

## South Carolina's Garcia won one for his grandfather

By RON MORRIS - McClatchy Newspapers

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COLUMBIA, S.C. -- When Stephen Garcia thrust himself into the national college football spotlight this week, one of the first phone calls he received was from his father, Gary, in Tampa, Fla.

"Congratulations on all your awards!" Gary Garcia told his son.

"What awards?" Stephen responded.

In two seasons as a starting quarterback, Garcia has learned well to deflect attention given to him, often turning a question about his performance into adulation for running back Marcus Lattimore, receiver Alshon Jeffery or the South Carolina offensive line.

Yet Garcia's 17-of-20 passing effort for three touchdowns in South Carolina's win over No. 1-ranked Alabama earned him Southeastern Conference offensive player-of-the-week honors. He also was recognized as the national offensive player by the week by Walter Camp Foundation and was named the Davey O'Brien quarterback of the week. Finally, ESPN and the Capital One Bowl named Garcia the winner of the impact performance of the week.

There is one prize from Saturday's game that Garcia gladly will stake claim to, one that certainly will remain dear to his heart for years to come. Garcia delivered on a promise of South Carolina beating Alabama as an 83rd birthday present to his grandfather **Augie Garcia**.

"I called and told him I'd win it for him, and we did," Garcia said. "He could not have been happier."

**Augie** has lived at the Carrollwood Care Center in Tampa, Fla., for the past year as he continues to recover from 2006 heart surgery. His room is adorned with South Carolina posters and schedules as well as photographs of his grandson.

The cable TV hookup at the assisted-living facility is limited in channels, so **Garcia** only sees his grandson play when South Carolina games are televised by CBS. Thus, he watched every sterling play by his grandson on Saturday.

Not long afterward, Garcia called his grandfather. "Happy birthday, Agg!" Garcia told him.

**Augie** - "Agg" to his grandchildren - played football and basketball at **Jesuit High School** in Tampa and earned a football scholarship to St. Louis University, where he played on one of that school's final teams before it discontinued football in 1949.

**Augie** returned to Tampa after college. He worked for Southern Wine & Spirits, a wine and liquor distribution company, until his retirement at age 80. That was his vocation. His avocation over the years has been following his grandsons' athletic exploits.

**Augie** made three or four trips a season to Boston to see Stephen's brothers, Brian and Gary Jr., play football at Harvard from 2001 through 2006. **Augie** never missed one of Stephen's games when he was a standout at Jefferson High School in Tampa.

Then came **Augie's** heart problems. Since then, his lone chance to see his grandson play in person for South Carolina came in the 2009 Outback Bowl at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa. It turned out to be a disastrous outing for Garcia, who completed 9 of 18 passes for 79 yards with three interceptions in a lopsided loss to Iowa.

Garcia said he would love nothing more than to get his grandfather to Columbia for a game. Until that happens, Augie will continue to rely on his four sons and daughter to bring South Carolina games to him.

**Augie** visits one of his children on game days so he can watch on TV. If that is not possible, the games are taped and he watches later in his room.

A few months ago, Al Gil happened to walk by **Augie's** room at Carrollwood Care Center while visiting his mother, Sophie. Gil took note of the Gamecocks paraphernalia and mentioned it to his brother, Kenny, who played football at South Carolina in 1981 and '82.

"I saw that Carolina stuff hanging in there, looked at the name on the door, and it was 'Garcia,'" said Kenny Gil, a sergeant for the Hillsborough County Sherriff's Department. "There were posters of Stephen and so forth. At that point, I made the connection."

Now Al Gil's daily visit to see his mother includes a stop to talk football with **Augie**. A few birthday cards from friends and relatives remain scattered about **Augie's** room. While all are special to him, nothing compares to the gift delivered on Saturday by his grandson.