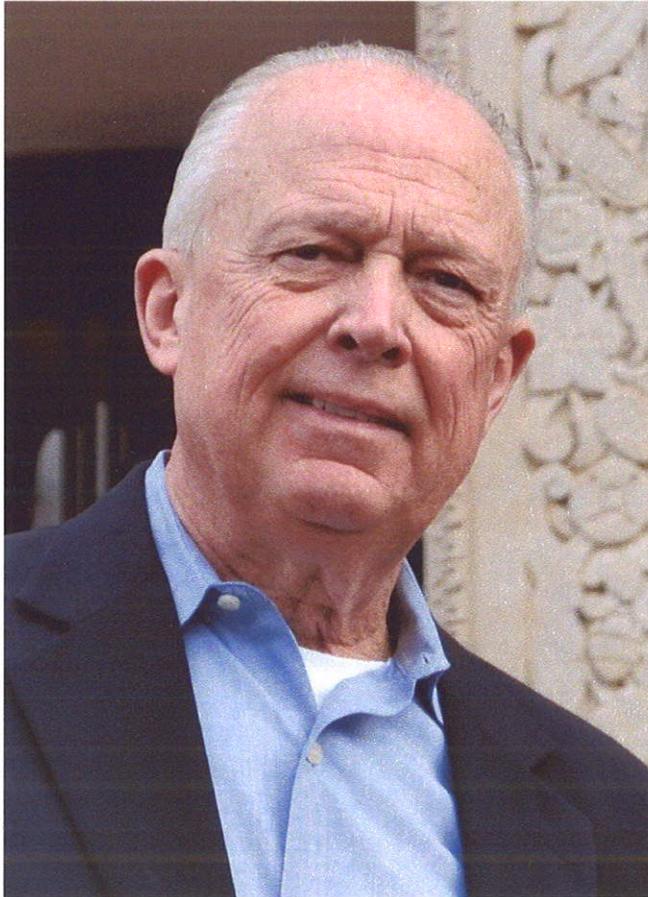


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## Clemson, Coastal Carolina titles a reminder of state's potential

By Richard Eckstrom S.C. Comptroller 20 hrs ago



Provided

For many South Carolinians – including a lot of die-hard Gamecock fans like me – the early morning hours of Jan. 10 won't soon be forgotten. Shortly after midnight and with just one second left on the clock, Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson hit wide receiver Hunter Renfrow for a two-yard touchdown pass to give the Tigers a lead in college football's national championship game.

Kicker Greg Huegel's extra point attempt was successful, and the Tigers upset reigning champion Alabama 35-31.

Clemson's resilience was on full display in the white-knuckled, back-and-forth contest. At one point in the second quarter, Alabama had a 14-0 lead. But each time they were backed into a corner, the Tigers clawed their way back. The end result was the school's first football championship in 35 years.

South Carolina now boasts national titles in two major college sports this season; last summer the Coastal Carolina Chanticleers defeated the Arizona Wildcats to win the College World Series championship, capping a nation-leading 55-victory season. Not only was it the school's first national title in any sport, but Coastal Carolina became the first team since 1956 to win the championship in its first-ever College World Series appearance. By contrast, Arizona was one of college baseball's revered programs, with four national championships and 16 previous series appearances.

Just as Clemson showed mettle even when trailing Alabama, the Chanticleers were forced to win six postseason elimination games in order to remain in contention. It's also noteworthy that both Clemson and Coastal Carolina were lifted by gritty performances by players who joined their teams as walk-ons – Clemson's Refrow and Coastal Carolina left-fielder Anthony Marks.

This a proud moment for our state as our student-athletes shine on the national stage. It's uncommon for one state to hold national titles in two major college sports, especially a small state like ours. (The last time the reigning baseball and football champions came from the same state was 2005, when the University of Texas dominated both sports.)

But what Clemson and Coastal Carolina accomplished is bigger than a championship.

Sports have a way of bringing together people who might otherwise feel they have little in common. That's especially so when a home-state team brings home the big trophy. For a moment, folks from all walks of life – young and old, black and white, white-collar and working class – have something common to cheer about.

Such achievements have the power to inspire, to captivate, to motivate. They remind us that triumphing over long odds is possible through hard work and determination.

South Carolina faces enormous challenges. And in too many areas, we often fall short of our potential. Perhaps we should take stock of the example set by these student-athletes. They offer a hopeful reminder of all we're capable of, and that great things are within our reach when our will is strong.

*(Richard Eckstrom is a CPA and the state's Comptroller).*