

MEN'S BASKETBALL 2006-07

BASKETBALL

Nwankwo appreciates life beyond basketball

By Jarred Amato
SPORTS EDITOR

Shan Foster remembers March 6, 2006, like it was yesterday. That's the day his teammate Davis Nwankwo nearly died.

"Everything was fine going up to that moment," Foster recalled. "Then he just hit the floor, and I ran beside him and got on my knees and started praying. It definitely put things into perspective and made us realize that it's a blessing to be out here."

When the Commodores take the court Wednesday night against Georgetown, Nwankwo will not be in uniform. But, thanks to athletic trainer Mike Meyer, he will be on the bench as a coach and visible reminder of what is truly important.

"You better appreciate what you have, because it can be here one second and gone the next," Stallings said. "I think that's a lesson that was pretty much driven home for all of us coaches and players alike with Davis's situation."

Nwankwo arrived at practice on March 6 feeling healthy. He came into the training room, got his ankle taped and chatted with Meyer.

"I asked, 'How you doing, Davis?' and he said, 'I'm good; doing fine.' He didn't complain of anything," Meyer said.

In 15 short minutes, it all changed for the worse. That's when Meyer heard somebody hit the ground hard.

"I went to pick something up off the floor, and just as I turned around, I heard coach (Kevin Stallings) yelling, and I could see Davis on the floor, and he wasn't moving," Meyer said. "There was no life. You can quickly distinguish between somebody grabbing for their knee or ankle and somebody that's in a life-threatening situation, which he clearly was."

Nwankwo stopped breathing shortly after his collapse, and Meyer cleared everyone off the floor. Meyer waited by Nwankwo as student athletic trainer Josh Leak ran to get the automated external defibrillator from the training room.

"The (defibrillator) did the job," Meyer said. "It told us when he needed a shock, and we shocked him one time. After that, he didn't have a pulse; he still wasn't breathing, so I gave him two rescue breaths and he took the third breath on his own."

Nwankwo, who was quickly transported to Vanderbilt Medical Center, suffered from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, or an enlarged heart. It is the same genetic condition that caused the deaths of the Boston Celtics' Reggie Lewis in 1993 and Loyola Marymount University basketball player Hank Gathers in 1990.

According to Dr. Dan Roden, professor of medicine and pharmacology and one of the physicians who cared for Nwankwo, the condition is genetic and the No. 1 cause of sudden death in athletes.

"At this point, I've been told by some cardiologists and our sports medicine physicians that he is only the second NCAA athlete with this condition that is documented to have been saved," Meyer said.

Without any literature on the case, doctors are asking Nwankwo to be cautious as they continue testing, and unless any new research is done, his playing days are over.

"He's fine. He's going to lead a normal life, but he needs to know what to expect in the future," Meyer said. "Those are the things we are trying to come to grips with."

In the meantime, Nwankwo said he is limited to walking, doing push-ups and light biking. It hasn't been easy for him to watch from the bench as his teammates play the sport he loves, especially when he could add depth to a thin Commodore front line, which has only 10 scholarship players.

"When you see our team is kind of short on numbers, I definitely wish I could do something about it," said Nwankwo, who scored 12 points and grabbed 30 rebounds as a redshirt freshman.

But it certainly beats the alternative, and while Nwankwo acknowledged that it may take him a while to get used to life without basketball, he is beyond grateful for his second chance.

"God's giving me another opportunity, so I definitely feel blessed every day," he said. "Right now, at 20 years old, I'm just blessed to still be living."

Since March 6, 2006, Foster's mindset has changed, too.

"It makes you go hard every single play because you look over at the bench and see someone who wishes he could be out here but can't anymore," Foster said. "It makes you appreciate practice. It makes you appreciate games — makes you appreciate living for that matter." ■



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BASKETBALL



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Cage, Skuchas ready for one last shot

By Will Gibbons
SENIOR SPORTS REPORTER

The video came out on YouTube four weeks ago. Vanderbilt, an underdog in both its first- and second-round NCAA Tournament games, upset North Carolina State to set off a wild celebration. Two players, Dan Cage and Ted Skuchas, remain from that team, and if they get what they want, a similar scene could take place for the Commodores.

It is no secret that last year's version of Vanderbilt basketball disappointed. Poor chemistry and inconsistent defense and rebounding put a team that one publication predicted to win the Southeastern Conference's Eastern Division in the NIT. With that in mind, this year's squad has worked to reverse these trends in an effort to get back to its 2004 form.

"For the team, I'd say the goal is to get better every day and to not beat ourselves," Cage said. "If we get beat on a particular night, let it be because we didn't play as well as the other team or because we were outmatched in some way."

Cage and Skuchas both know for that to happen, they will have to provide senior leadership for a team with just 10 scholarship players.

"We've been through the wars a little bit; we've been in close games," Cage said. "We've won close games; we've lost close games. These are the experiences we will utilize in hopefully giving some of the younger guys the knowledge they need to go out there, play our game and win the games that are going

to be tough."

"The older you get, the more you've been through, the easier it is to be a leader," Skuchas said.

For Skuchas, the challenge is containing some of the nation's premier big men. This year, the former four-star recruit will be asked to guard Georgetown's Roy Hibbert, Georgia Tech's Ra'Sean Dickey, Alabama's Jermareo Davidson, Kentucky's Randolph Morris, Louisiana State University's Glenn "Big Baby" Davis and Florida's Joakim Noah. With several established perimeter players on Vandy's roster, the play of Skuchas down low could tell a lot about the success of the team.

"I think with Ted, (the objective) is to play defense more consistently without fouling, finish plays and rebound the ball some," said coach Kevin Stallings.

For Cage, providing an all-around steady performance is key, as well as continuing to show his ability to shoot well. He too will have to rebound more than he has been accustomed to doing.

"Personally, I'd like to have my best season of the four years I've been here," he said. "How you define that is each person's set of standards."

Stallings has similar expectations for the seniors.

"I just hope they can play like seniors," he said. "They've been here a long time, and they know what the expectations of the program are, and I think they're both off to really good starts."

Stallings' desire for them to excel extends beyond the coinciding hope for the team's

win-loss record. By all accounts, both Cage and Skuchas have been model citizens in the course of their respective careers as Commodores.

"It's been fun to get to coach them and to get to know them, because they're really unique guys and very special guys," Stallings said. "I know I have benefited from coaching them."

Both players feel the outlook for the season is good, and the team should be able to gel more easily than it did last year.

"I would say that (the team) has more of a sense of togetherness than last year," Skuchas said. "Everyone is looking out for the guy beside them and wants the guy beside them to do well first instead of themselves, have the team win and do big things before they have their individual stats."

"The last week or so things are really starting to come together," Cage said. "Our rebounding and defense have improved. Our chemistry is really starting to show through."

What has helped that senior leadership role blossom is the friendship the two share as the two four-year seniors.

"When you spend as much time together as we do—we spend six, seven, eight hours a day together year-round almost—you can't know person better than that," Cage said. "Obviously, (Ted and I) have been together longer than the rest of these guys. I know him inside and out, and he knows me inside and out, and I'm looking forward to going through this season with him and having the two of us rekindle some of the magic that happened our freshman year." ■

DERRICK BYARS SENIOR (R)	
#4	
NICKNAME	DeeBee
POSITION	Guard/Forward
HEIGHT	6'7"
HOMETOWN	Memphis, TN
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Kobe Bryant
CURRENT RINGTONE	"One Blood," by The Game
QUICK FACTS	• Solid all-around player who can score in many different ways • Best defender on the team

DAN CAGE SENIOR	
#20	
NICKNAME	D.C.
POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	6'5"
HOMETOWN	Indianapolis, IN
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Matt Frieje
CURRENT RINGTONE	Standard
QUICK FACTS	• Excellent outside shooter • Defense and rebounding have improved each season

TED SKUCHAS SENIOR (R)	
#54	
NICKNAME	Skooch
POSITION	Center
HEIGHT	6'11"
HOMETOWN	Audubon, PA
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Kareem Abdul-Jabbar
CURRENT RINGTONE	Standard
QUICK FACTS	• Has shown a good hook shot • Solid post defender who needs to stay out of foul trouble

SHAN FOSTER JUNIOR	
#32	
NICKNAME	The Truth
POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	6'6"
HOMETOWN	Kenner, LA
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Steve Nash
CURRENT RINGTONE	The Saints Go Marching In
QUICK FACTS	• Best scorer and shooter on the team, among the best in the SEC • Could emerge as an NBA prospect this season

ALEX GORDON JUNIOR	
#3	
NICKNAME	Red
POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	5'11"
HOMETOWN	Pensacola, FL
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Allen Iverson
CURRENT RINGTONE	"Dear Mama" by Tupac Shakur
QUICK FACTS	• Has potential to be explosive in the up-tempo offense • Brings experience to the point guard position

AUBREY HAMMOND JUNIOR	
#14	
NICKNAME	Brey
POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	6'4"
HOMETOWN	Charlottesville, VA
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Lebron James
CURRENT RINGTONE	"I'm Da Man" by D4L
QUICK FACTS	• Strong work ethic allows him to get most out of teammates • Walk-on should expect increase in playing time

SEASON PREVIEW



BASKETBALL

Freshmen ready to make immediate impact

Beal poised to run Commodore offense

By Andrew Hard
SPORTS REPORTER

Any critics of Vanderbilt coach Kevin Stallings' ability to recruit need look no further than this year's class to swallow their words. With point guard Jermaine Beal and power forward JeJuan Brown, Stallings has two players that will contribute right away for the Commodores, despite never having played a game of college basketball.

One of them may even be named a starter when the Commodores open their season Nov. 15 against Georgetown.

To say Vanderbilt lacked consistency at the point guard position last year is a pretty big understatement, but it may have found its long-term answer in Beal, a 6-foot-3 true freshman from DeSoto, Texas. While Alex Gordon is a feisty defender and a good outside shooter, Beal's height advantage (4 inches) and size (205 pounds) translate to a more well-rounded skill set. His athleticism and quickness, as well as his "pass-first" mentality as a point guard may lead to instant success in a Commodore uniform.

And he may get a chance to start right away. After an impressive exhibition performance against Northern State, Stallings all but solidified Beal's spot in the starting lineup when the Commodores begin play next Wednesday.

"Jermaine is a very athletic player. I think he will be exactly what he showed tonight and even more," Stallings said after Beal's six-point, five-assist effort in the exhibition. "We're going to play Jermaine for now, even though Gordon will have to be a significant factor if we want to be successful."

Averaging 21.5 points and six assists over four years in high school, including a state championship, Beal is exactly the type of well-rounded player Vanderbilt so desperately needed last year at the point guard position. Because of his size, he will never be overmatched defensively, and he has the quickness and poise to run the floor in transition, something Stallings

hopes to do a lot more of this year.

As a point guard, his main duties will be to run the new offense, getting Shan Foster and Derrick Byars open often. While team chemistry was a major issue in last year's disappointing season, Beal said his acceptance with the veterans was instantaneous.

"Shan, DB (Byars), Red (Gordon) and I, we all hang out together rapping, lifting weights, going to church," Beal said. "Shan and I are definitely very close; we try and go to church together every Sunday."

In addition to his multiple talents and great potential, Beal also brings an unprecedented level of confidence into his first year of college basketball. While Stallings said it sometimes takes newcomers some time to release the jitters and get used to the intensity of big-time college basketball, Beal knows he is ready because he has worked hard to belong at this level.

"I'm excited to play a lot of minutes this year, but at the same time, I feel like I deserve the playing time because of the hard work I've put into it," Beal said. "I came to Vanderbilt knowing I would get playing time right away and would have a chance to contribute."

Beal already has a moxie level that freshmen usually take a whole season to develop. Working alongside Shan and Byars in his first season won't hurt his learning curve either, giving him a chance to refine his skills at this level without having to be the go-to playmaker on offense. ■

Brown to help in the paint

By Harish Krishnamoorthi
SPORTS REPORTER

For JeJuan Brown, the visit to Vanderbilt was the only one he needed. Sorry West Virginia, Marquette and Tulane, but Brown wanted his athletic prowess to go to the Commodores.

The 6-foot-7-inch versatile forward from Biloxi, Miss. likes what he sees in Vanderbilt basketball this season.

"Oh, you know everything's great now; everyone's working hard. Everybody's chemistry is good. I'm feeling good about it," Brown, the Sun Herald Gulf Coast Player of the Year, said.

According to Brown, Vanderbilt can offer more for him than other schools, and his mother is especially excited.

"She wanted me to get an education too, and she's a basketball fanatic, so she's really excited," Brown said. "She's going to come to a couple of games, and she's going to love it."

Brown graduated out of Biloxi High School with honors as a Mississippi Scholar after captaining his team for three years and leading them to four straight District 8 division titles.

And he sees a big difference between high school and college basketball.

"It's a fast paced game, more physical, much faster. We just got to work harder every day, stay at it and get used to the game," Brown said.

Brown feels a close connection with his teammates.

"Oh yeah man, I love my teammates. They're like my brothers out

there, like my family," Brown said.

"We keep getting together and getting team chemistry, and it will be good."

Not only is the Southeastern Conference regarded as the strongest college football conference, but Brown also thinks that the SEC will also be the best college basketball conference.

"It's all in team work, team chemistry and giving 110 percent," Brown said. "And if we keep what we're doing, I feel we're going to be a big impact in the conference because the SEC will be the toughest conference."

The SEC features five nationally ranked teams and strength from top to bottom. Brown, known as a good defender, points to solid defense as one of the ingredients for a successful season.

"I didn't get to see a lot of games last year, but from what I saw, it was finishing games," Brown said. "So this year we'll have to finish a lot of games and defend from start to finish." ■

Fast Break

10 questions to consider as Dores begin their season

1. Addition by subtraction?

While the team will miss starters DeMarre Carroll and Julian Terrell, losing Mario Moore to graduation is certainly a plus.

2. Who will be the third scorer?

With Derrick Byars and Shan Foster as the go-to guys, it will be interesting to see who is next. Will it be Dan Cage? Alan Metcalfe? Ross Neltner? George Drake? Only time will tell.

3. Can the Dores hold their own on the boards?

The play of Metcalfe, Neltner, JeJuan Brown and Ted Skuchas on the glass will go a long way in determining the Dores' fate.

4. Good-bye Princeton?

It appears as though the Dores have moved away from the Princeton offense and are going to play more up-tempo. Not only does this make sense with the personnel they have, but it will also make for a more exciting team to watch. The question is whether the Dores will be able to simply outscore teams.

5. Immediate impact?

The Dores are counting on two true freshmen, Brown and Jermaine Beal, and one redshirt freshman, George Drake, to play significant roles. Hopefully they are ready.

6. Chemistry?

The word so far is that this team is closer than in past years, and after how things unfolded a year ago, that is certainly good news. Let's see how the Dores react to adversity that is bound to affect any team.

7. What are the Dores' strengths?

Like all Vandy squads, this group can shoot the ball. It also has two legitimate scorers in Byars and Foster, two capable point guards in Beal and Alex Gordon, and two guards coming off the bench in Cage and Drake who should be able to provide a spark.

8. What are the Dores' weaknesses?

Without question, it is rebounding. Guarding many of the nation's elite big men such as Georgetown's Roy Hibbert, Florida's Joakim Noah and Louisiana State University's Glenn "Big Baby" Davis will be a challenge.

9. Can the Dores close out games?

Inconsistent play down the stretch hurt the squad last season. With Beal and a more experienced Gordon running the offense, the team should be more composed late in games.

10. Can the Dores defend?

Without the ability to control the boards, Vandy's guards are going to have create turnovers. Will the Dores press full court? If so, expect Drake to play a major role.

2006-07 SCHEDULE

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Georgetown	Nov. 15	Tennessee Tech/Northwestern (SJS)	Dec. 20	Ole Miss	Jan. 27
At Wake Forest	Nov. 21	TBD (SJS)	Dec. 21	At Florida	Jan. 31
Elon	Nov. 25	Alabama A&M	Dec. 29	Georgia	Feb. 3
Furman	Nov. 28	At Rice	Jan. 2	At Tennessee	Feb. 10
Toledo	Dec. 2	At Auburn	Jan. 6	South Carolina	Feb. 14
East Tennessee State	Dec. 5	Tennessee	Jan. 10	Florida	Feb. 17
Lipscomb	Dec. 7	At Georgia	Jan. 13	At Mississippi State	Feb. 21
Georgia Tech	Dec. 9	Alabama	Jan. 17	At Kentucky	Feb. 25
Nicholls State	Dec. 16	At Kentucky	Jan. 20	At South Carolina	Feb. 28
UPR-Mayaguez (San Juan Shootout)	Dec. 19	At LSU	Jan. 24	Arkansas	March 3
				SEC Tournament	March 8-11

ALAN METCALFE
JUNIOR

#11



NICKNAME	Big Al
POSITION	Forward
HEIGHT	6'9"
HOMETOWN	St. Helens, England
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Dirk Nowitzki
CURRENT RINGTONE	"Walk it Out" by DJ Unk
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tough-minded player who can punish opponents in the post Needs to control paint and avoid foul trouble

ROSS NELTNER
JUNIOR (R)

#41



NICKNAME	Nelly
POSITION	Forward
HEIGHT	6'9"
HOMETOWN	Fort Thomas, KY
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Dirk Nowitzki
CURRENT RINGTONE	"How to Save a Life" by The Fray
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good long-range shooter LSU transfer is a solid rebounder and will be counted on for defense down low

DAVIS NWANKWO
JUNIOR

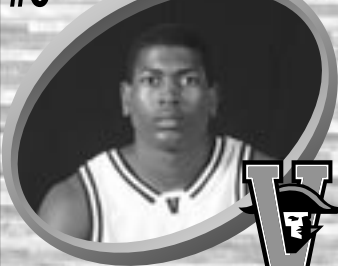
#10



NICKNAME	D-Nice
POSITION	Forward
HEIGHT	6'10"
HOMETOWN	College Park, MD
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Tim Duncan
CURRENT RINGTONE	"Murda, Murda" by Juelz Santana
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basketball career cut short after cardiac arrest Serves as coach/player/manager; reminds players of what's important

JERMAINE BEAL
FRESHMAN

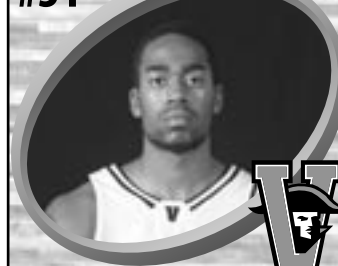
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NICKNAME	Dolla Beal
POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	6'3"
HOMETOWN	DeSoto, TX
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Gilbert Arenas, Steve Nash
CURRENT RINGTONE	"Back Then" by Mike Jones
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excellent passer with strong court awareness Will create match-up problems with his size

JEJUAN BROWN
FRESHMAN

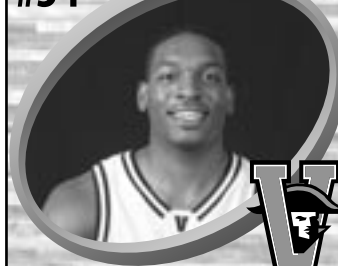
#31



NICKNAME	Big Juan
POSITION	Forward
HEIGHT	6'7"
HOMETOWN	Biloxi, MS
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Carmelo Anthony
CURRENT RINGTONE	"Keep Ya Head Up" by Tupac Shakur
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good rebounder who reminds some of a young DeMarre Carroll Good passer who will be asked to play right away

GEORGE DRAKE
FRESHMAN (R)

#34



NICKNAME	G
POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	6'4"
HOMETOWN	Calera, AL
FAVORITE NBA PLAYER	Michael Jordan
CURRENT RINGTONE	"We Fly High" by Jim Jones
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Game suited perfectly for up-tempo offense Good rebounder for his height and a lock-down defender

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL 2006-07

NEIL BRAKE / VU Media Relations

Fast Break

10 questions to consider as Dores begin their season

- 1.** Can Dee Davis stay healthy?
Coming off her third knee surgery, Davis knows she cannot play as many minutes as in years past. With Merideth Marsh and company, she will not have to, which will keep her fresh when it counts.
- 2.** One game at a time?
Last season the Dores put "April '06" on the back of their practice jerseys. This year, the focus is on the small things needed to get there.
- 3.** Who are opponents going to focus on?
With Carla Thomas and Liz Sherwood down low and Caroline Williams and Tina Wirth on the wings, opponents are going to have a hard time double-teaming anyone.
- 4.** Run and gun?
Coach Melanie Balcomb is excited about the team's new fast-paced offense. The Dores are more athletic and have players like Wirth and Amber Norton, who can run the middle lane, and Davis and Marsh, who can distribute the ball.
- 5.** Immediate impact?
Are the five true freshmen and one redshirt freshman ready to contribute right away? The Dores are counting on them to provide depth, and the exhibition games suggest they are up for the challenge.
- 6.** How deep are the Dores?
According to Balcomb, this is the most depth the Dores have had in her five-year tenure. If that is the case, expect the team to be in top shape come March.
- 7.** What are the Dores' strengths?
There are plenty, most notably their unselfishness. The players do not care who scores as they win. Not only that, but the Dores are balanced – they can score in many ways, from the inside, the outside and in transition.
- 8.** What are the Dores' weaknesses?
The Dores will need to rebound better, especially offensively. Sometimes they expect shots to go in rather than positioning themselves for the miss. Thomas and Sherwood also need to avoid foul trouble.
- 9.** Can the Dores play complete games?
Maintaining their focus for 40 minutes was a problem for the Dores' last season. Balcomb has stressed playing hard from start to finish, so expect that to be a non-issue.
- 10.** Can the Dores defend?
Balcomb certainly thinks so. With more athleticism, the Dores can put more pressure on the basketball. Expect Jennifer Risper and freshman Jessica Mooney to excel in this area.

Provided with all their basic needs, the Commodores focused their energy on creating and developing strong relationships with their teammates off the court in order to communicate more effectively on the court. In conjunction with a company that specializes in team building and corporate leadership, the Commodores embarked on a number of team building exercises that included navigating ropes courses,

By Pete Madden
ASST SPORTS EDITOR

For the first time in team history, coach Melanie Balcomb utilized a subtle weapon to give her Commodores an edge in the Southeastern Conference—the sleeper. The Vanderbilt women's basketball team recently spent a long weekend at Camp Holloway, a newly renovated Girl Scout facility near White House, Tenn., approximately 30 minutes outside of Nashville. Their hosts lodged them in cabins, cooked all their meals and, of course, reserved a small, local gym in which they could practice.



BASKETBALL

New season brings new focus

By Jambu Palaniappan
ASST SPORTS EDITOR

The Vanderbilt women's basketball team ended last season much earlier than it would have liked. After being slighted by the NCAA Tournament draw, the Commodores fell to top-ranked North Carolina. This year, they hope that their newfound versatility and depth can result in a run deep into March.

"I think this is the most depth we've had in the five years I've been here," said coach Melanie Balcomb. "There's no drop off from our starters to our bench. 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 play before. There are other people to go, which I think will help us down the stretch in a tough conference that's very physical."

Last season, the Commodores were forced to rely on a small core of extremely talented players to carry a majority of the load. This year, a deep bench full of

energetic freshmen plus the return of several key starters means the Dores will have a new identity in the extremely competitive Southeastern Conference.

"Coach keeps talking about how we are going to be a better transition team, offensively and defensively," said sophomore guard Tina Wirth. "We're more athletic, and we're in better shape this year, so we're going to get out and run."

The new season has brought Vanderbilt a fresh start and a more tailored focus. During the team's exhibition this past week, Balcomb was impressed with her team's ability to make the extra pass and create open shots.

"I think I'm most pleased with their unselfishness," Balcomb said. "We gave up good shots for great shots. Nobody cares who scores on our team. As soon as we learn how to be that unselfish on defense and help each other more, I think we'll be fine."

The Dores were also hampered by injuries and a lack of team speed. The offseason allowed players to rehab and get back to full physical health.

"We can defend and we can run better than we did last year," Balcomb said. "Tina and Amber (Norton) are capable

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BASKETBALL

Preseason retreat brings team together away from basketball

steering marbles through labyrinths and climbing trees. All of these activities required the entire team to cooperate toward the ultimate goal of completing the exercise.

Other activities included archery, watching movies on a big screen and playing icebreaker games, all designed to help the girls relax and have fun while simultaneously molding a team that is comfortable with and confident in one another.

"We did a lot of things that incorporated us learning more about each other as people, not just players," said Balcomb, who is preparing for her fifth, and perhaps most promising, season at the helm of the Commodore squad. "I think that that is really important. Having a bond off the court will help us on the court."

The players agreed that the retreat was both enjoyable and beneficial, fostering a team chemistry that was not limited to basketball.

"I thought working through the problems on the ropes course was really fun," said Liz Sherwood, a junior center from Castle Rock, Colo. "Learning how to communicate with each other better will help us to be more responsible teammates."

Despite all of its significance and structure, the trip would not have been complete without some typical sleeper antics.

"On Saturday, a couple of my assistants stayed up all night, attacked one of the cabins and scared all the girls," Balcomb said, a grin spreading across her face as she spoke. "But then they got us back."

Should the success of the retreat make itself evident on the court in the upcoming season, the Commodores would be wise to uphold the Camp Holloway tradition for years to come. ■

DEE DAVIS
SENIOR

#10



POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	5'7"
HOMETOWN	Cincinnati, OH
I CHOSE MY NUMBER...	Because I drop dimes.
I WISH I COULD...	Dunk
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earned All-SEC first team honors One of the nation's top playmakers, knows how to attack the basket and distribute

CARLA THOMAS
SENIOR

#50



POSITION	Forward
HEIGHT	6'3"
HOMETOWN	Mechanicsburg, PA
MEMORABLE MOMENT	Winning SEC Tourney as freshman
ON GAMEDAY, I LIKETO...	Take a nap
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solid mid-range game; good passer Team's leading scorer has ability to dominate down low

CAROLINE WILLIAMS
SENIOR

#33



POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	5'10"
HOMETOWN	Rockmart, GA
DREAM JOB	Sideline reporter for ESPN
FAVORITE TV SHOW	Grey's Anatomy
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continues to expand game Best shooter in the SEC hit school-record 95 three-pointers last season

LIZ SHERWOOD
JUNIOR

#32



POSITION	Center
HEIGHT	6'4"
HOMETOWN	Castle Rock, CO
DREAM JOB	Athletic Director
FAVORITE SPORTS MOVIE	Love & Basketball
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led SEC in field-goal percentage Connecticut transfer named SEC "Sixth Woman of the Year" last season

JENNIFER RISPER
SOPHOMORE

#2



POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	5'9"
HOMETOWN	Moreno Valley, CA
I'M LISTENING TO...	"How to Save a Life" by The Fray
FAVORITE LATE-NIGHT SNACK	Gushers
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Named Defensive Player of Year at team banquet Extremely athletic and plays with lots of energy

CHRISTINA WIRTH
SOPHOMORE

#34



POSITION	Guard/Forward
HEIGHT	6'1"
HOMETOWN	Mesa, AZ
FAVORITE PRO TEAM	Phoenix Suns
FAVORITE RESTAURANT	P.F. Chang's
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lights-out shooter worked tirelessly this off-season to improve strength Ability to play inside or outside

SEASON PREVIEW

BASKETBALL



NEIL BRAKE / VU Media Relations

The future looks bright for freshmen Amber Norton, Merideth Marsh, Jessica Mooney, Lauren Leuders and Ashlee Bridge.

Fearless attitude is what sets freshmen class apart

By Jarred Amato
SPORTS EDITOR

Vanderbilt coach Melanie Balcomb's freshman class is promising for many reasons. But the one that makes the five girls stand out is their fearlessness.

"I just think they have guts," Balcomb said. "They're not afraid to fail, they're not afraid to miss shots, they're not afraid to make passes and turn it over. They're willing to go for it and take chances that we haven't had in other freshman classes."

The five freshmen — Ashlee Bridge, Lauren Leuders, Merideth Marsh, Jessica Mooney and Amber Norton — have reminded the upperclassmen just how much fun it is to play basketball, and their constant focus and enthusiasm has been contagious.

"They're having a great time," Balcomb said. "They don't feel any pressure, and that rubs off on the kids that feel the pressure to do well and to lead the team. It allows them to relax and be kids again."

Players like Tina Wirth and Caroline Williams have certainly taken notice.

"They're all excited about every new thing, they're really athletic, really coachable and just good teammates," Wirth said.

"As a freshman, I was a little timid. It's good to see that they're not scared," Williams said. "They just go after it, and they're not afraid to make mistakes. They're athletic and fun to be with, and it's just exciting to have a group of girls like that."

While this class isn't ranked as highly as Balcomb's first, which included Williams and fellow seniors Dee Davis and Carla Thomas, the fifth-year coach is predicting big things.

"I know our first year, they were ranked No. 1, so nobody was really surprised how well these three

have made it through," Balcomb said. "But I think people are going to be surprised how good this group is, because there weren't a lot of big names. They're going to surprise a lot of people."

If the two exhibition games were any indication, Balcomb is right on target. Not only are the freshmen fearless, they are talented, too.

"They're freshmen that can all make plays. They're scorers, but they're unselfish as well, and they've blended really well into our team concept," Balcomb said. "I think they're all going to have a role in our success this year."

The group, although admittedly nervous, looked poised and confident against DT3 and the Premier Players. Marsh showed great court awareness as Davis' backup at point guard, while Leuders and Mooney provided energy at both guard positions. Bridge showed the potential to play both inside and outside and Norton displayed an aggressiveness around the basket that will make her valuable in the frontcourt.

Still, Balcomb knows there is plenty of room for improvement.

"They learned that what we're running and executing is very important," Balcomb said. "You have to work hard in practice every day. In high school, these are great players that didn't have to perform in practice. Now they have to perform at game speed in order to get in the games and to do well when they get in."

In addition to working hard together on the court, the quintet has already developed quite the bond off it.

"The team becomes your family," Leuders said. "We all get along so great. We can rely on anybody and have each other's backs. We've gone through so many things together already."

And to think that it has only just begun. ■

VANDY: Team emphasizes 'sacrifice'

From FOCUS, page 8

of running the middle of the floor. Carla and Liz are in better shape. We can be a much more powerful team that can score in flurries and in spurts because the middle runner is opening up all kinds of things that we didn't have last year. We became big and slow, and I didn't like playing that way."

Perhaps the most important change this season for the Commodores is the desire to achieve team goals, even if they come at the expense of individual accolades. Senior guard Dee Davis, a first-team All-


SEC performer, contends that the team's attitude will carry them even further than their physical talents.

"We have 'sacrifice' printed on our practice jerseys, and that's one thing that we committed ourselves to. We know we're willing to do whatever it takes. If I have a three-point shot and I'm wide open and I see Caroline Williams has a shot, I'm going to pass it to her. Everyone on this team is willing to do that." ■

2006-07 SCHEDULE

at Colorado	Nov. 12	at Mississippi	Jan. 7
at Western Kentucky	Nov. 16	at South Carolina	Jan. 11
Dartmouth	Nov. 18	Florida	Jan. 14
Texas A&M Corpus Christi	Nov. 20	at Georgia	Jan. 18
Florida Atlantic	Nov. 24	Georgia Tech	Jan. 21
Belmont or California	Nov. 25	Tennessee	Jan. 25
at UAB	Nov. 30	at Arkansas	Jan. 28
Clemson	Dec. 3	at Kentucky	Feb. 1
at Duke	Dec. 7	Alabama	Feb. 4
at South Florida	Dec. 17	Auburn	Feb. 11
Lipscomb	Dec. 20	at Mississippi State	Feb. 15
Indiana State/Longwood	Dec. 21	South Carolina	Feb. 18
Princeton	Dec. 30	LSU	Feb. 22
La Salle	Jan. 1	at Tennessee	Feb. 25
Arkansas	Jan. 4	SEC Tournament	March 1-4

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AMY MALO
FRESHMAN (R)

#43



POSITION	Forward
HEIGHT	6'3"
HOMETOWN	Fairmont, MN
FAVORITE TV SHOW	Fresh Prince
DREAM JOB	College coach
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaining confidence after sitting out last season due to injury Will provide depth in front court

ASHLEE BRIDGE
FRESHMAN

#11



POSITION	Guard/Forward
HEIGHT	5'11"
HOMETOWN	Cincinnati, OH
FAVORITE SINGER	Ne-Yo
FAVORITE TV SHOW	Flavor of Love
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wing player who can rebound, drive and hit mid-range shots Played for same high school team as Dee Davis

LAUREN LEUDERS
FRESHMAN

#5



POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	5'8"
HOMETOWN	Jackson, MO
FAVORITE PRO TEAM	St. Louis Cardinals
NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW	I'm the best flag football receiver
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most physical guard in Balcomb's tenure, played on boys' high school team Extremely quick release

MERIDETH MARSH
FRESHMAN

#23



POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	5'9"
HOMETOWN	Louisville, KY
FAVORITE MOVIE	Finding Nemo
NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW	I use two straws in my drinks
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smart and tough point guard will keep Davis' minutes down Ability to shoot the three and attack basket

JESSICA MOONEY
FRESHMAN

#20



POSITION	Guard
HEIGHT	5'8"
HOMETOWN	Nashville, TN
FAVORITE TV SHOW	Law and Order
FAVORITE BOOK	Clifford the Big Red Dog
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fastest player on team with great body control Adds new dimension to defense

AMBER NORTON
FRESHMAN

#25



POSITION	Forward
HEIGHT	6'1"
HOMETOWN	Louisville, KY
FAVORITE SINGER	Usher
DREAM JOB	Playing basketball for a living
QUICK FACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely physical and not afraid to mix it up Ability to rebound and run the floor; possesses great hands