

CHC: Vanderbilt Basketball History

by Bill Traugher

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Vanderbilt University was founded in 1873 with a \$500,000 from Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. The university's student body has been coeducational since 1875. The original campus which opened in a single building on 75 acres, expanded to the current 3,330 acres in 1979 when Vanderbilt merged with neighboring George Peabody College for Teachers.

The Vanderbilt University Athletic Association (V.A.A) was formed in 1886 with Dr. W. M. Baskerville serving as president. In those early days most of the Vanderbilt student body was included in the membership. The V.A.A. would oversee the sports played on the Vanderbilt campus including baseball, bicycling, tennis and track and field events.



1901 Men's Basketball Team

Dr. William L. Dudley was the Dean of Medicine at Vanderbilt University from 1895 until his death in 1914. He is also considered the father of Vanderbilt athletics and a pioneer of Southern football. Dudley took over the running of the V.A.A. in 1887. In 1893, Dudley organized and became president of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association (S.I.A.A.). This organization included competing athletic teams from North Carolina to Texas.

When Dr. James Naismith of the YMCA needed an indoor sport to avoid the bitter winters in New England, he invented the game of basketball in 1891. This new sport also spread into the South and onto the Vanderbilt campus. Vanderbilt played its first recorded basketball game in 1893 with a 9-6 victory over the Nashville YMCA. Several years would pass for Dudley to realize the impact the game as a means of exercise for his students.

A formal basketball team was produced to represent the university in December 1900, with W.D. Weatherford the first head coach. The first official schedule consisted of three games against the Nashville YMCA and one against the Nashville Athletic Club. The Commodores lost their first meeting against the YMCA, and finished that inaugural season 2-2. A pair of victories did come against the YMCA.

In those early years, basketball home games were played in the Old Gym, which continues to stand today. The cramped Old Gym, built in 1880, was used for basketball and gymnastics--both men and women. As the crowds began to cultivate, it was necessary to find another venue to host games. Vanderbilt home games were moved to the city-owned Hippodrome. The Hippodrome once stood on the present site of the Holiday Inn Select near

campus. The primary use of the Hippodrome at the time was for ice-skating.

Vanderbilt captured its first S.I.A.A. basketball championship in 1920 with coach G.T. Denton and captain Tom Zerfoss. The Commodores posted a 14-4 record. The S.I.A.A. was reorganized in 1920 with schools added and deleted. Vanderbilt was now a member of the Southern Conference. The Commodores would win the Southern Conference championship in 1927 by winning the postseason tournament held in Atlanta. Vanderbilt recorded its first 20-win season that year by going 20-4 with former football great Josh Cody as head coach.

The Vanderbilt ladies have never been neglected as to their participation in physical activities. There were some early apprehensions about the women students being active in sporting events considered by some as not being "lady-like." Then Stella Vaughn, a Vanderbilt graduate (1896), would become a pioneer in Vanderbilt women's athletics. After her graduation Miss Stella, as she was known with affection, became the women's physical education director.

Vaughn quickly absorbed basketball as a portion of activities for the women. The women wearing bloomers, tie down shoes and voluminous blouses, played a recorded game in March 1897 against Ward Seminary (Belmont). The game was held in the Old Gym and played before a women-only crowd. The doors were locked and windows covered by female teachers. However, one anonymous enterprising male reporter for The Hustler claims to have sneaked in for his descriptive story on the Commodores 5-0 victory.

Those early teams included Vaughn as a player and coach. Only traces of information are available for these infant years of the women's basketball program. Some publications indicate they began playing a regular schedule in 1902, and some report 1905. By this time crowds, including the men, were attending games in large numbers.



1908 Women's Basketball Team

The ladies generally played a five-game schedule, which expanded as more local schools began to produce women's teams. As the game became a national sport the women, who were playing mostly high schools, did play other colleges. The women would travel for road games to cities as Kentucky and Cincinnati and after 1910.

Reports on the women's basketball progression was included in the university's newspapers and yearbooks. Teams are listed through 1919, but information fade into the 1920s. The Girl's Athletic Association was formed in 1928 and basketball became an intramural league. Vaughn would continue to support women's athletics until her death at age 89 in 1960.

These early Vanderbilt women would also participate in gymnastics and tennis.

The Southeastern Conference was formed in December 1932 and began competing for championships in the spring of 1933. Vanderbilt was one of the 13 charter members. Other members include Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Kentucky, LSU, Mississippi, Mississippi State, Sewanee, Tennessee and Tulane. Sewanee would withdraw from the conference in 1940, Georgia Tech in 1964 and Tulane in 1966. Arkansas and South Carolina officially joined the conference in 1990.

The modern era Vanderbilt basketball began with the hiring of Bob Polk (1948-58, 1960-61) as its first full-time basketball coach. The Commodores were for the first time offering basketball scholarships with Billy Joe Adcock the initial signee. Other recruits by Polk include Bob Dudley Smith, George Kelly and Hank Duvier. Adcock graduated after the 1949-50 season and became Vanderbilt's first All-American.

Polk's greatest achievement was winning the only SEC Tournament in the school's history in 1951. The 19-8 Commodores rolled by Tennessee, Georgia and LSU before whipping Kentucky in the finals, 61-57. Polk suffered a heart attack and missed the 1958-59 season. He retired from Vanderbilt for health issues in 1961. Polk ranks second all-time in Commodore victories with a record of 197-106.

In this period, Vanderbilt was playing its home games at area high schools and David Lipscomb's McQuiddy Gymnasium. The Vanderbilt administration decided at their hiring of Polk, that basketball was to be given a chance to succeed on the campus. Dedicated in 1952 as a memorial to all Vanderbilt men and women that served in World War II, historic Memorial Gymnasium was constructed. The Commodores defeated Virginia, 90-83 on Dec. 6, 1952 in their inaugural home game. The gymnasium has been the sight of many exciting finishes giving way to the name, "Memorial Magic."

The Roy Skinner (1959, 1962-76) era began with the retirement of Polk. Skinner quickly guided Vanderbilt to one of the elites of the SEC. After securing center Clyde Lee (1964-66), Skinner led the Commodores to their first SEC basketball championship with a 24-4 record. Vanderbilt would fall to Michigan 87-85 in the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament. Along with Lee, All-SEC honors went to teammates Bob Grace and Ed Miller.

Lee would become an All-American and two-time SEC Player of the Year. He left Vanderbilt as the all-time leader scorer and now ranks fifth with 1,691 points. Lee currently holds all Commodore rebounding records. The outstanding play of Lee attracted swarms of fans to Memorial Gym. Balconies were added to the gym to increase the seating capacity. These additions were referred to as "The Balconies that Clyde Built."

The color barrier in the SEC was broken when Perry Wallace joined the Commodores as the first black scholarship player during the 1967-68 season. Wallace remained poised while enduring taunts and taunting throughout his career. The forward was a Second Team All-SEC selection in 1970. Wallace ranks second on the Vanderbilt all-time career rebounding list.

Vanderbilt, with Skinner, would win its second SEC championship in 1974 to finish 23-5. Skinner won his third of four SEC Coach-of-the-Year awards and the Commodores competed in the NCAA Tournament. During Skinner's tenure he would coach such greats as Jan van Breda Kolff (1974 SEC Player of the Year), Tom Hagan (All-American), Bo Wyenandt, Bob Warren, Terry Compton and the famous F-Troop of Joe Ford, Jeff Fosnes and Butch Feher.

In 1981, Charles Davis and Mike Rhodes played their final season for the Commodores. Rhodes and Davis battled for the Vanderbilt all-time career points lead. Rhodes erased Lee's record by totaling 1,724 points in front of Davis' 1,675.

The arrival of coach C.M. Newton (1982-89) upgraded the Commodore program years after Skinner retired as Vanderbilt's all-time coaching leader (278-135). Newton's "Bomb Squad" of Scott Draud, Barry Booker and Barry Goheen lit up the Vanderbilt scoreboards. With center and SEC Player of the Year Will Perdue, Vanderbilt made it to the Sweet Sixteen of the 1988 NCAA Tournament before falling to Kansas, the eventual national champs.

Newton was a two-time SEC Coach of the Year. Other basketball greats to have played in the Newton era were, Phil Cox, Jeff Turner, and Frank Kornet. In 1990, coach Eddie Fogler (1990-93) led Vanderbilt to the NIT championship. This title is the men's only championship in a national tournament. Draud was named the tournament's MVP.

Duke transfer Billy McCaffrey led the 1992-93 Commodores to its third and last SEC title and another Sweet Sixteen appearance. Vanderbilt set a school record with 28 wins (6 losses) that season. McCaffrey was named the SEC Player of the Year and gained All-American honors while Fogler was selected SEC Coach of the Year and National Coach of the Year. Also giving outstanding efforts were Chris Lawson, Bruce Elder, Dan Hall and Kevin Anglin.

Jan van Breda Kolff (1994-99) returned to Vanderbilt as coach taking the Commodores to one NCAA Tournament appearance in 1997 losing in the first round. His Commodores also received bids to two NIT's. Playing top caliber SEC basketball at this time were Drew Maddux, Dan Langhi (2000 SEC Player of the Year), Ronnie McMahan and Frank Seckar.

[Kevin Stallings](#) is in his eighth season leading the Commodores. Under his guidance Vanderbilt has appeared in two NIT's and advanced to the Sweet Sixteen of the NCAA Tournament in 2004. That year, Matt Freije became the Commodores all-time leading scorer with 1,891 points. Key Commodores in the 21st century include Greg LaPointe, Russell Lakey, Scott Hundley, Corey Smith, Mario Moore, Julian Terrell, [Shan Foster](#) and [Derrick Byars](#) (2007 SEC Player of the Year).

The Vanderbilt men have an overall record entering the 2007-08 season of 1,378-995. Their home record in Memorial Gymnasium is an astonishing 650-184. They have made nine NCAA Tournament appearances including four in the Sweet Sixteen and one Elite Eight. The Commodores have made 11 NIT (18-10) appearances with one championship (1990) and one Runner-up (1994).

When the federal government implemented Title IX requiring equal funding for women's sports, the Vanderbilt administration upgraded the ladies competition. By 1977, the university offered several women's programs to compete as an intercollegiate varsity sport. These athletic events were track & field, cross-country, basketball, tennis, swimming and field hockey.

The Vanderbilt women began their modern period of basketball when Joe Pepper (1977-80) was named part-time coach. The 1977-78 women posted a 15-9 record in their inaugural year. Sheila Johansson, Cathy Bender were the first full scholarship players. Teresa Lawrence was selected the school's first Female Athlete of the Year.

Phil Lee (1980-91) became the first full-time Vanderbilt women's coach in 1980. His 1981-82 squad captured the first 20-win season while appearing in the AIAW National

Tournament. Harriet Brumfield is the first woman from Vanderbilt to be named All-SEC. The Vanderbilt women captured the Women's NIT championship in 1984. The Dores made their first appearance in the NCAA Tournament in 1986 while finishing the season ranked No. 20.

The Vanderbilt women soon became one of the top SEC teams and were consistently ranked nationally. Lee is responsible for recruiting All-Americans Wendy Scholtens and Heidi Gillingham. Other greats at this time were Karen Booker, Deborah Denton, Barbara Brackman, Jackie Cowen, Carolyn Peck, and Donna Atkinson.

Coach Jim Foster (1992-2002) brought the Vandy women to new heights and national prominence with his hiring. Vanderbilt advanced to the Sweet Sixteen in the NCAA Tournament in eight of his 11 seasons. In 1994, the Commodores advanced to the Final Four before falling in a semi-final contest. Vanderbilt achieved a No.1 ranking in the poll taken before the tournament. Foster's teams also won three SEC Tournaments (1993, 1995, 2002).

Prominent players in the Foster era including Gillingham are Sheri Sam (All-American, Chantelle Anderson (Two-Time All-American), Angela Gorsica, Mara Cunningham. Ashley McEihiney, Zuzi Klimesova and Na` Sheemon Hillmon. Anderson is Vanderbilt's only SEC Player of the Year (2002) and all-time career leading scorer with 2,604 points.

[Melanie Balcomb](#) became Vanderbilt's fourth coach in May 2002. She has taken the Commodores to the NCAA Tournament in each of her six seasons and added SEC Tournament titles in 2004 and 2007. Vanderbilt key players were Jenni Benningfield, [Carla Thomas](#), Ashley Early, [Dee Davis](#) and [Caroline Williams](#).

The Commodores have an overall record of 623-307 record entering the 2007-08 season. Their Memorial Gymnasium all-time mark is an amazing 344-81. The Commodores have appeared in 20 NCAA Tournaments (third most in the SEC) and 12 Sweet Sixteen appearances.

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