

SPORTS

NCAA WOMEN’S BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT



South Carolina guard Te-Hina Paopao celebrates a three-point basket against Indiana in the first half of Sunday’s game at Colonial Life Arena in Columbia. JEFF BLAKE/IMAGN IMAGES

‘STAY CALM AND BE CONSISTENT’

Paopao saves USC’s season after shocking start vs. Indiana

Lulu Kesin
Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA — South Carolina women’s basketball’s fifth-year guard Te-Hina Paopao walked off the court in Colonial Life Arena one last time with a smile on her face, a towel on her neck and blew kisses to the crowd.

She has one national championship already and on Sunday, she was huge reason the No. 1 seed Gamecocks (32-3) get to continue their hunt for another, rallying to beat No. 9 seed Indiana 64-53.

A hard-fought effort from the Hoosiers (20-13) and abysmal Gamecocks shooting in the first half (25 points, 34% from FG) almost sent coach Dawn Staley home in the second round.

Paopao wasn’t going to let that happen. She locked down defensively, fueling runs that changed the tone of the game. She was in the ears of her teammates through the highs and lows of the March Madness game, settling the flow and creating productive habits.

“I feel like her presence calms us down,” starting forward Chloe Kitts said. “When she’s in the game with us,

just playing with her just feels so much more calm out there.”

Paopao had a career-high four blocks and added nine points, four rebounds, two assists and two steals in the win. South Carolina will play the winner of Monday’s Alabama-Maryland game in the Sweet 16 in Birmingham, Alabama, on Friday.

“You’ve just got to stay calm and be consistent,” Paopao said. “You can’t go too high with the highs and too low with the lows. When you’ve got a team like us, they trust you. They have confidence in you. When you play for (Staley), she does a really good job with that and putting her trust in you.”

Indiana disrupted South Carolina at first. Shots either missed badly or rolled out, but no matter what, the offense appeared rushed.

Paopao kept bringing the defensive intensity while also creating a flow that thrived in the pace of play as South Carolina got back into the game in the second quarter.

With South Carolina trailing 26-25, Bree Hall got a block then threw a fast break pass to Paopao on the run for a layup to start the third quarter. Sania Feagin scored back-to-back layups in the

paint. Then riding the momentum of a loud home crowd and a 10-3 run, Paopao stayed glued to Indiana’s Shay Ciezki.

She baited Ciezki to dribble right into her, stripped the ball and got the layup. Not even 30 seconds later, Ciezki caught the ball just ahead of Paopao, who swatted the ball, sprinted the other way then found Raven Johnson on the run, who swung it cross court for Hall to nail a wide open 3-pointer.

The sequence pushed the score to 45-33 South Carolina and CLA erupted.

“Pao’s defense was great,” Staley said. “It was executed to a T ... (Ciezki) is unconscious going left. She is super efficient, and Pao just sat on her left hand, forced her right. I think she got 12 points, but she would have gotten a lot more if she would have got into the flow of going left ... I don’t think her defense gets enough credit in the past two years that she’s been with us because it’s gotten better and better and better, and then she had performances like she did today.”

With 4:54 left, Paopao caught a pass with four seconds on the shot clock and had no choice but to shoot. Her 3-pointer swished in, she looked at the bench and her smile grew. Icing on the cake.

CLEMSON MEN’S BASKETBALL

How Tigers roster will look next season

Derrian Carter
Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

CLEMSON — Clemson basketball’s regular season was magical, but its run in the NCAA Tournament was a nightmare.

The fifth-seeded Tigers were upset by No. 12 McNeese State in the first round of March Madness, losing 69-67. Despite setting program records for total and ACC wins, they were embarrassed in the tournament to suffer an early exit.

Now, Clemson will have to address losing star players, including guard Chase Hunter, forward Ian Schieffelin and center Viktor Lakhin because of expiring eligibility. The Tigers may also lose guard Jaeden Zackery. These departures mean forward Chauncey Wiggins and guard Dillon Hunter will headline next season’s team along with whoever the Tigers might pick up in the transfer portal.

Clemson coach Brad Brownell, who is in talks for a contract extension, will have plenty of inexperienced freshmen and sophomores. Clemson will likely add transfers to supplement the loss of its crucial contributors too.

Here are the players who are leaving and returning for the Tigers’ 2025-26 season with the transfer portal opening Monday:

Will Jaeden Zackery return for Clemson in 2025-26?

Zackery, who transferred to Clemson from Boston College, was a brilliant addition for the Tigers. He averaged a career-high 11.7 points and 2.1 steals to make the ACC’s all-defensive team.

Zackery played five college seasons, including his three seasons with the Eagles (2021-22 through 2023-24) and one at Chipola College, a junior college program (2020-21). His potential for another season comes from recent rulings regarding Vanderbilt quarterback Diego Pavia, who sued the NCAA in federal court to try to get back a final year of eligibility.

Pavia received a court ruling granting him an extra year of eligibility because a judge stated that the NCAA’s rules counting junior college eligibility against Division I eligibility violated antitrust law. The NCAA is appealing the decision, but it issued a waiver allowing some players who would be in their last year of eligibility and had spent time at a junior college to play an extra year. However, a new ruling

See ROSTER, Page 2C

COLLEGE BASEBALL

Clemson wins series after wild comeback

No. 6 Tigers score 7 unanswered runs in finale against Wake Forest

Derrian Carter
Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

CLEMSON — Clemson baseball nabbed its second ACC series win thanks to an improbable comeback Sunday.

The No. 6 Tigers won the series finale vs. No. 13 Wake Forest, winning 7-6 after scoring seven unanswered runs capped off by Tryston McCladdie’s walk-off run on a wild pitch.

Clemson (18-2, 4-2 ACC) lost two straight series to Wake Forest (16-3, 7-2), including six consecutive losses dating back to 2023. This weekend’s victory gives the Tigers their first series win against the Deacons since 2022.

Here’s what we learned about Clemson’s fourth series win this season.

Clemson baseball showcases resilience in rubber match vs Wake Forest

The Tigers fell behind 10-0 in the third inning to Wake Forest on Saturday and failed to catch up, losing 12-10. They faced a similar predicament in the series finale, trailing 6-0 in the second inning, but this time came out on top.

Clemson held Wake Forest scoreless for the final seven innings and scored six runs in the final four innings to steal the series. Despite lacking power, Clemson’s offense displayed its ability to make timely hits and take advantage of miscues from opponent’s pitching to either mount comebacks or make games closes.

See CLEMSON, Page 4C



Clemson’s Aidan Knaak pitches to Wake Forest during the top of the second inning at in Clemson. on Friday. KEN RUINARD/GRENVILLE NEWS