Freshman Pankovits Blends With Experienced USC Team

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One of the main reasons the USC baseball team has been able to fashion a 22-3 record this season is that most of last year's youthful but talented squad returned. And returned with experience.

Only one regular graduated from last season's Gamecocks and his replacement may well be the main reason for Carolina's strong 1974 showing. Freshman Jim Pankovits has stepped into the third baseman position, which Bruce Pudlock vacated, most effectively.

After just 21 games, Pankovits has already surpassed Pudlock's season total of 17 RBI in 41 games last year. Pankovits' 20 RBI rank him third on the team behind Hank Small and Drew Choate.

But Pankovits' strength is not just his hitting, for he displays a brilliant mastery in the field and has committed just three errors, an unusually low total for a third baseman this far into the season.

Pankovits currently has a .258 average, but that represents a slip of .259 points from the .278 mark he entered Saturday's Georgia Southern doubleheader with.

"I am not hitting well now," Pankovits said after returning from Southern. "I am not making good contact. I haven't been hitting the ball hard at all, certainly not hard enough to be making hits. Plus we faced one of the best lefties I've seen when we played Southern."

Pankovits does not remember the series with any fondness. "It was like a nightmare," the rookie said. "It was the worst two games we played this season. The second game was one of the worst I've ever played in."

"Greg Ward pitched a real good game, but we didn't back him up. It was just an uphill effort the whole way, but we stayed right with them. If we could have played half as well as we've played in any of our other games we could easily have won."

"I suppose it was a little bit of mental fatigue. After Earl Bass pitched so well in the first game and we lost, I suppose we just had a letdown," Pankovits said.

"We were due for a bad game," Pankovits said. "We still get to play them three games up here and I'm looking forward to that because I am confident we can beat them."

The Georgia Southern series was an exception for the Gamecocks and for Pankovits. Neither are used to playing poorly this season. But Pankovits' .238 average does represent a tumble from the lofty