A truly admirable performance

By Sports Editor George Morris

Fans have a natural tendency to replay sports events in their minds and think how it could have been had breaks gone the other way. But only a dreamer could imagine USC playing a much better basketball game than they did Saturday against Notre Dame.

It's easy to make excuses for a team's losses and rationalize it's shortcomings, but there is no reason to do either regarding Carolina's 90-83 loss. The Gamecocks' performance stands as one of the most admirable efforts—win or lose—by a USC team in the past two years.

"Notre Dame was the better ball club," USC head coach Frank McGuire said. "I knew that before the game, but you can't tell that to our kids." If McGuire told his players that, they played like they didn't believe a word he said.

The Gamecocks' performances collectively and as individuals were nothing less than outstanding. Carolina shot 52.2 per cent as a team, including a 60 per cent second half performance, and their 19 assists were one less than the coliseum record for one team.

Defensively, the USC zone held Irish star Adrian Danley to his lowest point total of the year, quite a feat considering Notre Dame's opponents (i.e. Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Kansas and UCLA.)

But it was as individuals that the Gamecocks were most impressive, and the most impressive individual was Alex English.

English dominated Notre Dame inside like few players do against such teams. The slender forward scored 32 points, 19 of them coming in the second half against defenders who had to foul to stop him. Fouling didn't help, either, as he hit 11 of 12 attempts from the free throw line.

Although English did most of the scoring, his front court teammates did a commendable job rebounding against the taller Irish, who out rebounded their opponents an average of 14.1 per game. Mathias, who depends more on muscle than finesse, used his bulk to best advantage and got 11 rebounds. Nate Davis, meanwhile, leaped above his opponents for eight more.

As a result, Notre Dame's rebounding advantage was only three, 38-35.

Carolina guards played better together than they have all year. Mike Dunlevy hit 10 of 15 shots, and Jackie Gilloon penetrated and made a coliseum record 12 assists. Their play turned Carolina's offense, which has been characterized by sporadic efforts and over-reliance on English and Davis to score, into a smooth machine.

That such a performance should come in a losing cause is just one of those frustrating aspects of sports. But as the game is replayed in people's minds—as it will be—it should be remembered more for its excellent play than for its final score.

It was too good a game to be remembered otherwise.