

Vanderbilt's 1893 Controversial Season

By Bill Traughber

May 13, 2009

In 1893, the Vanderbilt baseball team was a member of the Southern section of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association. Other members in the Southern section were Tennessee, Sewanee and Alabama.



Members in the Northern section were Virginia, Johns Hopkins, St. Johns, Wake Forest and North Carolina. The four teams within the

Southern section played three games against each other. The team with the best record would play the Northern section champion in a playoff. The winner of the playoff would be declared the 1893 champions of the South.

Tennessee was out of the championship run and a dispute ensued with Vanderbilt, Sewanee and Alabama. Apparent forfeits and rainouts caused the number of games played unequal with the final records. Vanderbilt's President of the Athletic Association, Dr. William Dudley, formed an arbitration committee to settle upon the Southern section's winner of the association.

This "unofficial" committee decided that Vanderbilt should be the Southern representative. Sewanee was not involved in the arbitration and protested the findings. However, James B. Wilder, Secretary of the S.I.A.A. learned of this ruling and had a response that appeared in the Nashville daily newspaper *The Dailey American*:

I have read a remarkable communication in your issue of yesterday dated from Vanderbilt University and signed by William J. Vaughn, arbitrator for the University of Alabama, and N. Ferrell, arbitrator for

Vanderbilt University. What these gentlemen were arbitrating about or how they came to call themselves arbitrators is something of a mystery to me. They claim to be settling the status of certain games of base ball played in the championship series of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association, and yet I, the Secretary of that association, have to learn the existence of this so-called Board of Arbitrators through the columns of a daily newspaper.

It is needless to say, as Secretary of that association, I regard their action unofficial and unwarranted, even though sanctioned by its President, and of as little weight in the case as would be the unsupported dicta of two private individuals. I would further call attention to the fact that these suppositions arbitrators are representing two universities in a matter obviously affecting the interest of a third university. Not represented either on the so-called Board of Arbitrators, or by any person authorized to lay its side of the case before them, and that therefore both in the forum of conscience and public opinion as well as in the court of law could the act of these gentlemen be called in question there, the decision arrived at by them most inevitably be pronounced as unnecessary unbinding and unfair.

Mr. Wilder pointed out that Vanderbilt claimed a victory over Alabama in an earlier game due to forfeiture, even though they lost 2-1. There was a league rule that each team's captain must send a roster of its players to an opponent two weeks prior to a scheduled game. That was true, but Vanderbilt had an ineligible player. Wilder also said that there was not an official written protest sent to him that was required. Therefore Vanderbilt could not claim that win.

Wilder also stated in his letter published in *The Daily American*:

It must be remarked that our arbitrators have not that knowledge of mathematics which might be expected of them. In settling all championship games the method of percentages is adopted. It is certainly a queer kind of arithmetic that makes two games out of four equal to games out of four equal to two games out of three. And yet each team, Sewanee and Vanderbilt, has played all the games required, so there is no possibility of Sewanee playing a fourth game with Alabama to make the total number of games equal. It is obvious, then, that only the method of comparison is by percentage games won, and thus viewed the championship record of Vanderbilt and Sewanee will be found to stand as follows:

Team Won Lost Prct.

Vanderbilt..... 2 2 .50
Sewanee.....2 1 .66

These figures speak volumes, and with them I leave this whole matter with the statement that I have as Secretary of the S.I.A.A., notified the President of the Association that Sewanee has won the championship of the Southern section of the Association, and that she will contest with Virginia for the championship of the whole South at Lynchburg, Va., on May 17.

A reporter asked Dudley to respond to Wilder's letter and there was not an agreement, but more confusion:

"I am surprised that Mr. Wilder should endeavor to produce the impression upon the public that he was unaware that the disputed games between the University of Alabama and Vanderbilt were to be submitted to a committee of arbitration. The facts are that Vanderbilt urged Mr. Wilder to settle the dispute himself according to the law. This he declined to do and recommended that the President, Mr. Robertson of Virginia, be requested to decide it. Vanderbilt agreed to this. A statement of the case was sent to Mr. Robertson, but he declined to settle it and said that the two instructions should submit the case to arbitration.

"Mr. Wilder himself handed me a copy of the telegram from Mr. Robertson as I was standing on the platform preparatory to leaving Sewanee last Saturday. How can he plead ignorance? I then told Mr. Wilder that I did not know whether we would arbitrate or not., saying that personally I was disgusted with the whole affair, but that we would see about it when we got home. He raised no objection to arbitration then, nor did he until he heard the results of the arbitration. In fact, I understood from Mr. Porter, manager of the Vanderbilt team, that Mr. Wilder agreed to play off the tie.

"Mr. Wilder, however, states that Vanderbilt did not make protest against Alabama's actions after the game; here I am afraid Mr. Wilder's memory has again slipped away from him, as we have copies of the telegram and letter which were sent to Mr. Wilder making the protest, and we have Mr. Wilder's reply telling us we were right in our position."

This was 112 years ago and with all the "he said, he said" the record reveals that Virginia beat Sewanee 13-5 and was declared the 1893 baseball champions of the South. Vanderbilt's record for 1893 is listed

as 8-5-2.

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