

# SPORTS

## FOOTBALL

### Players excited to see old teammate get starting nod

*Denver to host Seattle on national television.*

By Jarred Amato  
SPORTS EDITOR

When Denver quarterback Jay Cutler steps on the field Sunday night to make his career NFL start, he will not be the only one who is excited.

"It's going to be tight seeing someone you know play on the biggest stage," said Vanderbilt wide receiver Marlon White, who caught passes from Cutler for three seasons.

"Once he spent some time in the offense, I knew it wasn't going to take a long time for him to be out there."

Commodore coach Bobby Johnson echoed White's sentiments. "We are excited for Jay and excited about this opportunity for him," he said. "We know Jay will do a fantastic job for the Broncos."

Cutler is also pumped to be back on the field.

"It's always fun to play Sunday nights, so to make my debut on a nationally televised game like that is going to be fun," he said. "My pregame is going to be a little bit different, and I'll be a little more excited. But once I get on the field, I think it's just going to take over and I'll be fine."

While Denver coach Mike Shanahan informed Cutler on Monday that he would start this weekend against Seattle in the Sunday Night Game of the Week, the 2005 Southeastern Conference Offensive Player of the Year had a feeling it was coming before then.

"I knew there was a possibility I might get to play this year," Cutler told the Denver media Monday. "I prepared like I might get to play, so I'm happy. I'm just going to take it one day at a time."

Cutler's teammates certainly feel he's ready. White praised Cutler for his "short memory," or ability to put his mistakes behind him quickly. Vanderbilt linebacker Marcus Buggs added that Cutler's mental toughness will allow him to be successful, even as a rookie.

"He's got a cool head. He doesn't get rattled," Buggs said. "He's smart. He's got the ability to read defenses, and his strong arm allows him to make tough throws in coverage."

Shanahan raved about Cutler's work ethic and preparation.

"I like the way he has practiced, I like the way he handles himself and I think he gives us the best chance to win," he said.

"He's very mature. He's very confident. He's a worker. He's got all the tools that you look for. That's why he's getting this opportunity, on how he's practiced."

Taken by the Broncos as the 11th pick of the 2006 NFL Draft, Cutler was expected to back up starter Jake Plummer this season. However, Plummer has struggled and Shanahan needed to give his team, which is 7-4 and two games behind the San Diego Chargers in the AFC West, a boost.

"Hopefully I can give us a little bit of a spark," Cutler said. "We're going to get things turned around. We've got too much talent and too much character on this team not to."

Shanahan's decision has not gone unquestioned, but given the timing of it, that is expected.

"(The decision) never is (unquestioned), especially with a guy that has played as hard as Jake has through the years," Shanahan said. "But that's why you get paid what you get paid, to make those tough decisions, and you've got to do what you think is in the best interest of the team."

Cutler said that his relationship with Plummer has not changed since the switch.

"I talked to Jake a couple of times (Monday). Jake's a good guy," he said. "He's been great since I got here. As soon as he got here (Monday), we kind of talked and said it didn't change anything between me and him. He's going to be there for me. It's good to have him around."

At Vanderbilt, Cutler broke nearly all passing records. He is the career leader with 9,953 yards of total offense, 59 touchdown passes, 8,697 passing yards and 76 total touchdowns, to name a few. In his last game in black and gold, No. 6 guided the Commodores to a 28-24 victory at Tennessee, throwing a touchdown to Earl Bennett on his final pass.

In his first preseason with the Broncos, Cutler threw for 561 yards, third best in the NFL. It doesn't mean much to him now.

"Preseason is preseason. I don't put a lot of stock in it," Cutler said. "This is a different animal. We're playing for real now."

Still, Shanahan liked what he saw early on.

"He wasn't awed by a preseason game. I think we all know the defenses are much different during the regular season than they are during the preseason," he said. "But this guy is a guy that handles himself quite well. There will be growing pains."

No matter how Cutler performs Sunday or the rest of the season, Shanahan made it clear this is his team.

"There will be many mistakes that happen, but he's going to be our guy. He's the guy for the future. He's the guy for the present," he said.

That makes Buggs, White and the rest of Cutler's former teammates excited. ■

## FOOTBALL

### Dores will benefit from Cutler's success



PAUL CONNORS/AP Photo

With the Broncos struggling, coach Mike Shanahan turns to rookie quarterback Jay Cutler and benches Jake Plummer. The experiment will be put to its first test Sunday night when Denver hosts Seattle. The question then becomes: how will Cutler's success affect the Vanderbilt football program?

## GOOD CALL

By Max Franklin  
SPORTS REPORTER

Jay Cutler is the Denver Broncos' starting quarterback.

Well, that's great for the Broncos. But unless Cutler comes back and stands under center for the Commodores, it doesn't affect Vanderbilt, right?

Wrong.

Jay Cutler being a starting quarterback in the NFL does not help Vanderbilt as much as all the 2005 games on ESPN2 did. It doesn't even help as much as Cutler being drafted and talked about all over the country for all of March and April. And it certainly doesn't help as much as if Cutler and the Dores had gone to a bowl game last season, or if Vanderbilt had a short-term history of winning.

That being said, Cutler's start against the Seattle Seahawks next Sunday on national television is the greatest impact that any single player could make on and for the Commodores for the next few seasons.

Vanderbilt baseball coach Tim Corbin has such great success recruiting not only because of the success of his teams or the opportunity for a Vanderbilt education, but because he can point at the number of Commodores who have been drafted over the past few years. When head football coach Bobby Johnson tries to sell his recruits on the possibility of professional success, he can point at Corey Chavous, Shelton Quarles and Hunter Hillenmayer. While Chavous was an NFL Pro-Bowler and Quarles won a Super Bowl, none of those players are currently household names. Next week, Johnson can text message all his recruits to turn on NBC and see what a Vanderbilt quarterback can do.

Cutler's success this season will have little impact on the Dores. But whenever he plays, Vanderbilt's name will be broadcast, the same way that every time Byron Leftwich or Ben Roethlisberger play, Marshall and Miami of Ohio are brought up. As long as every announcer doesn't make a point of dogging the Commodore football program, that exposure can only help Vandy.

If the Dores can continue playing games that are shown on the ESPN networks or CBS, or at least Lincoln Financial Sports, combined with having Cutler on TV every Sunday, Vanderbilt will receive plenty of exposure. Moreover, if in a couple seasons prospects can look and see Jon Goff, Earl Bennett, Cutler and other former Dores playing on Sundays, then Vanderbilt will start to see the effects in the caliber of recruits choosing to play at Dudley Field.

The main issue to remember is that next season on a good Broncos team, Cutler can win more games in one year than he won in his entire career at Vanderbilt.

A culture of success at a college cannot be built by watching one player on TV. But combined with Johnson's commitment to both winning and academics, and hopefully a couple of lucky breaks in games to go along with a group of emerging players, Vanderbilt can cement a move from the butt of jokes to the minds of bowl committees.

Then maybe while Cutler is watching tape to prepare for a late-season bout with the Chiefs, he can switch the channel to watch the Dores playing a December bowl.

I bet he would like that. ■

## BAD CALL

By Franklin Petr  
SPORTS REPORTER

"The Cutler Era has officially started," claimed The Associated Press.

"He's our future, he's our present," said Denver coach Mike Shanahan.

"So what?" I counter.

My future and my present still lie with Vanderbilt, and although I am excited for Cutler, my enthusiasm ends there. "What about the recognition?" people ask. "What about the recruits?" What about them? Vanderbilt is not going to experience a breakaway recruiting boom because they had one first-round draft pick that may live up to his hype. Kids all around the States aren't going to check their local listings for the Commodores' next game because Cutler played here.

Just check your history.

1985. Mississippi Valley State showcases the greatest wide receiver the game has ever seen.

1995. Alcorn State produces the most prolific all-purpose quarterback in NCAA history who is drafted third overall.

Yet neither of these two schools has produced anyone since. And why? Because individual players do not make the team; continued success does.

We have seen in the past week how important success is. Larry Coker and Mike Shula have each been removed from their programs after going 6-6. Coker has gone to two Bowl Championship Series title games, and Shula led a 10-2 Tide squad just last year. But that doesn't matter. Meanwhile, the University of Miami's main choice for Coker's replacement is currently coaching at Rutgers. Last year no one knew his name, but now, after a one-loss season, he is the bee's knees.

And while Cutler's play won't hurt the Commodores, our biggest help this year occurred on campus. Bobby Johnson's four wins in a year many saw as a "recovery year" from Cutler's departure shows people we are on that up-and-up. He's making it work even without his best player. This momentum should hold as Chris Nickson and Earl Bennett continue to develop, and in future years, we will be known as Vanderbilt University, not as where Cutler went to school.

Our biggest draw is still our ability to offer a first-class education and the chance to play in a premier conference. With our improvements this year on both sides of the ball, we are becoming a force, maybe not to reckon with, but neither Florida nor Georgia will underestimate us again anytime soon. We have become the team with a chance of breaking it big. We are the next Rutgers, and that is what will attract our next generation of players, not Cutler's performance this season. And who knows, in 10 years we may be looking back at a plethora of NFL players and a coach who moved on to Southern Cal or Notre Dame.

But in the mean time, rest assured that when Jay Cutler takes the field Sunday night against Seattle, I will be watching like most of our campus. And I will be cheering for the Broncos. But I will not be hanging Vanderbilt's future on his arm. And neither should you. ■

## BASKETBALL: Vandy 'demoralized' with missed shots

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"We felt like we had momentum, had rhythm," Cage said. "But then the second half maybe we took it for granted a little bit. We didn't get our shots, and the ones that we did, we didn't connect."

Vanderbilt extended its lead to seven at 36-29 coming out of the locker room on a Byars' lay-in. It seemed as though Vandy would be able to put Furman away as the game wore on, but the Palidins responded with a quick 5-0 run, capped by point guard Jadee Jones's three-pointer.

The Commodores continued to keep a slim lead until Alex Opacic's three-pointer gave Furman a 49-48 lead with 9:43 left to play. Alex Gordon then found forward Ross Neltner (team-high 12 points) under the basket to give the lead back to the Commodores at 50-49.

But the feisty Paladins' effort never wavered, as they tied the game at 52 on Eric Webb's three-point shot, and then took a 54-52 lead with Stanley Jones's score underneath. A two-handed jam by Moussa Diagne extended that

lead to four. It was clear that Furman wasn't playing for a moral victory.

"We talked to our guys (after the game) that this doesn't need to be the zenith of the season," Jackson said, who coached Furman to its first win over an Southeastern Conference team since 1974. "This is a good road win for our program as we build toward conference play."

Each jab that Vandy took, Furman responded. Guard Eric Webb nailed a three-pointer to give his team a 61-57 lead just after Byars'

circus shot and ensuing free throw seemed to give the Commodores some momentum.

Typically a good shooting team, Vanderbilt continued to struggle beyond the arc down the stretch. When Byars missed a three that could have brought the Commodores within two points, the mounting loss began to set in.

"Our effort tonight was good," Stallings said. "We were demoralized with shots that we missed. It's what happens after you get great shot after great lay-up and can't make them. We have to keep working." ■

BASKETBALL

# Dores off to faster start than even Balcomb imagined

By Jarred Amato  
SPORTS EDITOR

Her team had played just one exhibition game, but Vanderbilt women's basketball coach Melanie Balcomb was already glowing.

"I'm excited about the possibility of how good we can get with this group if they maintain their effort and unselfishness," the prophetic Balcomb said after her Commodores beat DT3 94-64 on Nov. 2. "It could be a lot of fun."

It has certainly been a blast so far. The No. 14 Commodores are 6-0, with their most recent victory coming against No. 16 California in the championship game of the Vanderbilt Thanksgiving Tournament at Memorial Gymnasium last Saturday.

And it is not just the fact that the Commodores are winning, but how they are winning.

Vanderbilt has outscored its opponents by an average of 19 points per game, and it is shooting 52 percent from the field and 44 percent from three-point land.

Senior Caroline Williams (15.8 points per game) is 20-for-39 from behind the arc and was recently named the Thanksgiving Tournament's Most Valuable Player after scoring 35 points in two games.

Classmate Carla Thomas was also named to the All-Tournament team after scoring 16 points

and grabbing seven rebounds in Vanderbilt's 67-55 victory over Cal. Thomas currently leads the team in scoring (17.2 ppg) and rebounding (6.8 per game).

While everyone knows that Vanderbilt can shoot, the team is also playing defense, forcing 22 turnovers per game and holding opponents to 42 percent shooting from the field. Against Cal, the Commodores held the Bears scoreless for almost 11 minutes, from 5:50 in the first half to 14:57 in the second half.

After six games, it is clear that Balcomb's team is as selfless and deep as she promised.

While sophomore Christina Wirth (10.2 ppg) and junior Liz Sherwood (8.7 ppg on 67 percent shooting) are solid third and fourth options behind Thomas and Williams, six other Commodores are averaging at least four points per game.

"I'm most pleased with their unselfishness," Balcomb said early on. "We give up good shots for great shots. Nobody cares who scores on our team."

And it has shown. Vanderbilt is averaging an SEC-best 21.5 assists per game, eight more than its opponents. In addition, 10 players are logging more than 10 minutes per game, with none averaging more than 30.

"I think this is the most depth we've had in the five years I've been here," Balcomb said.

"There's no drop off. It's going to be important for everybody to play hard because they're not going to have to play as many minutes as they've had to before."

In the past, the Commodores were unable to run their offense without senior guard Dee Davis in the game. This year, Davis is playing only 27 minutes per game thanks to the arrival of freshman Merideth Marsh.

"I think Merideth is perfect for the situation," Balcomb said. "She's so smart and has such a great knowledge of the game, and she sees the floor very well. It's a perfect match. That's what we needed - to be able to give Dee a rest. They're two very different styles of point guards, which I think is going to be very difficult to defend."

Davis, who chose 10 as her jersey number because she likes to drop "dimes," leads the SEC with 7.5 assists per game. She's also averaging five points, 2.5 rebounds and two steals. Marsh, meanwhile, is averaging 4.5 points (she's 5-for-11 from three-point range) and 2.7 assists.

The Commodores travel to Birmingham to play University of Alabama at Birmingham Thursday night and then return home to play Clemson Sunday afternoon in a nationally televised contest. Memorial Gymnasium should be packed.

As Balcomb said, it could be a lot of fun. ■



MASON HENSLEY / The Vanderbilt Hustler

Senior guard Caroline Williams is just one of many Commodores off to a strong start.

WATER POLO

# Water polo finishes second at Georgia Fall Invitational

Will Gibbons  
SENIOR SPORTS REPORTER

Here's a riddle: What sport combines the skills of soccer, wrestling, basketball, volleyball, rugby and football?

The answer? It is water polo, arguably one of the toughest sports one can play. And at Vanderbilt, it is gaining momentum, as the club water polo team finished second at the Georgia Fall Invitational two weeks ago, defeating club team Dynamo, Emory and Florida State.

The coed team has been around "at least 10 years" and practices three times a week at the Student Recreation Center. It competes in out-of-town tournaments typically, but wants a home tournament in the spring.

"Anyone can sign up," said junior Nikki Majoras. "It's up to you whether you stick with it."

Sticking with it might be the hard part. Indeed, the sport can be a taxing one. For those in need of a quick overview, water polo is played with teams of seven (including a goalie) that advance a ball

either by throwing it one-handed or swimming with it. If a player is not swimming, he or she is likely treading water, which imaginably gets exhausting after a complete game.

"The hardest part is being able to have endurance," Majoras said. "You're not allowed to rest on the side of the pool."

Being in the water can place more strain on the muscles as well.

"Every single movement you have in the water uses a muscle, whereas in the air, there's a lot less resistance," said junior Hunter Adkisson.

It can also be a contact sport. It is notable that water polo originated from rugby played in rivers in Scotland. While it is not quite as hard-hitting today, there is still a lot of contact, especially under the water where it is more difficult for referees to see the fouls.

"You can't swim over the top of them or drown them, contrary to what it looks like," Majoras said. "So it's kind of hard for players to learn what ejections are and what fouls are."

While it is very popular in Europe, water polo is less known and sometimes confused here in the United States.

"The funny thing about water polo is you say you're going to water polo practice or you have a water polo tournament, you'll get a varying range of responses," Adkisson said. "Somebody will say, 'Are there horses in the water?' and other people say, 'I saw that on the Olympics; that looks really hard.'"

For the members of the Commodore water polo team, a collection of things brought the group together. Some join the team with high school experience, while others join as freshmen who never played the sport.

"I realized my legs were really long, and I did not know how to use them," Adkisson, a converted soccer player, said. "So I switched to water polo."

While the team strives to win, the most important thing for those involved is the friendship that extends beyond the pool.

"The best part is getting to play with a bunch of people who I've become really good friends with," Majoras said. "We're kind of a family. We go out to dinner after practice. We hang out. It's really fun to play with the group of people we have here." ■

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## SHOWS THIS MONTH

THU NOV 30

**ARMY OF ANYONE**  
with Cage The Elephant

FRI DEC 1

**CAREY OTT**  
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SAT DEC 2

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