

SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS

In my #1 surprise team writeup I talk about a team that disappointed voters last year due to a poor finish and that is where my **#7 Surprise Team the South Carolina Gamecocks** come in. Last year I thought South Carolina could finally make the step to legitimate contender in the SEC East. Things looked good as they knocked off #11 Georgia (a team that went on to finish #2) on the road in week two. They did lose at #2 LSU but after beating #8 Kentucky moved to 6-1 and #6 in the polls. The rest of the season must be a blur to Steve Spurrier as they lost their final 5 and missed out on a bowl. They did play some of the best teams in the country down the stretch and had some tough losses like vs Tennessee when they had a 31-16 FD edge. I doubt they will even be ranked at the start of the year. One of the reasons to their decline were some key injuries on defense. This year they have 10 starters back on defense and get some of their injured players back, including Jasper Brinkley who was their TOP defensive player when injured in week 4. The only question mark on offense is QB and while that is a major question mark, Steve Spurrier knows a thing or two about producing top notch QB's and he has some talent to work with. Special teams was a weakness last year but not only do they have a much more veteran unit, Spurrier brings in Ray Rychalski who did great work coaching ST's at Maryland. They do play 3 of my top 10 teams this year but do get LSU and Georgia at home. Spurrier has shown his teams can win on the road as he won his last trip to Clemson (#24) and was a missed FG away from winning his last trip to the Swamp (Florida #6).

