

CHC- Bomar Was Commodore's First Hall of Famer

by Bill Traugher

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When former Vanderbilt All-American football player Lynn Bomar died in 1964, his passing was front-page news. The "Blonde Bear" was the first Commodore football player (1921-24) to be selected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 1956. The offensive and defensive end's last collegiate game ended suddenly in 1924 against Georgia in Athens.

Blinky Horn, writer for *The Tennessean*, wrote about that terrible day in Athens:

Yet while Commodore stand and gaily flutter, to defy defeat, there is wretchedness at Vanderbilt that cannot be banished. Not because disaster has left an ugly stain. Vandy is shrouded in woe because Lynn Bomar fell mortally wounded upon the battlefield.

They carried him away in the third quarter, never to return. For Bomar only the recollection of the honor that was his remains. He will come no more to uphold the ensign of the black and gold.

There is a second cante paralysis gripped him. The celebrated Commodore hero now lies in bond age, his muscles rigid, his body irresponsive to the summon of his mind.

A kick upon the jaw came in the second period as he stepped a Georgia play. The crushing blow blasted out a tooth. But Bomar remained, with gigantic courage at his post, Giddiness seized him. And finally the monster moleskin man limply was carried away. The giant who so often in the past blocked the Bulldog path is now a broken mass.

Oft shall the summons come to Commodores. Bomar will hear, but he cannot answer. The end of the trail has come for the big Blonde Bear.

Vanderbilt lost the hard fought game to the Bulldogs, 3-0. Bomar suffered a brain hemorrhage after he made a severe tackle. His life was threatened for several days as he lay in a hospital bed paralyzed from the waist down. He never played another down for the Commodores. Bomar did have a miraculous recovery and his playing days were over.

Or so it was thought.



Lynn Bomar



The next year, Bomar was playing professional football in the infant National Football League. In two seasons (1924-25) with the New York Giants, Bomar played in 20 games scoring five touchdowns as a receiver. Bomar's professional career ended with a dislocated knee.

In the book, "50 Years of Vanderbilt Football" by Fred Russell and Maxwell Benson, they state:

The Blonde Bear was one of the world's greatest football players, who never missed an open-field block. When one considers that he made Walter Camp's All-America when he was backing up the line on defense and blocking and catching passes on offense, his greatness is realized.

Bomar never used his great strength except legitimately. He spared every man he could He played fairly and cleanly. Bomar's recuperative powers amazed physicians and although he could play no more for the Gold and Black, he was on the bench every game.

Bomar was a native of Bell Buckle, Tenn., where he first attended Webb School in his hometown. He then played football at the old Fitzgerald and Clarke School and finally at Castle Heights in Lebanon. At Vanderbilt, he played four years including fullback and halfback. Bomar also excelled as a Commodore basketball and baseball player.

Vanderbilt was playing in the Southern Conference during Bomar's playing years. Bomar was one of the first Southern football players to make the Walter Camp All-America team in 1923. He led the Commodores to a 7-0-1 record as a freshman (1921) and was credited for saving five touchdowns in the Georgia game.

In 1922, Bomar's Commodore club was 8-0-1. The only blemish from that historic season was a 0-0 tie against powerful Michigan. That game was also the first game played at the newly christened Dudley Field.

During the period between 1934-39, Bomar was a deputy U. S. Marshall living in Nashville. Bomar was with the Tennessee Safety Department as head of the Nashville Division, but resigned to head the combined police and fire departments of Knoxville for two years. By 1943, he returned to the highway patrol to lead the Knoxville division.

Bomar stayed active within the state for years serving in the capacity of Commissioner of Safety for Tennessee, working for Tennessee Motor Transport Association, Universal Tire and Appliance Co. and Tennessee Superintendent of Public Works. Bomar was appointed the warden of the Tennessee State prison in Nashville where he served upon his death at age 63.

Nashville's legendary sports writer and Vanderbilt alumnus, Fred Russell, also said about Bomar in his book *Bury Me in an Old Press Box*:

"As a freshman I had pledged Kappa Sigma fraternity, which at that time had many varsity

athletes. Among them was Lynn Bomar, selected All-American end in 1923. Bomar held one of the choice jobs given football players: a street-car `spotter.' In this capacity Bomar's duty was to check on whether the conductors rang up all the fares. He was required to fill out a brief report on each street-car ride he made, the conductor's number, the registers reading, etc.

"For each report the Nashville Railway and Light Company paid 25 cents, though limiting his earnings to a maximum of \$75 a month. Bomar subtracted his job to me, and we split \$75 every month. I also had the responsibility, as a freshman, of awakening Bomar in time for him to get to classes, and at the end of the school year I did this one morning by rolling the biggest lighted firecracker I ever saw under his bed.

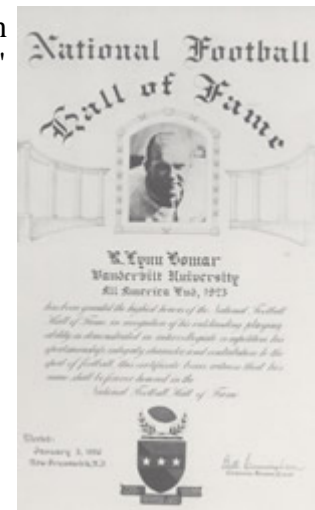
"When it exploded I feared the whole corner of the fraternity house had been blown off, and I was so scared that even Bomar in his BVD's chasing me across the street and deep into the campus couldn't catch me."

During their playing days at Vanderbilt, Gil Reese an All-Southern halfback for the Commodores said about his close friend:

"He would never let them jump on me. Whenever anyone would threaten me, Bomar was always right there to say, `Keep your hands off that boy.' They always did, too. Bomar always looked after me, and he always called back to me when we started on end runs. No one could run interference like Bomar."

In January of 1956, when Bomar was officially named to the College Hall of Fame in New Brunswick, N.J. he said:

"I just wish all the men who played football with me at Vanderbilt between 1921 and 1924 could also receive this coveted award. They deserve it more than I do. After all they made it possible for me to be chosen."



College Hall of Fame

Next week read about Frank Mordica's 321-yard record rushing effort against Air Force in 1978.

Traughber's Tidbit: Vanderbilt has five players that are members of the National Football Foundation College Hall of Fame. They are Fullback John Tigert (1901-03), Tackle Josh Cody (1914-16, 1919), End Lynn Bomar (1922-24), QB Bill Spears (1925-27) and Center Carl Hinkle (1935-37). One-time Vanderbilt head coaches in the HOF include Dan McGugin, Ray Morrison (as a Vandy player) and Red Sanders (also a UCLA head coach). Former Vanderbilt player and Athletic Director Jess Neely (1924-26) is also a member primarily as a former coach at Rice University.

If you have any comments or suggestions you can contact Bill Traughber via e-mail at WLTraughber@aol.com.