

Vanderbilt's Bryce Drew wants to make winning fun

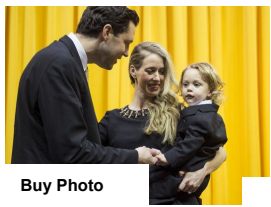
Adam Sparks , asparks@tennessean.com 10:28 p.m. CDT April 6, 2016

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Vanderbilt introduces Bryce Drew as basketball coach Wednesday during a news conference at Memorial Gym. Andrew Nelles / The Tennessean



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(Photo: Andrew Nelles / The Tennessean)

[Bryce Drew](#) hit all the right buttons — smiles, fun and the Final Four — when he was introduced as Vanderbilt's new basketball coach Wednesday.

Some of the rhetoric seemed to be a counter to the style of [Kevin Stallings](#), his predecessor as Vanderbilt's all-time winningest coach. But all of it, Drew said, was grounded in his bedrock coaching principles.

"I pride my whole culture in understanding that it's the players' team," said Drew, who was a player at Valparaiso and in the NBA before serving as head coach at his alma mater the past five seasons. "It's not coaches versus players."

THE TENNESSEAN

Valparaiso praises Bryce Drew as he heads to Vanderbilt

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Fans say Bryce Drew a good fit for Vanderbilt

When asked specifically about Stallings, who took the Pittsburgh job last week, Drew called his predecessor "a great coach who won a lot of games." But Drew also painted a contrast between himself and the coach he replaces.

"I just know how I coach. We are going to work very hard (and) be very focused, but yet the players are going to have some freedom," Drew said. "At the end of a hard day of working and winning games, smiles are going to be there. We're all going to enjoy it together."

TOP VIDEOS



TSU homecoming tailgates

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Marcus Mariota's home vs. road discrepancy

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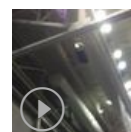
Blooper reel of P.K. Subban's Bridgestone Tire commercial.

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TSU missing defensive end Ebo Ogundeko

1:28



Lightning strikes TSU's Gentry Center

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Regardless of his approach, Drew set high expectations for the program he's taking over.

"We would like to be that first Vanderbilt team to get to the Final Four."



But getting deep into the NCAA Tournament might be a tall order early in Drew's tenure. He made a comical pitch to the current players during his opening remarks of the press conference saying, "Let's give a hand to everybody being back next year."

The plea resonated with the applauding fans attending the event at Memorial Gym, but it didn't seem to sway underclassmen [Wade Baldwin](#) and Damian Jones, who both intend to forgo their remaining eligibility to enter the NBA Draft this summer.

Baldwin, a sophomore point guard, announced on Tuesday that he would enter the draft. When asked if he would reconsider after meeting Drew, Baldwin said, "I have already made my announcement."

[THE TENNESSEAN](#)

Vanderbilt's Wade Baldwin entering NBA draft

Jones, like Baldwin, is projected as a first-round draft pick as a two-time All-SEC center. He said he would make his final decision "pretty soon," but added that he is already NBA-ready.

"I haven't decided yet, but I have a good feeling about (the prospect of entering the NBA Draft)," Jones said. "I just need to get my schoolwork done."

Jones will only lack a few credit hours after this semester to graduate. He said he could finish that work later if he started his NBA career now.

But Drew should have time to get the Commodores on track. According to ESPN, he signed a six-year contract with Vanderbilt, but athletics director David Williams declined to confirm those terms or his salary.

Williams said Vanderbilt interviewed five candidates "of a serious nature," and all had current or previous head coaching experience at the college level.

(Photo: Andrew Nelles/The Tennessean)

"We picked the person who wanted to be here, the person who is a winner," Williams said. "We picked the person who during the interview, as we sat there, said, 'We will play in the national championship game.'"

Drew, 41, is the 27th coach in Vanderbilt basketball's 115-year history, but only the second since 1999, when Stallings started the Commodores' longest tenure. After 17 seasons at Vanderbilt, he compiled a 332-220 record and seven NCAA Tournament appearances.

Drew had a 124-49 record in five seasons at Valparaiso, including two NCAA Tournament trips and two NIT appearances. Valparaiso went 30-7 this season, the most wins in program history, and lost to George Washington 76-60 in the NIT title game.

Junior forward Luke Kornet, another pro prospect, said he will return next season.

"I want this next year to be a special. The only way to do that is buy in, accept it and get acclimated as quickly as possible," Kornet said. "Resisting change makes it worse. I think we are getting another coach that is very genuine.

"After meeting (Drew), I'm excited to start working with him."

Reach Adam Sparks at 615-259-8010 and on Twitter @AdamSparks.

BRYCE DREW FILE

Coach: Head coach at Valparaiso since 2011 and assistant coach from 2005-11.

Player: Indiana Mr. Basketball in 1994. Two-time Mid-Continent Conference Player of the Year (1997 and 1998). Valparaiso's all-time leading scorer (2,142 points). Six-year NBA career with Rockets, Bulls and Hornets.

Postseason: In five years as a head coach, Drew has made appearances in two NCAA Tournaments, two NITs and one CIT. He played in three NCAA Tournaments, including the 1998 Sweet 16.

Other accolades: Three-time Horizon League Coach of the Year (2012, 2015, 2016); Won 1998 ESPY Award for his buzzer-beating 3-point shot to beat Ole Miss in the NCAA Tournament.

Notable: Bryce Homer Drew is named after his father, Homer, the long-time Valparaiso coach. Bryce's brother, Scott, is Baylor's coach.

Bryce Drew Introductory Press Conference (April 6, 20...



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Big man on campus: Luke Kornet

Vandy senior prepping for sizable role under Bryce Drew



Oct. 5, 2016

By Zac Ellis
VUCommodores.com

On campus in Nashville – When Bryce Drew scans his Vanderbilt basketball roster, here's what he sees: Twelve players, 10 of whom stand shorter than 6-foot-8. One of the two Commodores taller than 6'8" is Djery Baptiste, a relatively raw and unproven 6'10" center who redshirted last season. Thus, Drew is expected to utilize plenty of "small ball" with Vanderbilt as it navigates its SEC schedule.

But one sizable outlier exists in the Commodores' locker room. He's a shot-blocking senior who stands 7'1" with a soft jumper and a possible NBA future. And as Drew enters his first season in Nashville, he expects to count on lanky forward Luke Kornet as a cornerstone of his new roster.

"Any coach in the country would be thrilled to have Luke," Drew said.

Drew is certainly thankful he inherited Kornet, particularly at this point in Vanderbilt basketball history. The Commodores head into Drew's inaugural campaign looking to absorb the departure of two NBA draft picks in guard Wade Baldwin and forward Damian Jones. That duo combined to average 28.0 points and 10.9 rebounds per game in 2015-16, with Baldwin also leading the 'Dores in assists (5.2 per game). That's a lot of production that Drew must replace.

Kornet expects to be a big piece to that puzzle. This season Kornet and guard Nolan Cressler return as the only two seniors on Vanderbilt's roster. But while Cressler joined the Commodores two summers ago as a transfer from Cornell, Kornet has been with the program since the 2013-14 campaign. His father, Frank, played at Vanderbilt from 1986-89. That history – and a passion for the Commodores -- has placed a burden of leadership on Kornet's shoulders. As he enters his final season in Nashville, it's an opportunity he doesn't intend to waste.

"I definitely believe there's more pressure on me, now that me and Nolan are the only seniors," Kornet said. "But honestly, I was prepared for that last year. I just focus on doing the best that I can, try to influence others and not think about pressure."

Kornet is hardly an unfamiliar face to Vanderbilt fans. He's played in 93 games over the past three seasons, starting 25 a year ago and earning All-SEC Defensive Team honors. Kornet finished fourth in the country in blocks (3.0 per game) and is already fourth in Vanderbilt history in swatted shots (139). But the seven-footer is more than just a defensive threat; Kornet is a career 31.6% three-point shooter with range that routinely stretches defenses.

That versatility is why Vanderbilt's offense will often run through Kornet, even with a "small ball" approach. "He's multidimensional," Drew said. "He can handle, pass, shoot and post. He'll have an opportunity to do all of those things, and the team has done a really good job of finding him where his spots are."

Kornet hopes to end his career in black and gold on a high note, particularly after last season. Vanderbilt entered Kornet's junior campaign as a top-25 team but finished 19-14, including 11-7 in SEC play. Then longtime head coach Kevin Stallings left for Pittsburgh,

and Baldwin and Jones jumped to the NBA. That changing of the guard threw Kornet into a role as an elder statesman, one largely responsible for the 'Dores' immediate future. This season he will lead a crop of returnees like junior Matthew Fisher-Davis (9.7 points per game in 2015-16), junior Jeff Roberson (9.3) and junior Riley LaChance (6.9).

The wild card, of course, is Drew. Kornet admits he was uneasy to adjust to a new coach during his final season at Vanderbilt. Today he says the program's only holdover staffer from his freshman season is Zach Hamer, the head student manager. But Kornet's hesitation concerning the 'Dores' new coaches didn't last long.

"Once they got me with Coach Drew, I felt pretty confident that we were in good hands," Kornet said. "He's a very focused individual. That carries into everything in his life. He's going to be intent in everything he does, and be on top of it. He doesn't leave anything to chance."

Kornet now has a chance to help revert Vanderbilt back into an SEC power. The NBA also remains an eventual goal for Kornet, who wants to improve his passing, his back-to-the-basket post game and his on-ball defense. But a strong start to the Bryce Drew era – and perhaps even a deep NCAA tournament run – is priority number-one for Kornet.

As for expectations other than his own? "None of that matters at all," Kornet said. "What matters is your team playing on the court, focusing and not looking at anything outside the team."



Getty Images

Drew faces sizable challenge in first season

Vanderbilt has fewer big men in 2016-17 compared to previous year's roster

AUTHORS [David Boclair](#)

Long and lean?

If you're talking about Vanderbilt's basketball team, you're half right.

Bryce Drew inherited a roster that is short on big men because one 7-footer, Damian Jones, decided to pass up his final year of college eligibility and another, Josh Henderson, finally completed his college career after six seasons.

The first-year coach says that those who remain have gotten thinner during summer training as they worked to fit into a scheme designed to mitigate the lack of height.

"We're a lot smaller than last year's team because of the draft and losing Damian early," Drew said. "We weren't able to bring in a big [man] late [during recruiting]. So we're definitely going to be playing a lot of smaller guys this year and they've done a really good job getting used to ball movement and a lot of spacing and cutting.

"So guys have slimmed down a little bit with all the different movements that we do."

Half of this season's 12 Commodores are between 6-foot-1 and 6-foot-4. Senior Luke Kornet, at 7-foot-1, is head and shoulders above virtually all of his teammates except the 6-foot-10 freshman DJery Baptiste, who is 6-foot-10.

Even last season at Valparaiso, his fifth in charge of that program, Drew had five players who were 6-foot-8 or taller, including 7-foot-1 center Derrik Smits, who didn't play.

"We tweak our offense to fit our personnel so we'll have to do things to help play small," Drew said. "But then some of the other things we can just adapt with the size of guys we have. They're very intelligent guys and they pick up things quickly."

Given that Vanderbilt won't have the same inside presence, it is likely to rely on its perimeter shooting. The Commodores were second in the SEC in 2015-16 in 3-point percentage (38.8), but six conference teams attempted more shots from beyond the arc.

"I think some offensive schemes are a lot different," junior guard Riley LaChance said. "Defensively, we're doing some stuff different and some stuff similar too. It will be good. It definitely will be fast-paced, which is good for us. So I think the fans should be very excited."

And some of the 'little' guys should have the opportunity to put up big numbers.

"He's definitely given us the green light," sophomore guard Camron Justice said. "We're in an offense where we kind of penetrate in the gaps and stuff like that. So we're spreading the ball out and then we'll just penetrate and kick out to the open man for a shot."

Sliding into those gaps ought to be a little easier given that they're all a little thinner.

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Drew's first Vanderbilt team worse than Stallings' last?

Adam Sparks, asparks@tennessean.com 7:12 p.m. CDT October 12, 2016



(Photo: Billy Kingsley / For The Tennessean)

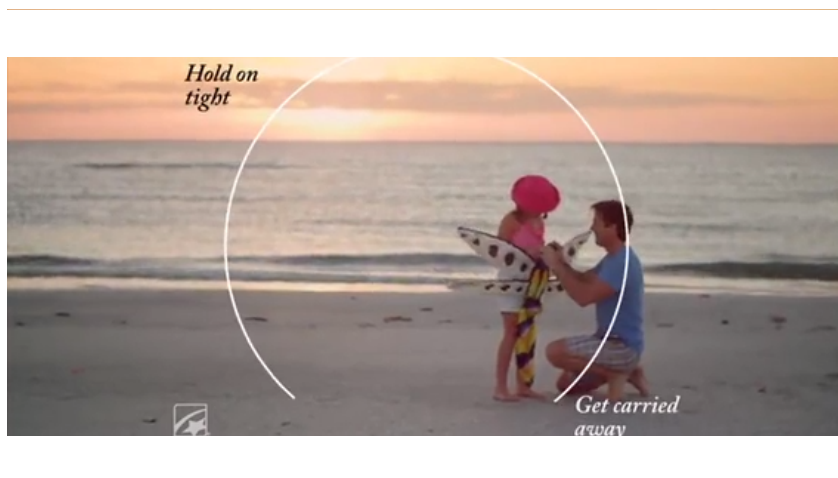
New Vanderbilt basketball coach [Bryce Drew](#) (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/10/05/why-vanderbilts-bryce-drew-not-twitter/91505844/>) does not have the same team as predecessor [Kevin Stallings](#) (<http://www.pittsburghpanthers.com/sports/m-baskbl/mtt/kevin-stallings-910377.html>) shows it.

He arrived at his introductory press conference in April just in time to say hello and goodbye to eventual NBA first-round draft picks [Wade Baldwin](#) and [Damian Jones](#) (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/04/14/vanderbilts-damian-jones-declares-nba-draft/83029128/>). Both underclassmen had made up their minds they were going pro early (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/04/05/vanderbilts-wade-baldwin-entering-nba-draft/82675822/>), and Drew never really had a chance to keep them.

So with those two All-SEC performers gone, is it fair to say Stallings' team last season was more talented than Drew's first Commodores squad?

"Well, I would say that we are going to be different," Drew said. "I think there are going to be a lot of unanswered questions until games start or when we get into conference play. Any time you lose that much of your scoring, it's a big change for your team."

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Baldwin and Jones averaged 14.1 and 13.9 points per game, respectively, last season. And along with three graduates and [Samir Sehic](#) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-baskbl/mtt/samir_sehic_971672.html), who transferred to Tulane (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/05/20/vanderbilts-samir-sehic-transferring-tulane/84649340/>), the Commodores lost 43 percent of their scoring from the 2015-16 team.

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"We lost a lot of talent and so we lost the preseason expectations we had last year," senior guard [Nolan Cressler](#) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-baskbl/mtt/nolan_cressler_910377.html) said. "But we have put in too much work to approach this season thinking that we're not good enough."

Added forward [Jeff Roberson](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/jeff_roberson_910376.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/jeff_roberson_910376.html): "I'm sure a lot of people think we won't be that good, but every team is different. This team is different. I really think there is an opportunity to have a special team this year that no one saw coming."

Again, Drew said Vanderbilt might not be better or worse, just "different." But how?

For starters, this Commodores lineup is smaller. Seven-footers Jones and [Josh Henderson](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/josh_henderson_713063.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/josh_henderson_713063.html) are both gone. And Sehic, though a reserve player, was a 6-9 post.

On the current team, versatile 7-1 forward [Luke Kornet](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/luke_kornet_849753.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/luke_kornet_849753.html) is the only player taller than 6-7 with game experience. Other frontcourt options are 6-10 redshirt freshman [Djery Baptiste](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/djery_baptiste_970916.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/djery_baptiste_970916.html) and 6-8 freshman [Clevon Brown](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/clevon_brown_1018357.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/clevon_brown_1018357.html).

Drew said Vanderbilt will run a lot of 4-out, 1-in offense, relying on good ball movement and shooting from its deep crop of returning perimeter players.

"We're definitely not as big as we were last year," Drew said. "But we have a lot of guys that can handle (the ball) and pass."

Vanderbilt ranked second in the SEC in 3-pointers made (273) and 3-point percentage (38.2) last season, and the bulk of those shooters are back — including [Matthew Fisher-Davis](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/matthew_fisher_davis_910367.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/matthew_fisher_davis_910367.html) (44.6 percent), Roberson (43.5), [Joe Toye](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/joe_toye_970904.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/joe_toye_970904.html) (42.9), [Camron Justice](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/camron_justice_970902.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/camron_justice_970902.html) (38.9) and [Riley LaChance](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/riley_lachance_910369.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/riley_lachance_910369.html) (36.1).

"I think we've still got a lot of weapons," Fisher-Davis said. "The ball is moving faster in practice, and I think we have a chance of getting everyone involved better."

Drew said his offensive goal is to "get four guys in double figures every night, but I would expect (Kornet) to hopefully have some monster nights to carry us, too. He's going to have to come up with some big nights, and our whole team is aware of that."

Vanderbilt still needs a point guard. LaChance and freshman [Payton Willis](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/payton_willis_1018396.html) (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-basketball/mtt/payton_willis_1018396.html) are among the candidates, but Drew said several players will handle the ball in various roles.

Defensively, Kornet ranked fourth nationally in blocks per game (3.0) last season, but he will no longer have Jones beside him in the paint. That's why Vanderbilt's defense may be a bigger transition than its scoring.

"We'll need to be able to defend the ball as well as we can on the perimeter to keep our bigs out of foul trouble," Drew said.

Vanderbilt will tip off its season versus [Marquette in the Veterans Classic](http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/04/11/vanderbilts-bryce-drew-era-open-vs-marquette/82896564/) (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/04/11/vanderbilts-bryce-drew-era-open-vs-marquette/82896564/>) in Annapolis, Md., on Nov. 11, and then its home opener will be against Belmont on Nov. 15.

Reach Adam Sparks at 615-259-8010 and on Twitter @AdamSparks.

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Freshman Payton Willis prepared for major role with Commodores

By **Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor** - October 17, 2016



Joe Howell/Vanderbilt Athletics

The key to Vanderbilt men's basketball's 2016-17 season may lie in the hands of an untested freshman.

A year ago, the Commodores shouldered huge expectations with a team full of experience at every position. Point guard Wade Baldwin IV was coming off a strong freshman season and looked like the perfect man to run the team.

Now, Baldwin is gone. The talented underclassman put his name into the 2016 NBA draft, where the Memphis Grizzlies selected him 17th overall.

That leaves a major vacuum at point guard for the Commodores, and first-year Payton Willis will likely have to step up if Vanderbilt hopes to return to the NCAA tournament. Junior guard Riley LaChance struggled last year after moving from shooting guard to point guard, and the 'Dores have no other players on the roster with meaningful experience at the point.

Willis has played mostly point guard in practice, and he will need to adjust to a new role, set of teammates and level of competition in the SEC.

“In high school it was basically like my team, I could basically come down and jack it whenever I wanted,” Willis said. “This year, we’re definitely gonna have to run the ball through Luke and Matt and those guys, get them a look before I come down and think about shooting.”

The key to making the adjustment to college has been Willis’ development over the summer. The SEC is known as one of the more physical conferences in college basketball, particularly in the paint: Last year, the league led all of Division I in the percent of two-point attempts blocked, according to KenPom.com. The 6’4”, 182-pound Willis has the frame to grow into an imposing figure at point guard, but more time in the weight room is necessary to reach that status.

“Payton’s had a great summer, and it was really helpful for him to go through summer school and work with the strength coach and our team,” head coach Bryce Drew said. “So he’s definitely going to have the ball in his hands and get playing time. We’ve only got 10 scholarship guys on our team who can play, so all 10 are gonna get an opportunity.”

Another part of Willis’ development has come on the defensive end. Both LaChance and Matthew Fisher-Davis, Vanderbilt’s two primary backcourt returners, have been below average defenders through their first two seasons in Nashville. Adding a third defensive liability puts the Commodore big men at risk of foul trouble as opposing guards stroll right into the paint.

At the top of Willis' to-do list was improving against ball screens and down screens, as well as tightening up his one-on-one pressure defense. Continued improvement in these areas would go a long way toward earning him a starting role.

"When I got here, I was terrible at defense, my footwork and everything," Willis said. "But I've come a long way since I stepped foot on campus in June."

Drew is quick to downplay the importance of positions once the offense settles into its halfcourt sets, but LaChance and even Fisher-Davis are lined up to play some point, as well. Regardless of whether Willis, LaChance or both are in the the game, however, the Commodores will look to get their point guard plenty of opportunities to shoot.

"There are a lot of sets where the point guard actually gets the shot, where [Drew] wants the point guard to make the play," Fisher-Davis said. "... There's a lot more freedom than with [former coach Kevin] Stallings. Everyone can make plays."

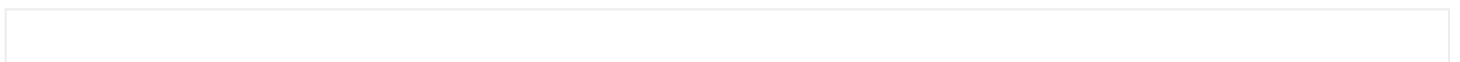
Indeed, shooting is one area where the Commodores won't be lacking when it comes point guard play. Willis shot 38 percent from three in 2015 on the AAU circuit with Team Portis Wings Elite and nearly 45 percent at Fayetteville (Ark.) High School as a junior. LaChance is a career 37 percent three-point shooter at Vanderbilt on more than four attempts per game.

Willis will work both on and off the ball, but his ability to drive the lane should push LaChance to the two-position more often than not when they share the court. According to Hoop-Math.com, LaChance shot just 43.3 percent at the rim last year and 33.5 percent on two-point jumpers. Vanderbilt may be better off letting Willis handle the ball while shooters such as Fisher-Davis and LaChance spot up outside the three-point line.

"We've got a lot of different sets and a lot of different actions that are gonna get different guys shots from a lot of different places," LaChance said. "So I think the good thing is we aren't gonna be predictable at all."

Ultimately, however, it's Willis who can add a new dimension to a team that otherwise lacks pop at the point guard spot on both ends of the court.

"[Willis] is extremely talented. He can do a lot of different things; he's very athletic, very good with the ball in his hands," LaChance said. "... He's gonna be a huge part of the team."



Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor





Luke Kornet steps into updated role as team's most experienced player

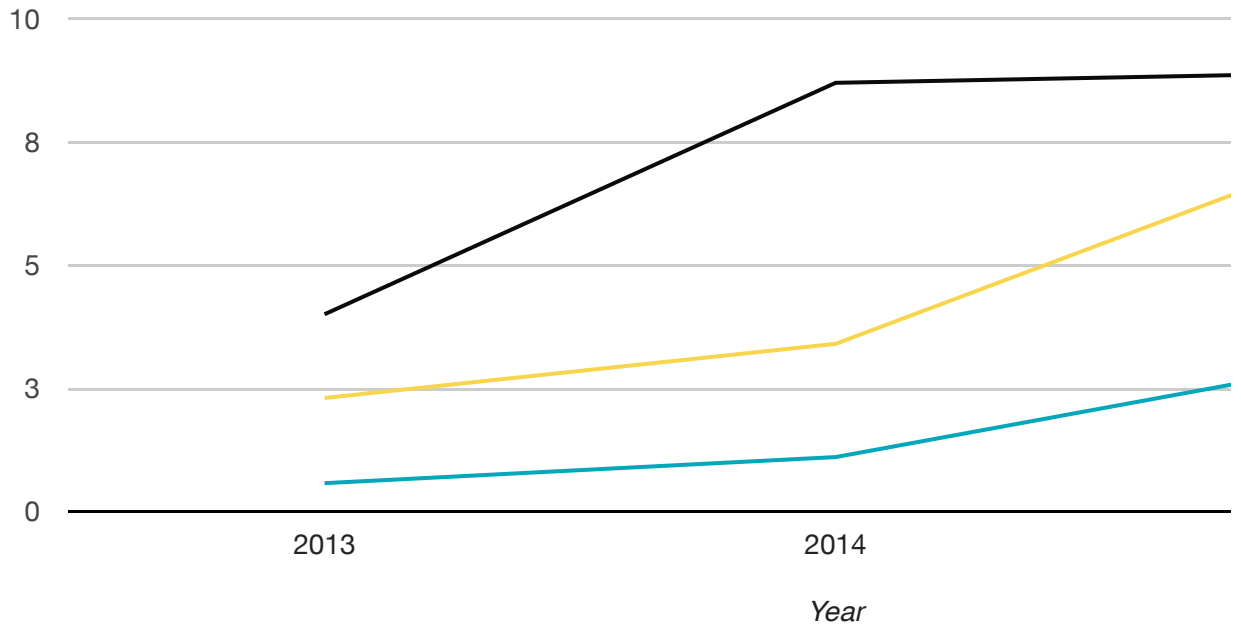
By **Josh Hamburger, Editor in Chief** - October 17, 2016

During the 2015 season, Vanderbilt enjoyed a roster that included three veteran players of at least seven feet: Damian Jones, Josh Henderson and Luke Kornet. But this upcoming season presents a new problem: Jones left for the draft in the first round and Henderson's eligibility ran out, leaving Kornet as the team's lone experienced big man.

That leaves some questions at center, mainly focused around redshirt freshman Djery Baptiste. After sitting out last year to become more accustomed to the sport at this level, the Haitian native appears destined for a significant role on the court. But it's currently unknown how much of a role that may be or how ready he is, given his lack of collegiate playing time.

"I think they'll be together some, and then obviously at some point (just) one of them on the court," head coach Bryce Drew said about Kornet and Baptiste.

Luke Kornet through the years



One concern though that most Vanderbilt fans are aware of is foul trouble, which plagued Jones throughout much of last season. Even with two other seven footers on the team, Jones' limited playing time in many games hurt the overall production. He was arguably the team's most important player, much like Kornet will be this season. Without much backup though, Kornet (and Baptiste) will need to be extremely careful, something that Coach Drew is keenly aware of.

"Obviously it'll be a big concern to keep people out of foul trouble," Drew said. "We'll try to tweak things on defense or try to manage the time and keep those guys on the court."

But Kornet isn't just the experienced big man on the team. He's also the team's most seasoned player, heading into his fourth season for the Commodores. Guard Nolan Cressler is also a senior but has only played one year at Vanderbilt after transferring from Cornell following his sophomore year. Kornet's age gives him a new role amongst his teammates: mentor. And with that, he's been helping out some younger players get adjusted.

"I think Clevon (Brown) especially, just helping him a little more because he's also a big and there's a lot more stuff that I can help with and give him advice," Kornet said.

Luke Kornet Minutes per Game



Kornet not only worked with some former teammates on his career and as he adjusted to the new role. He pointed out that former teammates (2010-2014) and Henderson (2011-2016) played especially important roles in his development as a player and ultimately a more physical big man.

“Especially later on with Josh, dealing sometimes with being hurt and stuff like that,” Kornet said. “I mean Rod, more so since he’s left because he comes back in the summer and talking with him and being someone to relate to in terms of basketball and what we want to do with the basketball.”

Although Kornet is transitioning more into a standard center role this year, he’s not too concerned about the added burden of work. His career-high playing time last year, primarily as an inside man, helped him adjust to the different skills needed with the more physical area around the hoop.

“I think last year was a big step in terms of rebounding and defending and getting my body ready for that stuff,” Kornet said. “So I think having that whole last year to look back on, knowing what works and what doesn’t, having confidence in that for sure definitely helps and in terms of just being around it so much, you recognize a lot of actions and things to look for.”

Although Kornet is new to Drew as a head coach like every other player on the team, Drew has already recognized what his tallest player brings to the team. He highlighted both his academic achievement as a computer science major (evident by his five academic awards) and his dynamic skill set as a seven footer with three-point shooting ability.

“I think any coach in the country would be thrilled to have him (Luke) on the team,” Drew said.

Rexrode: White, Drew stump for Vanderbilt like they're in election

Joe Rexrode, The Tennessean 7:04 a.m. CDT October 30, 2016



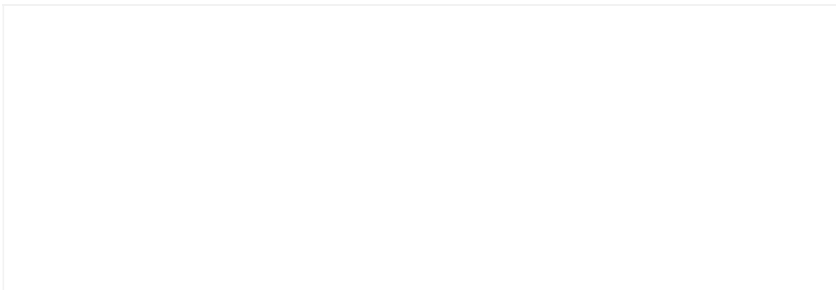
(Photo: George Walker IV / The Tennessean)

They are not on any ballots — they are here to coach basketball — but there's definitely something election year about the way [Bryce Drew](http://www.tennessean.com/search/Bryce%20Drew/) (<http://www.tennessean.com/search/Bryce%20Drew/>) and [Stephanie White](http://www.tennessean.com/search/Stephanie%20White/) (<http://www.tennessean.com/search/Stephanie%20White/>) have been conducting themselves around town.

And that is no accident. It's also no stretch for either one of them.

As the second phase of their takeovers of the [Vanderbilt](http://www.tennessean.com/sports/vanderbilt/) (<http://www.tennessean.com/sports/vanderbilt/>) men's and women's basketball programs approaches — the actual basketball — the first phase can be called a job exhaustively done. Not that it's ever really done.

They have been selling the synthetic leather out of their programs, programs that will always be linked because they are starting at the same time and because Drew and White are both basketball legends in the state of Indiana.





These coaches ultimately will be evaluated on the court, but getting Vanderbilt basketball in front of people is crucial. And it was apparently lacking.

“Things have changed in this business,” Vanderbilt athletic director [David Williams](http://www.tennessean.com/search/David%20Williams/) (<http://www.tennessean.com/search/David%20Williams/>) said. “Fans are really linked to the coach, and you want your coaches to be people who link to the fans. We want people who can relate to the community and want to relate to the community. We want that in all our programs, but I think basketball stands out more than anything.”

Friday was a culmination, “Memorial Madness” at Memorial Gym, both coaches and teams on display for fans, with pizza and T-shirts and autographs included. White’s women’s team hosts Bellarmine at 2 p.m. Sunday in the first of two exhibitions, before a Nov. 11 season opener at home against Kennesaw State — the same night Drew’s men’s team opens the 2016-17 season against Marquette in Annapolis, Md.

We’ll find out soon enough if White can translate her up-tempo WNBA style in one season, and if Drew can find a point guard and enough scoring to replace NBA departures Wade Baldwin and Damian Jones. An NCAA bid would be a major achievement for either team.

We already know something about these coaches because they’ve made it so. They’ve been pressing flesh like congressional candidates. ~~Full screen~~ the fact that White just recently moved permanently to town with the completion of the Indiana Fever season.

Vanderbilt coach Bryce Drew

She finally has just one job. And she knows well the importance of this aspect of it. She still has friends who were fans of her national championship team as a player at Purdue, and outreach is a big piece of a WNBA coach’s duties.

“We can’t kid ourselves, we can’t say, ‘Oh, when you win more, more people will come,’” White said. “Well, look, people have got a lot of different ways they can spend their money nowadays. They can watch on TV and they can watch on their phones, whatever. It’s about relationships and it’s about engagement and it’s about experience. What is our experience of coming to a game going to be like? What is our experience of interacting with our staff and student-athletes going to be like? We want them to root for our team and have relationships with individuals on our team. That’s important.”

Like Drew, White’s non-basketball schedule has been packed. Along with “Memorial Madness” this weekend, she was signed up for a Friday ~~Full screen~~ the Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt with her team, and as honorary starter for a half-marathon Saturday in Brentwood.

Vanderbilt women’s basketball coach Stephanie White

Williams recently got a call from his wife, Gail, who had been at a “Women and Politics” dinner featuring ~~Full screen~~ [Megan Barry](http://www.tennessean.com/search/Megan%20Barry/) (<http://www.tennessean.com/search/Megan%20Barry/>). She called to tell him White was there, too.

“Pretty cool,” Williams said. “And now the mayor is gathering people together to go to the season opener.”

Drew recently visited an area retirement home to find a woman who had approached Williams on campus and asked to meet the new coach.

“He went and found her, ended up meeting six people,” Williams said. “But can you imagine what it meant for those six people? Sometimes you’ve just got to be about that. Because if the coach does things like that, the players will do it, too.”



Vanderbilt basketball coaches Stephanie White and Bryce Drew
Tuesday, Oct. 25, 2016, in Nashville, Tenn. (Photo: George Walker IV / The Tennessean)

As a kid, Drew would at times hit the banquet circuit with his father, Homer, longtime coach at Valparaiso. He learned “to just be quiet and eat your food,” but also the value of getting to know the fans.

On the Nashville circuit, he has been impressed with the desserts that he can’t seem to resist, and with the basketball intelligence and passion of the fans asking questions.

“It just reinforced the involvement of our alums and the interest in Vanderbilt basketball,” Drew said. “So many stories where people have been season-ticket holders for 20, 30 (years), or their family for 40, 50 years.”

RELATED

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- [Stephanie White, Vandy players bonded on FaceTime](http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/10/20/vanderbilts-stephanie-white-players-bonded-via-facetime/92072212/)

Both of these programs can use a spark, though. Under former coach Kevin Stallings, the Vanderbilt men averaged 10,042 fans per game over the past four seasons. In the five seasons prior to that, the program averaged more than 13,000 per game and ranked in the top 25 nationally each year.

The women’s program averaged 2,906 fans per game last season under Melanie Balcomb, its first time under 3,000 since the 2000-01 season. It has been declining since an average of 5,369 fans per game in the 2007-08 season, which ranked 17th in the nation.

Sponsor Message

Again, on-court results matter most. But Stallings and Balcomb were not known for being dynamic in public, especially later in their tenures.

“You kind of just needed a fresh start,” Williams said. “With Bryce and Stephanie, it’s a brand new start. Kevin and Melanie were amenable to doing it, and were willing to do it at times, but I think there was so much history that got in the way of it being done successfully.”

TOP TRENDING

[Mason Wolf, Joe Rexrode recap Titc](http://www.tennessean.com/video)

It’s being done differently now, with the idea that you can gain fans before you ever win a game in front of them.

“I think there’s always a little bit of jolt any time there’s change — there’s apprehension, no question,” White said. “I played for three coaches in four years in college, I get that. But we want you to be a part of our family.”

Follow Joe Rexrode on Twitter @joerexrode.

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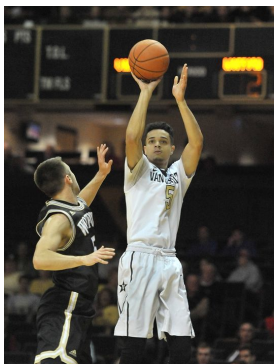
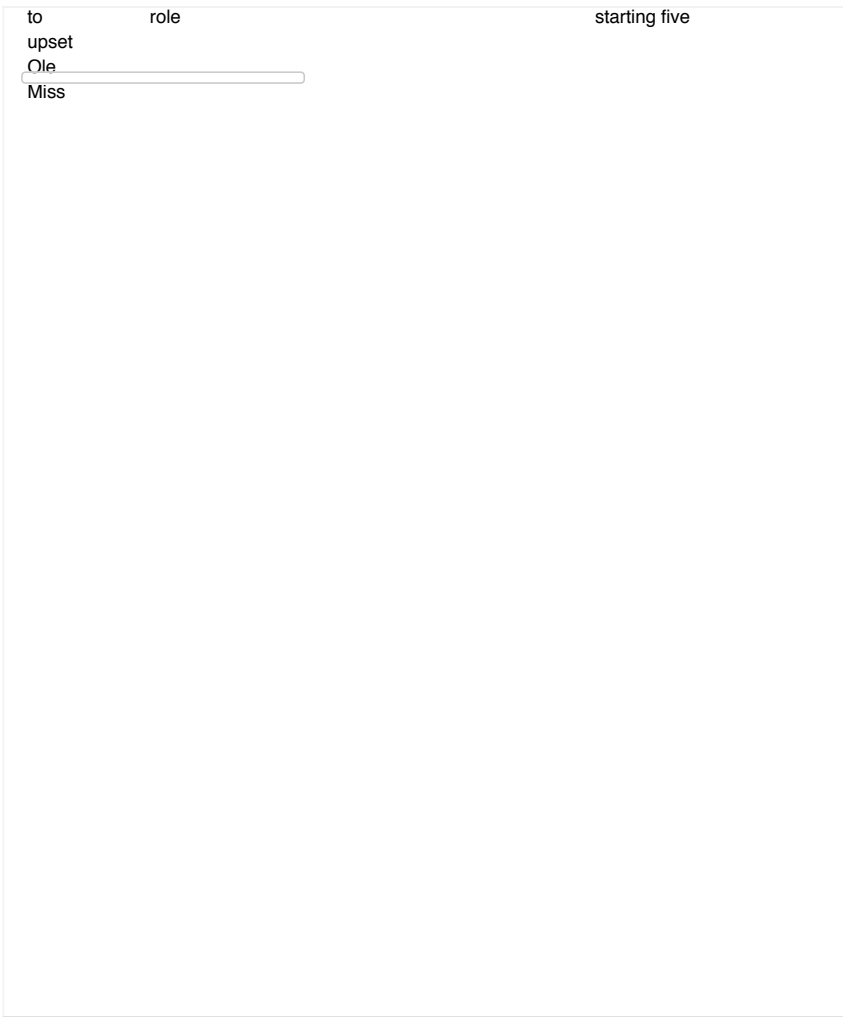
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Vanderbilt's Fisher-Davis mimicked Bryce Drew's famous shot

Adam Sparks, asparks@tennessean.com 5:18 p.m. CDT November 2, 2016



(Photo: Jim Brown/USA TODAY Sports)

Vanderbilt (<http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-baskbl/vand-m-baskbl-body.html>) basketball coach Bryce Drew (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-baskbl/mtt/bryce_drew_1011352.html) thinks his players don't know about "The Shot" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Rm_eAiV4dA), which he famously made in Valparaiso's upset win over Ole Miss in the 1998 NCAA Tournament.

Matthew Fisher-Davis (http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-baskbl/mtt/matthew_fisher_davis_910367.html), his sharp-shooting guard, chuckles at such a suggestion.

"We ran a play in high school called 'Valpo,' and I was him in the play," Fisher-Davis said. "It was the exact same play that they ran. But I don't think (Drew) knows that. I never told him."

Drew's buzzer-beater was from about 25 feet, which happens to be Fisher-Davis' sweet spot on the floor to this point in his Vanderbilt career.

Fisher-Davis was the SEC's leading 3-point shooter (<http://www.secsports.com/statistics/mens-basketball/player/three-points/threePointFieldPercentage>) in the regular season at 45.7 percent in 2015-16, and he rarely took a shot inside the arc. But Drew, the Commodores' first-year coach, wants his 6-foot-5 guard to get in the paint and above the rim.

Vanderbilt's Matthew Fisher-Davis

"We don't want him to be a one-dimensional player, so we are working a lot on him attacking the rim," Drew said. "He's got a really quick first step. So hopefully in those situations, he'll be able to shot-fake and drive by guys."

With [Wade Baldwin](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-baskbl/mtt/wade_baldwin_iv_910366.html) (14.1 ppg) and [Damian Jones](http://www.vucommodores.com/sports/m-baskbl/mtt/damian_jones_849751.html) (13.9 ppg) leaving early for the NBA after last season, Fisher-Davis is Vanderbilt's top returning scorer (9.7 ppg). But 77 percent of his made baskets came from 3-point range.

Fisher-Davis' role should expand when Vanderbilt tips off its season against Marquette on [Nov. 11 in the Veterans Classic](http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/04/11/vanderbilts-bryce-drew-era-open-vs-marquette/82896564/) in Annapolis, Md.

1998: The Bryce Drew Shot - Valpo upsets ...



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- [Bryce Drew, Stephanie White stump for Vandy like they're in election](http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/10/30/rexrode-white-drew-stump-vanderbilt-like-theyre-election/92908042/)
- [Why Vanderbilt's Bryce Drew is not on Twitter](http://www.tennessean.com/story/sports/college/vanderbilt/2016/10/05/why-vanderbilts-bryce-drew-not-twitter/91505844/)

"The previous two years my role was more about spacing the floor, giving lanes for Wade to drive and Damian room to operate down low. But it will definitely change this year," Fisher-Davis said. "(Drew) has forced me to get to the cup, get fouled, go to the free throw line and make plays for others rather than just settle for the 3."

Fisher-Davis understands that Vanderbilt fans know him for lighting up Memorial Gym with streaky 3-point shooting rather than driving to the basket. But he said the latter was a big part of his game in high school.

"I've always been able to shoot the ball. But back then, I did more of taking it to the rim," Fisher-Davis said. "If I had a 3, I would take it. But my senior year I had to create for other people, get into the lane and things of that nature. I am still capable of doing that. It just wasn't my role in my first two years here."

As for Fisher-Davis' 3-point stroke, it's still as good as ever. And he's still waiting to mimic "The Shot" that made Drew a household name in NCAA Tournament lore.

Vanderbilt coach Bryce Drew

"We never got to use that play in a game (in high school). We never needed it," Fisher-Davis said. "But we practiced it all the time, and I always took (Drew's) shot."

"I made it about 60 or 70 percent of the time."

Reach Adam Sparks at 615-259-8010 and on Twitter [@AdamSparks](http://twitter.com/AdamSparks).

MATTHEW FISHER-DAVIS SHOT SELECTION

(Offensive stats 2015-16, includes postseason)

Scoring: 9.7 ppg

3-point range: 79-177 (45 pct.)

2-point range: 23-59 (39 pct.)

Free throws: 27-36 (75 pct.)

NEXT GAME

VANDERBILT VS. MARQUETTE

Where: Annapolis, Md. (Veterans Classic)

When: 5:30 p.m. Nov. 11

TV/Radio: CBS Sports Network/1510-AM

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Vanderbilt Basketball Preview 2016: 'Dores tip off Bryce Drew era

After a disappointing 2015-16 season, Vanderbilt gears up for the beginning of new head coach Bryce Drew's tenure on West End. The 'Dores return three starters as they commence their quest to return to the NCAA tournament.

By **Vanderbilt Hustler Sports Staff** - November 7, 2016



Meet the team

Projected starters

Point guard – Payton Willis – 6'4" – Fr. – Fayetteville, Ark.

By all accounts, freshman Payton Willis will have a major role for the Commodores this year. Willis has great size for the point guard position and also will play off the ball, with his strong three-point shooting helping space the floor. Willis has room to grow defensively, but he's improved his attention to detail on that end of the floor since arriving at Vanderbilt. It's unclear if the freshman from Arkansas will immediately seize the starting point guard role, but it's easy to see him doing so by the end of the season. If Willis can consistently provide 25 to 30 minutes of good point guard play, the Commodores will be back in the NCAA tournament. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

Shooting guard – Matthew Fisher-Davis – 6'5" – Jr. – Charlotte, N.C.

After attempting 59 two-pointers and 177 three-pointers last season, it's no secret Matthew Fisher-Davis loves the three-ball. In fact, he led the SEC in three-point field-goal percentage in 2016, shooting 44.6 percent from behind the arc. Although he only shot 39 percent from two-point range, Fisher-Davis' role in the offense will most likely expand with the departures of Wade Baldwin IV and Damian Jones. Averaging

9.7 ppg and 3.6 rpg last season, there is no doubt he was an efficient scorer. This season presents a big opportunity for him to both further develop his game and become a leader for the team. – *Henry Lewis, sports reporter*

Small forward – Joe Toye – 6’7” – Soph. – Chicago, Ill.

Joe Toye averaged 3.6 points and 1.2 rebounds as a true freshman last season and looks to take on a bigger role in his sophomore year. Toye was a 4-star recruit from Chicago, Illinois, and showed promise in his last two games, sporting season-highs in minutes and points in scoring 10 against Tennessee and Wichita State. Toye has the size at 6’7” to drive the lane and jam on defenders, with the shooting touch to hit from outside. He’ll be a valuable asset who could start for Bryce Drew this year. – *Max Schneider, sports reporter*

Power forward – Jeff Roberson – 6’6” – Jr. – Houston, Texas

Jeff Roberson is one of the Commodores’ returning starters who will be relied upon heavily on both ends of the court during the 2016-2017 season. The 6’6” junior was the fourth-leading scorer last season and is second among returning players at 9.3 points per game (trailing only Matthew Fisher-Davis at 9.7). He also grabbed 5.6 rebounds per game for the Commodores. Expect first-year head coach Bryce Drew to lean upon this veteran to put up consistent numbers for the team throughout the year. – *Steve Sherk, sports reporter*

Center – Luke Kornet – 7’1” Sr. – Lantana, Texas

Two thirds of Vanderbilt’s dynamic big-man team is gone this year, as Damian Jones left for the NBA and Josh Henderson graduated. Even though Jones’ spirit lives on with Luke Kornet (you can spot the 7’1” senior wearing Jones’ Golden State Warriors jersey around campus), he will have a lot of responsibility this season as the only experienced big man on the team. In fact, he’ll be the most experienced member of this Commodores squad overall. Kornet will need to use his height to control the boards and his experience to keep the team’s focus in check as they enter a new era of Vanderbilt basketball. In a way, Kornet’s ability to rebound and control the glass will determine how well the Commodore offense can operate. If he is an effective presence, Vanderbilt should be able to run a smooth ship on the offensive end. – *Cutler Klein, Assistant Sports Editor*

Bench

Guard – Riley LaChance – 6’2” – Jr. – Brookfield, Wis.

Vanderbilt needs good Riley LaChance if it wants to compete this season. LaChance — a guard from Brookfield, Wisconsin, with slick handles and great court vision — had a breakout freshman year, averaging 12.1 points and 33 minutes per game. As a sophomore, though, LaChance failed to build on his first-year wave, seeing a major reduction in both minutes and play quality. His struggles can likely be attributed to a position change, as he was forced to play most of his minutes at point guard when Wade Baldwin IV needed a break. This season, LaChance will likely be asked to play both guard positions interchangeably as the new crop of freshmen develop, and Bryce Drew would surely be pleased to see a LaChance renaissance. — *Jordan Grapentine, sports reporter*

Guard – Nolan Cressler – 6’4” – Redshirt Sr. – Pittsburgh, Pa.

After former Vanderbilt coach Kevin Stallings bolted for Nolan Cressler’s hometown of Pittsburgh, the redshirt senior and Cornell transfer will embrace a fresh start under Drew and a new coaching staff. Despite averaging just 4.8 points in 12 minutes per game during his first action as a Commodore last season, Cressler had multiple flashes of brilliance in limited playing time. He put up 11 points in just 12 minutes against Tennessee on March 1 and scored a season-high 14 points in only 13 minutes on February 6 against Ole Miss. As a more regular member of Vanderbilt’s rotation this season, look for Cressler to better translate his double-digit scoring capabilities from the Ivy League to the SEC. — *Max Herz, sports reporter*

Center – Djery Baptiste – 6’10” – Redshirt Fr. – Gonaives, Haiti

After sitting out last season, Djery Baptiste seems poised to play a prominent role for the Commodores as one of the team’s only big men. Without any playing experience at this level, it’s difficult to predict how his performance will be. Regardless, he’ll be getting plenty of playing time alongside Luke Kornet and as the sole big on the court, according to head coach Bryce Drew. — *Josh Hamburger, Editor in Chief*

Guard – Camron Justice – 6’3” – Soph. – Hindman, Ky.

After a rather quiet freshman year, guard Camron Justice will certainly have a larger role this season. One of the best shooters in his class, expect Justice be one of the first guards off the bench and to be one of the Commodore’s leading three-point shooters. Considering the Vanderbilt’s lack of proven point guards, Justice’s ball-handling could also be important to the team’s success this year. — *Karim Oliver, sports reporter*

Forward – Clewon Brown – 6’8” – Fr. – San Antonio, Texas

With Vanderbilt's lack of depth in the paint, freshman forward Clevon Brown will need to provide passable minutes off the bench when Kornet and Baptiste are in foul trouble. Brown brings good athleticism, but he'll be undersized when playing center. That wouldn't be much of a problem if Brown could make threes and stretch the floor, but it looks like he's at least a year away from becoming a consistent outside shooter. Brown's playing time will probably be sporadic, but good performances in relief of Kornet and Baptiste could help swing a couple of games in the Commodores' favor. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*



The Hustler's A-to-Z men's basketball guide

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A: All-SEC Candidates

The Commodores have a number of candidates for spots on the All-SEC teams, including returning All-Defensive team member Luke Kornet. Freshman guard Payton Willis will get the opportunity to

earn enough playing time to garner All-Freshman recognition if he plays well, while returners like Kornet, Matthew Fisher-Davis and Jeff Roberson could vie for spots on the two All-SEC teams. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

B: Bryce Drew

In April, Vanderbilt hired Bryce Drew as their head coach, replacing Kevin Stallings, who has coached here for 17 seasons. Previously, he coached at Valparaiso, where he led his teams to two NCAA tournaments in five years. – *Josh Hamburger, Editor in Chief*

C: Cressler

Hyped up as one of the Commodores' best players in practice during his redshirt year in 2014-15, Cornell transfer Nolan Cressler disappointed in his debut season. A 38 percent three-point shooter on over 300 attempts in upstate New York, Cressler shot only 27 percent from deep last year. Expect Cressler's shooting to regress to the mean this season and for him to make at least 35 percent of his three-point shots. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

D: Djery Baptiste

After sitting out his freshman year, big man Djery Baptiste is poised to play a significant role on the court this season. At 6'10", he's the team's second tallest player behind Luke Kornet. Expect to see him share the court with Kornet at times, but he will be asked to cover the inside when Kornet needs rest. – *Josh Hamburger, Editor in Chief*

E: Experience

The Commodores may have lost some NBA talent, but the Vanderbilt program has more experience than at any point since the 2012 SEC tournament championship team. Payton Willis looks like the only freshman who will be in Drew's rotation early on, and VU's seniors and juniors all project to earn at least 20 minutes per game each. Kornet in particular looks to be in line for heavy minutes, barring injury, as Baptiste will likely find it difficult to avoid foul trouble. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

F: Fever

Get vaccinated, folks, because a seemingly annual fever is set to strike Memorial Gym once again this winter. While new Vanderbilt women's basketball coach Stephanie White left the WNBA's Indiana Fever behind, the men's portion of SEC hoops just can't seem to shake the severe ailment that is #SECBasketballFever. Resulting from a combination of over-hyped teams and underwhelming quality of basketball, the fever **spread** across the entire conference last season. So get your booster shots and think twice before over-hyping a big-name coach or freshman phenom once SEC play rolls around in January. – *Max Herz, sports reporter*

G: Goodbye Stallings and Balcomb

Vanderbilt will have two new faces on the baselines for the first time ever this season as Bryce Drew takes over as the men's head coach, while Stephanie White takes over the women's job. The two newcomers replace two longtime Vanderbilt figures, Kevin Stallings and Melanie Balcomb. Even just a few months in, both Drew and White are already changing the dynamic of their programs. Drew is making himself accessible to the student body and engaging with the community, and White is putting together a fast, up-tempo team that might be ready to surprise some folks this season. – *Cutler Klein, Assistant Sports Editor*

H: Henderson

One of Vanderbilt's big losses this offseason was center Josh Henderson, who played six years on the team dating back to the 2010-11 season. Seriously. The sixth-year senior truly saw it all during his half-dozen years as a Commodore. Back when former head coach Kevin Stallings had hair, Henderson was a member of Vandy's 2012 SEC tournament championship team. Despite a torn ACL, Henderson was the vocal leader of the 2013-14 team venerably know as the Magnificent Seven. His 80-foot buzzer beater against Florida last year remains the most ridiculous shot in basketball history.

Sadly, it is time for Henderson to move on after entertaining generations of Commodore fans. It's going to take a lot of new freshmen and a few extra years of eligibility to fill the 7-foot-wide hole Henderson's departure left in fans' hearts. – *Max Herz, sports reporter*

I: Iowa State

This year's opponent for the Commodores in the SEC/Big 12 Challenge is No. 24 Iowa State. The 'Dores and Cyclones haven't met since 1986, and ISU will head to Nashville on the heels of one of its most successful multi-year stretches in program history. ISU features All-American candidate Monte Morris at point guard and has made five straight NCAA tournament appearances. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

J: Jackrabbits

Vanderbilt's last postseason win came against the South Dakota State Jackrabbits in the NIT second round on March 20, 2015 at Memorial Gym. The neon-clad Commodores advanced to the NIT quarterfinals, where they lost to eventual champion Stanford, building excitement for a 2015-16 that fell short of expectations. We'll see if the Commodores' early December trip to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to face Minnesota results in more postseason wins (and neon uniforms) in 2016-17. – *Max Herz, sports reporter*

K: Kentucky

Like always, the Kentucky Wildcats will be the team to beat in the SEC. They are the clear favorites to win the conference, something they have done for the past two seasons. Vanderbilt upset them last season at home and plays them on Jan. 10 at home and Feb. 28 on the road. – *Josh Hamburger, Editor in Chief*

L: Las Vegas

For this year's early-season exempt tournament, the Commodores will head out west for the Continental Tire Las Vegas Invitational the week of Thanksgiving. Vanderbilt faces Big East foe Butler in the first round of the four-team tournament before taking on the winner of No. 10 Arizona and Santa Clara. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

M: Memorial Gym

Since 1952, the Vanderbilt basketball team has hosted games at historic Memorial Gym. A defining feature is the elevated court, which hovers above many of the seats close by it. Additionally, the team benches are at opposite ends of the courts behind the hoops, while most arenas have them on the sidelines. – *Josh Hamburger, Editor in Chief*

N: NCAA tournament

Last year, Vanderbilt snuck into the NCAA tournament First Four, before falling to Wichita State. Before the season, they had been predicted to make the tournament, but a disappointing year had them barely getting in. The expectations are not the same this year, however, as a trip to the tournament would be a surprise to many. – *Josh Hamburger, Editor in Chief*

O: Offense

Drew and his players describe his offense as a free-flowing system in which players have the freedom and authority to read the defense and make decisions on the fly. Perimeter positions will matter less in half-court sets than in Stallings' offense, so making sure the spacing is correct could be important early in the season as players adjust to reading the defense and relocating off the ball. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

P: Passing

Vanderbilt doesn't have one player who projects to rack up lots of assists, but Drew's new offensive system means all five players on the floor will often have opportunities to have the ball in their hands. Crisp passing and sharp off-ball movement will be key to the success of Vanderbilt's offense, so the Commodore big men must make smart decisions with the basketball when a pass is required to find the open man. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

Q: Quality of shots

Drew has spent significant portions of the offseason working on the team's spacing in the halfcourt. Spacing was an issue on offense last year, as playing with two 7-footers who didn't contribute much from three and weren't threats to drive to the basket made things easier on defenses. Even without an athletic penetrator like Wade Baldwin IV, the Commodores' improved spacing should help their offense from taking much of a step back this year. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

R: Recruits

This year's incoming freshmen are Payton Willis and Clevon Brown, both 3-star recruits. Willis is a 6'3" guard from Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Brown is a 6'8" forward from San Antonio. They may not get much playing time this year, but it's good to know that they exist if they play short stretches. – *Will Wilson, sports reporter*

S: Shelton Mitchell

Seriously, where is he? The 4-star, class of 2014 point guard made 11 starts and averaged 20 minutes per game as a freshman for the Commodores in 2014-15, splitting time at the point with fellow freshman Wade Baldwin IV. He transferred to Clemson after that season and sat out the 2015-16 season, per NCAA rules. Two years after freshmen Mitchell and Baldwin split time at point guard, Vanderbilt is back to square one at the position, relying upon freshman Payton Willis to run the offense. Did no one tell Mitchell that Baldwin was more than likely going to the NBA after his sophomore season? The 2016-17 'Dores could no doubt benefit from having Mitchell back in black and gold. – *Max Herz, sports reporter*

T: Three-point shooting

Between its offense and defense, Vanderbilt put together one of the most impressive three-point percentage differentials in college basketball last season. Predictably, the 'Dores knocked down 38.2 percent of their own three-point shots, good for 28th nationally. The more surprising development, however, came on defense: Vanderbilt held opponents to just 29.4 percent from downtown, the third-best mark in the nation. It's hard to see the Commodores missing the NCAA tournament if they put together another plus-8.8 percent differential on three-pointers in this year. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

U: Unranked

The Commodores will open the season unranked, after beginning last year as the 18th-ranked team in the AP Poll. However, after delivering lower than expected results and losing Wade Baldwin and Damian Jones in the first round of the NBA draft, they'll begin this season outside the Top 25. – *Josh Hamburger, Editor in Chief*

V: Villanova

The Villanova Wildcats won the NCAA tournament this past season and look to defend their title. They are ranked in the Top Five entering the season and are returning the majority of their lineup from last year. Although Vanderbilt doesn't play them this season, be sure to keep a watch on the Wildcats.

W: Willis

Payton Willis seems destined for extensive playing time for the Commodores, even though he is only a freshman. He is just one of two freshman on the team, along with Clevon Brown, who also may get some substantial playing time. Willis adds plenty of scoring prowess and could be a threat on the perimeter. –

Josh Hamburger, Editor in Chief

X: Xavier

During the summer, Xavier guard Larry Austin, Jr. announced that he was transferring from Xavier to Vanderbilt. As a result, he became Drew's first signee as Vanderbilt's head coach. Austin will have to sit out the season per NCAA rules but could play an important role at point guard in the long-term. – *Josh*

Hamburger, Editor in Chief

Y: Yawners

While it lacks the top-end competition that last year's schedule presented, the Commodores' 2016-17 slate doesn't look likely to produce many huge blowouts. Aside from early home games against High Point and Norfolk State, each opponent should have the talent to prevent a 30-plus-point beating, after Vanderbilt handed out four such defeats last year. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*

Z: Zach Cunningham

Although Vanderbilt may not feature an All-American candidate like Cunningham, it does feature one player whose athleticism rivals that of the inside linebacker's. Joe Toye threw down a handful of nasty dunks during his freshman season, and the sophomore forward surely will provide fans with plenty more in 2016-17. While Toye won't get the chance to hurdle an offensive line to block a field goal, he may throw in a couple of exhilarating blocked shots as well. – *Robbie Weinstein, Sports Editor*