

SPORTS



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SOUTH CAROLINA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Johnson comes up big in rout

Lulu Kesin

Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK - SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA – Tessa Johnson giggled before she said, “This is going to sound very bad.

“But I’ve been trying to rebound this season, it just sometimes doesn’t work out for me and today it did.”

Johnson had first career double-double for South Carolina women’s basketball and found herself fielding questions about rebounding, a uncommon topic for the shooting guard.

She scored 14 points with her career-

high 10 rebounds in the 103-34 victory over No. 16 seed Southern in the March Madness first-round game on March 21 in Colonial Life Arena.

It wasn’t that the junior guard woke up on the morning of her third Women’s NCAA Tournament opener and decided to start rebounding.

But with a recent shooting slump, she was intentional about helping her team in other ways.

“I just wanted to do more than just scoring out there,” Johnson said. “I feel like I can do a little bit more out there

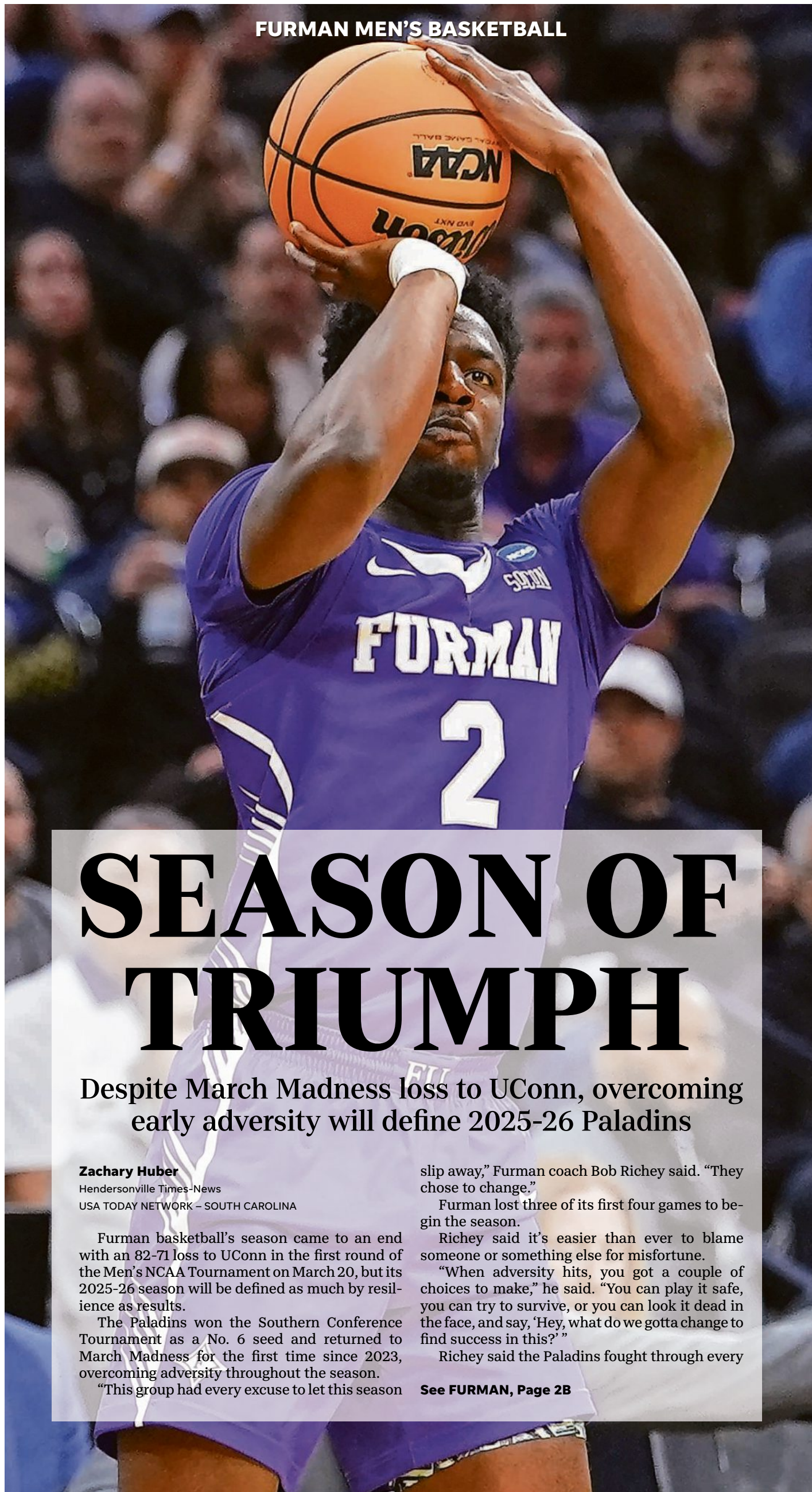
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South Carolina guard Tessa Johnson drives around Southern guard Zaria Hurston in the first half at Colonial Life Arena in Columbia on March 21.

JEFF BLAKE/IMAGN IMAGES

FURMAN MEN'S BASKETBALL



SEASON OF TRIUMPH

Despite March Madness loss to UConn, overcoming early adversity will define 2025-26 Paladins

Zachary Huber

Hendersonville Times-News

USA TODAY NETWORK - SOUTH CAROLINA

Furman basketball’s season came to an end with an 82-71 loss to UConn in the first round of the Men’s NCAA Tournament on March 20, but its 2025-26 season will be defined as much by resilience as results.

The Paladins won the Southern Conference Tournament as a No. 6 seed and returned to March Madness for the first time since 2023, overcoming adversity throughout the season.

“This group had every excuse to let this season

slip away,” Furman coach Bob Richey said. “They chose to change.”

Furman lost three of its first four games to begin the season.

Richey said it’s easier than ever to blame someone or something else for misfortune.

“When adversity hits, you got a couple of choices to make,” he said. “You can play it safe, you can try to survive, or you can look it dead in the face, and say, ‘Hey, what do we gotta change to find success in this?’”

Richey said the Paladins fought through every

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CLEMSON MEN'S BASKETBALL

A look at Tigers' 2026-27 roster

Derrian Carter

Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK - SOUTH CAROLINA

TAMPA, FL – Clemson basketball coach Brad Brownell and his staff are back to the drawing board after another early exit in the Men’s NCAA Tournament

No. 9 seed Iowa eliminated the No. 8 Tigers in the first round, winning 67-61 on March 20 at Benchmark International Arena. It marked the second straight season that Clemson (24-11) had a first-round exit in March Madness. The Hawkeyes (22-12) will face No. 1 seed Florida in the second round on March 22.

Clemson made the tournament for the third straight season despite the team having the largest roster turnover in Brownell’s tenure.

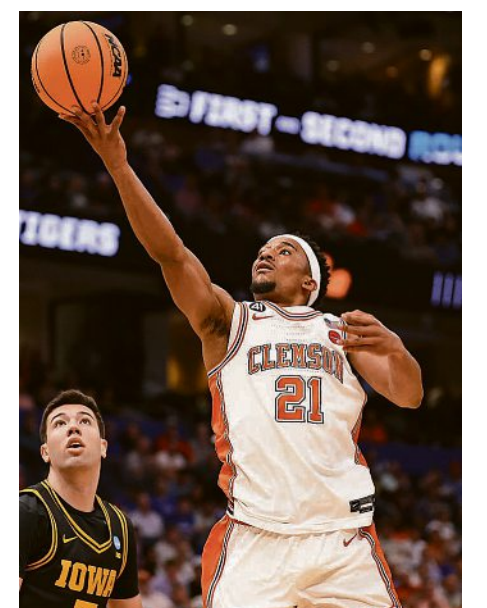
That change is happening again as the Tigers will lose five seniors to expiring eligibility: guards Dillon Hunter, Justin Porter and Butta Johnson and forwards RJ Godfrey and Nick Davidson.

This group consists of Clemson’s leader in points (Godfrey), assists (Hunter), 3-point shooting (Porter) and steals (Porter).

Clemson’s expected returners are guards Ace Buckner and Zac Foster; forwards Jake Wahlin, Chase Thompson, Dallas Thomas and Blake Davidson; and centers Carter Welling and Trent Steinour.

Clemson also signed three freshmen: four-star guard Harris Reynolds, four-star forward Will Stevens and three-star guard Amare James. This leaves four roster spots remaining on the Tigers’ 2026-27 roster. Clemson only used 13 roster spots this season.

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Clemson guard Ace Buckner shoots a layup against Iowa on March 20 in Tampa, Fla.

MATT PENDLETON/IMAGN IMAGES

Furman guard Eddrin Bronson shoots the ball against UConn in the first half during a first round game of the men’s NCAA Tournament on March 20 in Philadelphia. KYLE ROSS/IMAGN IMAGES

SPORTS ON TV MONDAY, MARCH 23 (ALL TIMES EASTERN)

COLLEGE BASKETBALL (WOMEN'S)

12 p.m.
ESPN — NCAA Tournament, Regional 3, Second Round, Louisville vs. Alabama

2 p.m.
ESPN — NCAA Tournament, Regional 4, Second Round, Iowa vs. Virginia

4 p.m.
ESPN — NCAA Tournament, Regional 1, Second Round, Ohio State vs. Notre Dame

5 p.m.
ESPN2 — NCAA Tournament, Regional 3, Second Round, West Virginia vs. Kentucky

6 p.m.
ESPN — NCAA Tournament, Regional 1, Second Round, UConn vs. Syracuse

7 p.m.
ESPN2 — NCAA Tournament, Regional 1, Second Round, Vanderbilt vs. Illinois

8 p.m.
ESPN — NCAA Tournament, Regional 4, Second Round, South Carolina vs. USC

10 p.m.
ESPN — NCAA Tournament, Second Round, UCLA vs. Oklahoma State

COLLEGE GYMNASTICS (WOMEN'S)

12 p.m.
ESPNU — NCAA Selection Special

COLLEGE LACROSSE (MEN'S)

7 p.m.
ACCN — Dartmouth at Virginia
ESPNU — Michigan at Johns Hopkins

COLLEGE SOFTBALL

6 p.m.
BTN — UCLA at Rutgers

7 p.m.
SECN — Oklahoma at Mississippi

GOLF
9 p.m.
ESPN2 — TGL, Jupiter Links GC vs. Los Angeles GC, Finals, Match 1

MLB BASEBALL
1:05 p.m.
MLBN — Exhibition, Baltimore at Washington

4 p.m.
MLBN — Spring Training, Tampa Bay vs. Philadelphia, Clearwater, Fla. (tape delay)
8:05 p.m.
MLBN — Exhibition, Kansas City at Texas

11 p.m.
MLBN — Exhibition, L.A. Angels at L.A. Dodgers (same-day tape)

NBA BASKETBALL
7 p.m.
AMAZON PRIME — G League, College Park at Wisconsin
NBC/PEACOCK — San Antonio at Miami
9:30 p.m.
NBC/PEACOCK — Golden State at Dallas
NHL HOCKEY
7:30 p.m.
NHLN — Ottawa at N.Y. Rangers
TENNIS
11 a.m.
TENNIS — Miami Open, ATP 3rd Round; WTA Round of 16

CLEMSON WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Poppie upbeat about future despite loss

Kamryn Jackson

Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK — SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA — Clemson women's basketball season may have come to an end, but the Tigers say they are just getting started.

The Tigers fell to Southern Cal 71-67 in overtime in the first round of the NCAA Women's Tournament on March 21 at Colonial Life Arena. Clemson coach Shawn Poppie is in his second season, and he led the Tigers to their first March Madness appearance since 2019.

"Those girls just set the standard for what Clemson basketball is going to be," Poppie said. "If you went man to man, roster to roster throughout this entire year, that's probably why no one thought we could be here. But here we are, and I think that we can take a lot of that movement forward."

"That's the culture of who Clemson women's basketball is while we continue to try to get, obviously, more and more talent. We have a heck of a freshman class coming in. I like the returning class we've got coming back."

The Tigers (21-12) thought they'd be moving on to the second round after senior guard Mia Moore hit a running 3-pointer to seemingly give the Tigers the win in regulation. But after the review, the shot was waved off because it was after the buzzer.

Initially, Poppie thought there was a foul called before the shot.

"They said when they got the stop-watch out, I guess as they timed it, the whistle was not blown before what they said were zeroes on the stopwatch.



Clemson coach Shawn Poppie directs his team vs. USC. JEFF BLAKE/IMAGN IMAGES

That's how it was explained to me," Poppie said.

Senior guard Raven Thompson has been with Poppie since she started college. She began her career at Chattanooga, where Poppie previously coached, then transferred with him to Clemson.

"Obviously, I've been with him (Poppie) for four years. It's been the best four years of my life. For him to take a chance on me as a freshman and not knowing what my minutes or anything would

look like means the world to me."

To any upcoming recruit or player in the transfer portal, Thompson has advice on where they should go.

"Come be a Tiger," she said. "Things are going to get rough, but just take it in and just learn from your mistakes."

Poppie agreed with the sentiment. "I think that we've continued to prove that in 2025 and 2026, that maybe you don't need to have the most money. Maybe you don't have to have the most talent, but you still can have the

old-school team, and they're going to compete their butts off for one another, and you can still reach dreams and aspirations. And that's what they just did."

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 KE-Jackson@gannett.com and follow her on X @KamxJack (formerly Twitter).

Furman

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injury imaginable.

For example, on Jan. 14, against Samford, the Paladins had only eight players available and were without forward Cooper Bowser and guards Asa Thomas and Thomas House. Furman still found a way to prevail in a 77-73 win despite playing short-handed.

House missed that game with a concussion. He said overcoming his injury has made him a better person and player.

"Everything's either going to break you, or it's gonna make you," House

said. "I'm appreciative of the struggles, and I'm appreciative for the opportunity to put my best foot forward; it'll help you get to a better place."

He was instrumental in keeping the No. 15 seed Paladins (22-13) within striking distance against No. 2 UConn (30-5). He poured in 21 points, including four 3-pointers.

The Huskies defeated Furman behind a historic performance from forward Tarris Reed Jr., who had 31 points and 27 rebounds.

Richey said a major turning point in the season was the 78-69 loss to East Tennessee State on Feb. 18.

The day after, Richey canceled practice and met with every player in the program individually. He held a meeting

with the seniors about how the team needs to move forward.

"It was one of those conversations where this right here is either gonna define us," Richey said. "It's gonna destroy us, or it's gonna develop us."

Players began making sacrifices for each other. Bowser volunteered to come off the bench ahead of the conference tournament, so Furman could have an extra guard in the lineup.

Forward Ben Vander Wal came off the bench for the final three games of the season. He was part of the Paladins' 2023 team that upset No. 4 Virginia the last time they made the NCAA Tournament and will go down as one of Furman's all-time winningest players with 90 victories.

The Paladins won five of their six games, including the SoCon tournament championship after that meeting, to reach the NCAA Tournament.

Richey said the adversity the team overcame this season will stick with them for the rest of their life.

"Watching how they played in the conference tournament, watching how they played tonight, I told them in the locker room, they're gonna draw off this for the rest of their life," Richey said.

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South Carolina

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and really wanted to focus on rebounding this game."

The top-seeded Gamecocks (32-3) will play No. 9 Southern Cal (18-13) in the second round on March 23 (8 p.m., ESPN).

Johnson's height at 6-feet does occasionally give her an advantage against some guards but given how frequently South Carolina runs in transition, it's

normally Johnson sprinting down the court instead of crashing the boards.

She leads the SEC in 3-point shooting at 44.1%, which is 10th in the nation.

Her signature spot-up shooting was highlighted on a grander scale in the 79-72 win over LSU on Feb. 14, when she started 4-of-5 in the first half, forcing Tigers coach Kim Mulkey to scream "Who can guard Tessa" at her team.

Johnson then went 10-of-34 across the next six games (29%).

To start the game against the Jaguars (20-14) it looked like Johnson hadn't quite shaken off the slump, starting 0-

of-2 from the 3-point line. She went to the locker room in the first quarter and returned three minutes later after tapping two of her fingers.

She hit two 3-pointers in the third quarter and two in the fourth.

"Good I mean, there was like a cover on the hoop for everyone in the first half," said Johnson when asked how breaking out of the 3-point slump felt. "The second half we picked it up defensively and I think that just helped us offensively."

By halftime she was only three shy of tying her career-high in rebounds with

seven, but grabbed four in the third quarter

"I wasn't thinking about a double-double until I realized I was at eight points, eight rebounds but I really was just looking at my rebounding," said Johnson, who is averaging a career-high 3.3. "I don't rebound very well but now I'm getting up there."

Lulu Kesin covers South Carolina athletics for The Greenville News and the USA TODAY Network. Email her at LKesin@usatodayco.com. Follow her on X @Lulukesin and Bluesky @bylulukesin.bsky.social

Clemson

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More can open if an unexpected player enters the transfer portal, which opens April 7, the day after the national championship, and closes April 21.

Brownell has been outspoken about Clemson's lack of a go-to scorer this season as the team had to rely on multiple contributors. He said those players are

at a premium but recognizes their impact in postseason settings.

"It takes pressure off your team when there's a guy that you can rely on to either go score, go get fouled or create a double-team, and it just makes life for the other players easier," Brownell said. "So yes, we've had those guys in the past. Love to have one in the future. This year's team, maybe we just weren't quite wired that way."

Foster and Welling have no timetables to return from their ACL tears. This

may lead to Brownell pursuing a veteran guard and big in the portal as there would be no junior or senior playing at either positions if Welling doesn't play next season.

Brownell has had success in the portal, landing impact players who have helped Clemson make March Madness three straight times. Those players include guards Joseph Girard III and Jaeden Zackery and center Viktor Lahkin.

Now, Brownell will have to work his magic again to help the Tigers make it

back to this stage and get over the first-round hump.

"Winning culture, great coaching, trustworthy, honest, integrity — a couple of words that I can really say about this program that's real," said Johnson, a UAB transfer.

Derrian Carter covers Clemson athletics for The Greenville News and the USA TODAY Network. Email him at DCarter@usatodayco.com and follow him on X, formerly known as Twitter, @DerrianCarter00