



News Release

Atlantic Sun Conference

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The Spartans begin competition in 2007-08

Atlantic Sun Conference Membership Reaches 12 with Addition of USC Upstate

MACON, Ga. – The Atlantic Sun Conference moved its league membership to 12 with the addition of USC Upstate as officially announced in a press conference held in Spartanburg, S.C., on May 16.

“USC Upstate is an ideal fit for the Atlantic Sun Conference and the A-Sun is excited to have them counted among our number,” said A-Sun Commissioner Bill Bibb. “Through the leadership of Chancellor John Stockwell and Athletics Director Mike Hall, they gained the unanimous support of their constituents for this decision, and for that, they deserve to be commended. The university’s strengths mirror those of many other A-Sun members. USC Upstate is located in a major metropolitan area and is a dynamic, growing institution with a commitment to building a successful athletics program.”

The history of the University of South Carolina Upstate is a chronicle of remarkable development. Since its founding, USC Upstate has grown from a small, two-year campus helping address a nursing need into one of the leading metropolitan universities in the Southeast. This growth has been a direct response to the needs of the Upstate—a tradition that began with the university’s creation. The university has expanded well beyond nursing to include 40 bachelor’s and master’s programs in the liberal arts, sciences, business, information systems, teacher education and nursing. Today’s thriving campus boasts 280 acres and an enrollment of 4,500 students.

“USC Upstate is honored to join in association with the outstanding public and private universities of the Atlantic Sun Conference,” said Chancellor John Stockwell. “Each member institution has a well-earned reputation for academic excellence and athletic competitiveness, and the Conference itself is widely respected, well-governed and well-administered. All this, taken together with the geographic distribution of the Conference and the array of men’s and women’s sports it offers, we could not ask for a better fit for our growing university.”

USC Upstate officially began the possibility of reclassifying to Division I status after A-Sun representatives visited campus last fall. Interest grew from there and the university made an official announcement of its intention to explore reclassification in February. The University of South Carolina Board of Trustees met in February and approved USC Upstate’s potential move to Division I. The A-Sun sent an evaluation team to Spartanburg in April and left with a positive view of the university and the athletics department. The A-Sun President’s Council, the body that votes on membership issues, meets on June 15 and a vote would have been taken at that time. However, the A-Sun moved quickly on the membership issue and ballots were sent to each school president. USC Upstate was unanimously approved to become the newest member of the A-Sun.

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The USC Upstate athletics department is a diverse, dynamic, and widely successful arm of the university, one that promotes teamwork, leadership, and an overall sense of community both on campus and in the greater Upstate region of South Carolina. USC Upstate has enjoyed a proud athletic history. The men's basketball program won the 1982 NAIA National Championship and all programs have performed with a high level of success as a member of NCAA Division II since joining the ranks in 1991. USC Upstate athletic teams have won four Peach Belt Conference Commissioner Cup championships, 21 regular season Peach Belt championships, and 18 Peach Belt Tournament titles. USC Upstate athletic teams have made 31 appearances in NCAA Tournaments, including six this year.

"Today is a great day for our University," said Athletic Director Mike Hall. "This affiliation with the Atlantic Sun is more than an athletic identity. This relationship will strengthen our academic profile, our metropolitan mission and the public awareness that USC Upstate is truly a major catalyst in the Upstate of South Carolina and beyond. Personally, this is an answer to my prayers and a dream come true to be able to lead our coaches, staff and student-athletes into NCAA Division I and the Atlantic Sun Conference. The Conference has very strong leadership and institutions with outstanding reputations, both academically and athletically. I am very excited to be able to implement our plan to join the A-Sun and am very grateful for the widespread campus support for this special day in the history of the University."

Off the field, USC Upstate athletics has also enjoyed tremendous success. Two of its student-athletes have been named the NCAA Woman of the Year for South Carolina and two student-athletes have won the university's Earl Gordon Service Medal for exemplary community service. The athletics department averages over 60 selections to the Peach Belt Conference Presidential Academic Honor Roll awarded to students with a 3.0 or better grade point average. The GPA's of the student-athletes have continued to improve in each of the last eight semesters. In the fall of 2005 alone, over half of the university's 170 student-athletes earned a 3.0 GPA or better and every team GPA was above a 2.7.

The Spartans will begin their re-classification with the 2007-08 season, playing full regular season conference schedules. The University will "fast track" two sports thanks to a provision of the NCAA's multi-divisional competition rules that will allow the men's soccer and softball programs to join the championship field in 2009-10. With the addition of USC Upstate, the Atlantic Sun increases its membership to 12 institutions that represent some of the best destination cities in the southeast as well as balance of public and private institutions noted for a commitment to quality academics and dynamic growth.

The 12-member league headquartered in Macon, Ga., consists of Belmont, Campbell, ETSU, Florida Gulf Coast, Gardner-Webb, Jacksonville, Kennesaw State, Lipscomb, Mercer, North Florida, USC Upstate and Stetson.

