil, New York 15; Lopez, Minnesota 15; Valdez, Houston 15; Burns, Baltimore 15

**ERA** — Skubal, Detroit 2.39; Blanco, Houston 2.88; Valdez, Houston 2.91; Miller, Seattle 2.94; Burnes, Baltimore 2.95; Lugo, Kansas City 3.03; Houck, Boston 3.12; Ragans, Kansas City 3.14

**Strikeouts** — Skubal, Detroit 228; Ragans, Kansas City 223; Gilbert, Seattle 213; Kikuchi, Houston 206; Crochet, Chicago 203; Rodon, New York 190; Lopez, Minnesota 190

**Saves** — Clase, Cleveland 47; Hader, Houston 34; Yates, Texas 31; Holmes, New York 29; Jansen, Boston 27; Miller, Oakland 27; Foley, Detroit 26

**National League**

**Batting Average** — Arraez, San Diego .314; Ozuna, Atlanta .310; Ohtani, Los Angeles .303; Turner, Philadelphia .296; Marte, Arizona .294; Merrill, San Diego .292; Betts, Los Angeles .290; Harper, Philadelphia .286; Bohm, Philadelphia .284; Contreras, Milwaukee .283.

**Home Runs** — Ohtani, Los Angeles 53; Ozuna, Atlanta 39; Schwarber, Philadelphia 38; Marte, Arizona 35; Alonso, New York 34; Adames, Milwaukee 32; Hernandez, Los Angeles 31; Lindor, New York 31; Harper, Philadelphia 30; Suarez, Arizona 29.

**RBI** — Ohtani, Los Angeles 125; Adames, Milwaukee 111; Machado, San Diego 104; Ozuna, Atlanta 102; Schwarber, Philadelphia 102; Suarez, Arizona 98; Olson, Atlanta 98; Bohm, Philadelphia 95; Hernandez, Los Angeles 94; Marte, Arizona 93.

**Stolen Bases** — De La Cruz, Cincinnati 65; Ohtani, Los Angeles 56; Turang, Milwaukee 47; Stott, Philadelphia 32; Carroll, Arizona 32; Young, Washington 32

**Wins** — Sale, Atlanta 18; Wheeler, Philadelphia 16; Imanaga, Chicago 15; Cease, San Diego 14; Gallen, Arizona 14

**ERA** — Sale, Atlanta 2.38; Wheeler, Philadelphia 2.56; Imanaga, Chicago 2.91; King, San Diego 2.95; Flaherty, Los Angeles 3.17; Manaea, New York 3.29

**Strikeouts** — Sale, Atlanta 225; Cease, San Diego 224; Wheeler, Philadelphia 213; Gray, St. Louis 203; King, San Diego 201; Peralta, Milwaukee 200

**Saves** — Helsley, St. Louis 48; Finnegan, Washington 38; Suarez, San Diego 35; Iglesias, Atlanta 32; Diaz, Cincinnati 28; Estevez, Philadelphia 26

**SPORTS ON TV SUNDAY****BEACH VOLLEYBALL**

4 p.m. BSSO — FIVB Queen and King of the Court

**COLLEGE WOMEN'S FIELD HOCKEY**

Noon ACC — Syracuse at Duke

**COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL**

1 p.m. ESPN — Kentucky at Florida

SEC — Ole Miss at Arkansas

1:30 p.m. ACC — Pitt at Georgia Tech

3 p.m. ESPN — Stanford at Louisville

SEC — Texas at LSU

5 p.m. SEC — Alabama at Auburn

**COLLEGE WOMEN'S SOCCER**

2 p.m. ESPNU — South Carolina at Arkansas

**GOLF**

7 a.m. Golf — DP Acciona Open de España

Noon NBC — Presidents Cup

2 p.m. Golf — LPGA Walmart NW Arkansas Championship

**MLB**

3:15 p.m. BSSE — Kansas City at Atlanta

**MEN'S LACROSSE**

4 p.m. ESPN2 — World Box Championship Final

**MEN'S SOCCER**

8:20 a.m. FS2 — FIFA Futsal World Cup Quarterfinal 1

9 a.m. USA — Aston Villa at Ipswich Town

10:50 a.m. FS2 — FIFA Futsal World Cup Quarterfinal 2

11:30 a.m. USA — Tottenham at Man United

8:30 p.m. ESPN2 — New Mexico at Sacramento

**MOTORSPORTS**

3 p.m. FS1 — NHRA Midwest Nationals

USA — NASCAR Cup Hollywood Casino 400

**NFL**

1 p.m. CBS — Pittsburgh at Indianapolis

Fox — Cincinnati at Carolina

4:25 p.m. CBS — Kansas City at L.A. Chargers

8:15 p.m. NBC — Buffalo at Baltimore

**NHL**

7 p.m. NHL — Pittsburgh at Ottawa

**WOMEN'S AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL**

1 a.m. FS2 — Adelaide at Brisbane

3 a.m. FS2 — Carlton at Port Adelaide

**WOMEN'S LACROSSE**

1 p.m. ESPN2 — World Box Championship Final

**WNBA**

3 p.m. ABC — Las Vegas at New York

8:30 p.m. ESPN — Connecticut at Minnesota

**Note:** Live events only. Subject to schedule changes, local blackouts.

**Plan**

Continued from Page 1C

long.

Despite the odds, Simpkins aims to play in the NFL. After three seasons in the FCS, he arrived in Columbia with a caveat.

Most of his biology credits wouldn't transfer over so he is a business major at South Carolina, and will return to NC Central next semester to finish his biology degree.

"Torricelli is mature, intentional with everything he does, so communicative, and you never have to question if he is on his work, he's reliable, and he works incredibly hard," said Justin Light, director of football academics at South Carolina said.

In an industry that can end a career in a single snap, Light highlighted that Simpkins will have two bachelor's degrees from two schools.

The NFL may work out; if not, Simpkins wants to work either in lab, or in the water,

finding toxins that impact marine animals and their environments.

"Everyone should have a backup plan, nobody should put all their eggs in one basket," Simpkins said. "Try your hardest to make it, but if you don't, don't just fall straight off, have something to fall onto."

*Lulu Kesin covers South Carolina athletics for The Greenville News and the USA TODAY Network. Email her at lkesin@gannett.com and follow her on X, formerly known as Twitter, @Lulukesin*

**Retiring NBA MVP made peace with 'what-ifs'**

**Jeff Zillgitt**  
Columnist  
USA TODAY

Derrick Rose sat courtside inside the Bulls' practice facility — then located in suburban Chicago — and discussed his knee injury. It was February 2013, and Rose was in the middle of grueling rehab on his left knee after surgery to repair a torn anterior cruciate ligament sustained during the 2012 playoffs.

"I don't know what type of player I'm going to be," Rose told USA TODAY Sports then. "I just know that I'm going to be very good."

Rose was good again in stretches but never great again — and Rose, who announced his retirement from pro basketball on Thursday, was great in his first four seasons.

His ascent into NBA stardom was rapid, joyful, entertaining and rare: Rookie of the Year in 2008-09, All-Star in 2009-10 and MVP, first-team All-NBA and All-Star in 2010-11.

In that MVP season, Rose, just 22, averaged 25 points, 7.9 assists 3.4 rebounds and shot 43.5% from the field, leading the Bulls to a 62-20 record. He remains the youngest player to win MVP.

Nearly 18 months after that torn ACL and 10 games into the 2013-14 season, Rose tore the meniscus in his right knee, requiring another surgery which sidelined him for the remainder of the season.

Rose, who turns 36 Oct. 4, returned in 2014-15 and had solid seasons with Chicago, the New York Knicks and Minnesota Timberwolves but he was never the same player.

It was a 16-year career marked by flashes of brilliance but also devastating knee injuries that robbed him of realizing his full potential as an NBA star.

What was truncated by what-ifs.

Rose bounced from team to team following his time with the Bulls and played for Memphis last season, appearing in 24 games.

He was explosive, tough to defend with his speed and strength, finished



**Derrick Rose poses for a picture after winning the NBA MVP trophy in 2011.** MIKE DINOV/USA TODAY SPORTS

at the rim and had a mid-range jump shot. For his career, he averaged 17.4 points, 5.2 assists and 3.2 rebounds and shot 45.6% from the field.

It's easy to wonder what a career without injuries — or without as many — would've looked like for Rose.

It was a Hall of Fame start, but he likely will be the only player to win NBA MVP but not make the Basketball Hall of Fame.

Rose, who was the No. 1 pick by his hometown Bulls, did his best to eliminate those what-ifs. He maintained a positive attitude, always believing in himself no matter the circumstance. If he had a woe is me attitude, he hid it well.

In his retirement announcement, Rose showed injuries did not ruin his

love for a game that gave and took so much.

In a love letter to basketball, Rose wrote, "Thank you, my first love ... You believed in me through the highs and lows, my constant when everything else seemed uncertain. You showed me what love truly meant. You turned the court into my sanctuary, a home where I could express myself freely. You made every early morning and late night we spent together worth every drop of sweat. You reminded me that I could always rely on you, that in every moment of doubt, you would show me what I'm capable of."

"You introduced me to new places and cultures that a kid from Chicago could have never imagined. You taught me that every loss was a les-

son and every win was a reason to be grateful. You offered wisdom that was not just about the game, but about life, discipline, hard work, perseverance. You showed me that passion is something to cherish, ensuring that I pour my heart into every dribble, every shot, every play. You stood by me even when the world seemed against me, unconditionally, waiting for me to pick you up. You gave me a gift, our time together, one that I will cherish for the rest of my days. You told me it's okay to say goodbye, reassuring me that you'll always be a part of me, no matter where life takes me."

Derrick Rose, at peace with what was, what could've been and what is.

Follow NBA reporter Jeff Zillgitt on social media @JeffZillgitt