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## The Palmetto State: Orange and Purple or Garnet and Black?

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Tensions between the University of South Carolina Gamecocks and Clemson University Tigers have escalated since 1896 when the football teams took to the field for the rivalry's inaugural game.

The intensity between the two universities reached another level in 1902 when a riot broke out after the South Carolina football team upset undefeated Clemson. Following this matchup, the game was banned until 1909. From then to 2019, the two teams played 111 consecutive matchups, which coined the rivalry as one of the longest uninterrupted rivalries in college football history.

Despite the rivalry originating with the gridiron and pigskin, the intensity has intertwined itself into all collegiate sports offered, both varsity and club level.

For the past five years, the two universities have competed in a head-to-head competition referred to as the Palmetto Series. The series is a points competition between the major varsity sports programs, with each victory securing one point for their respective school. South Carolina has won the Palmetto Series trophy every year.

This yearly battle has inspired club athletic programs to partake in their version of the series.

Since the establishment of the club hockey programs, the universities have brought this intense rivalry to the ice. Every season, the Palmetto Cup is awarded to the team that reigns victorious over a best-of-three series.

While the heated competition between schools resides in the Palmetto State, players from across the country understand the significance behind the matchup.

John Riggins transferred from Wentworth Institute of Technology, where he played NCAA Division III hockey, to the University of South Carolina this season as a sophomore. Riggins, who leads the team in scoring, has adopted the culture of the Gamecock program and embraced the rivalry.

"Rivalry games are definitely different, especially USC and Clemson. No matter what sport it is, it's two schools that really dislike each other a lot," Riggins said. "I'm sure it is going to be a chippy game...we need to go out there and play our game."

Even the student-athletes who come from out of state acknowledge the long history between the two schools. Senior forward and team captain Thomas Samuelson attends Clemson University but was born in Williston, Vermont. Before coming to school in the South, he had no connection to the rivalry.

"As someone who grew up in the North, I wasn't really aware of the intense rivalry between the two schools," said Samuelson, "didn't take too long to figure it out".

Over the last several seasons, the Gamecocks have had the edge over the Tigers. The last time the Tigers took home the Palmetto Cup was during the 2016-2017 season, and the last time they won a game in the series was back in 2019.

This season, these two teams have faced off twice already in November, with the Gamecocks winning both matchups and securing the Palmetto Cup.

"It's nice to have secured the Palmetto Cup in the first two games of the series, and now for the third game, we can just go out there and play our game without any outside factors... it's going to be nice if we can get the season sweep against Clemson," said Riggins.

Last time these two teams clashed, the Gamecocks came out on top with a 5-4 overtime win. Despite losing, this marks the first time the Tigers have taken the Gamecocks to overtime since the 2020 season.

South Carolina is looking to sweep the season series against the Tigers. Regardless of the wins, the Gamecocks are looking to improve their game and make last-minute tweaks before postseason play gets underway.

"I personally feel we haven't played our best hockey against them this year," said Riggins. "I hope that we can put it all together for the final game and end the regular season on a high note before heading to nationals."

Clemson is looking to change the trajectory of the rivalry with a win in the upcoming matchup.

"Just need everyone taking the extra step and taking hits to make plays. If we stick to our game, I see no reason we don't come out on top this time," said Ben Brucker, assistant captain of the Tigers.

Despite the intensity and passion both programs bring to the game, the teams have a mutual respect for each other.

"We give them respect because they are a good squad and give it their all," said South Carolina head coach Allan Sirois. "We cannot forget what made us successful against them as a group and stray in another direction."

This upcoming game will be a special rendition of the rivalry, as the game will be played at Bon Secours Arena, the home of the ECHL Greenville Swamp Rabbits.

Playing as a precursor to an ECHL game aims to grow the sport of hockey in the South, specifically the state of South Carolina, and garner more attention for both the programs involved.

"Creating the atmosphere as two student-run organizations is the coolest thing for me," said Clemson's Brucker.

"Hockey in the Southeast has really taken off and has made its own little niche marketplace for people looking to watch another high-intensity and hard-hitting sport such as football, basketball and baseball, which are all historic staples of the region," said Bobby DiCicco, assistant captain of the Gamecocks.

Puck drop is set for 1 p.m. (ET) on Feb. 24, 2024, at Bon Secours Arena in Greenville, South Carolina. Following the Palmetto Bowl, at 7 p.m. (ET), the Greenville Swamp Rabbits will take the ice in their matchup against the Rapid City Rush.

**ABOUT College Hockey South:** Founded in 2008, College Hockey South is a 29-school, 46 team intercollegiate hockey conference spanning seven southeastern U.S. states that competes in AAU College Hockey. College Hockey South is a 501(c)3 not for profit organization.



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