Game's still the same, but things have changed.

It had been a short while since I last covered a USC football game. In fact, the Gamecocks were the last team I was in the press box when.

Well, Saturday, I returned. The feel is still the same, but there's something different about watching a Sparky Woods-coached football game.

The first difference I noticed was the play-calling.

I had initially noticed the relative conservatism of whoever it was that now calls the plays for the Gamecocks when USC played host to Virginia Tech Sept. 9. As we all recall, USC jumped out to a large, early lead, then flat and managed only a win.

The same thing was about to happen against East Carolina for USC, didn't have a large, early spark. But with the wind no longer a factor, Wood's and staff opened it up a little, particularly with passes on first down, the Gamecocks scored like a different team. I guess that's what happens when you set four or more yards on first down.

Another difference I noticed from the now unfamiliar confines of the USC pressbox was the number of turnovers and penalties the Gamecocks committed. I didn't do any kind of computations, but it seemed like the team committed fewer turnovers and plays a lot closer.

My observations of these differences didn't stop at the end of the game.

When I walked into the room where the post-game press conference to hold, I noticed the chairs were utilized, there was a podium and a table with some food. Woods came in, along with four of the game's heroes, Todd Ellis, Carl Pratt, Cory Miller and Mike Drugg.

While Woods spoke candidly about the game, I was struck by the fact that having the four players was like press conference communion. We, the members of the press, were being told who we could talk to.

That fact was emphasized after the press conference, when we went into the locker room to speak to a player who wasn't one of the people at the press conference.

I walked around the room for a while, looking for the player.

Kevin Tharp, the sports informer director, approached me.

"Who are you looking for?" he asked.

"David Pitkin," I said. "OK, I'll help you find him," he said, motioning for me to leave the room. "The locker room is closed." I said, "I didn't know that had changed."