

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

Memorial Gymnasium one of nation's best



GOOD CALL

By Andrew Barge
SPORTS REPORTER

Vanderbilt students have plenty to complain about in terms of athletic facilities. Memorial Gymnasium is a different story.

Despite its average capacity of 14,168, the gym's remarkable acoustics and unique bench location create a home court advantage few programs get to experience. Vandy fans should take pride in the fact that they play an important role in the outcome of every home game.

The location of the benches serves as the gym's most interesting attribute. Rather than placing the benches at half-court like every other gym in the country, Memorial puts the teams directly under the baskets. This is why Kevin Stallings yells louder than any other coach in the Southeastern Conference. If a coach wants to get the attention of his players, he has to scream at them from the other side of the court.

Too bad they can't hear him. The odd vertical seating places the upper sections of the crowd over the court while the lower sections are submerged below the floor. The resulting noise from the crowd makes it very difficult for an opposing point guard to hear the play call from his coach on the other side of the court.

Impressive attendance helps make this noise possible. The Nashville community has made Memorial Gymnasium one of college basketball's most popular venues. Since 1977, Vanderbilt has ranked as one of the NCAA's top 30 attendance leaders 23 times. This noteworthy stat has translated into a successful home court advantage for the Commodores, who have won 78 percent of their contests at Memorial.

Over the years, several coaches have complained about the difficulty of playing in Memorial Gym. Former Florida State coach Pat Kennedy lost a first round NCAA tournament game at Memorial Gymnasium and blamed his players' lack of concentration on the bench location. Kennedy's constant nagging caused the NCAA to permanently move its Nashville games to the Gaylord Entertainment Center. While this change definitely enthused the out-of-conference coaches, those in the SEC still have to deal with the noise every year. Add this benefit to the gym's aesthetic appeal and you have a venue that puts pride in Vanderbilt athletics.

Year after year our basketball team depends on its fans to help frustrate opposing players and coaches in its one-of-a-kind gym. I encourage every Vanderbilt student to visit Memorial Gymnasium tonight and enjoy the experience first hand. ■

BAD CALL

By Zac Sugarman
SPORTS REPORTER

Memorial Gymnasium is one of the worst, if not the worst, arena in all of college basketball. Whether it is the raised court, benches on the baseline or the awkward seating, there is nothing "awesome" about Memorial Gym.

The first five rows can barely see the game — seeing as how they are almost 4 feet below the level of the court — and the view from the back of the student section is obscured by the overhang from the upper level. Even though the gymnasium was built in 1952, seating has increased from 6,500 to 14,000...so why do our hoops look like the ones still standing from the gym's original construction?

Why don't we have the Kentucky-style free-standing hoops that have gained widespread popularity among the premier college programs? The most ridiculous aspect of the gym's construction is not the elevated court (even though I am still hoping Glen Davis dives for a loose ball during the Louisiana State University game and lands on a row of unsuspecting Vandy Fanatics), but the benches along the baseline.

For some reason everyone loves to label the arrangement as "unique" or "cool," which are just polite replacements for "weird" and "I don't really care." The only perk is watching as opposing players simply walk onto the court, forgetting to make the 20 yard trek to the scorer's table to sub in, much to the crowd's delight and the player's confusion.

More importantly, college basketball games should be — and in most cases are — centered around the fans; from waving objects from behind the basket during their free throw attempts to harassing opposing players from behind their bench, it is our job to annoy the visiting teams by our presence, not by the awkwardness of our gym.

Either way, something needs to be done, because Memorial Gym is anything but conducive to an exciting basketball atmosphere. It is not Wrigley Field, and it is not the Horseshoe, both landmarks for their respective sports.

Seeing as how Vanderbilt has been in a spending mood according to recent "studies," why not renovate Memorial Gym and bring the antique into the 21st century? Who knows, maybe a new look is what Memorial Gym needs to get more Vanderbilt students to attend the games. ■

BASKETBALL

Byars, Foster excited to pick up the pace



NEIL BRAKE / VU Media Relations

Junior guard Shan Foster should excel in the Dores' new offense along with senior swingman Derrick Byars.

By Pete Madden
ASST SPORTS EDITOR

Out with the old, and in with the new.

This is the prevailing philosophy among the Commodore squad as they prepare for the start of the upcoming 2006-07 season, prompting coach Kevin Stallings to formulate a new plan and look for new leadership.

Following a disappointing 2005-06 effort, a season in which the Commodores, led by troubled point guard Mario Moore, showed signs of brilliance both at home and on the road but ultimately failed to realize their full potential, Stallings and the Commodores are ready for a change of pace — literally.

In order to take advantage of the speed and quickness of their perimeter players as well as hide their lack of depth in the frontcourt, look for the Commodores to play a faster, more up-tempo brand of basketball.

"I think that the pace has a chance to be a little quicker than it was a year ago," Stallings said. "We're going to do whatever we feel best suits our opportunities to be successful. We've tried to cut out some of the fluff and put more of an emphasis on the pace of play."

The burden of running this new, fast-paced, high-intensity offense falls to junior guard Shan Foster and senior guard Derrick Byars, the two most explosive offensive players on the young Commodore roster.

Foster led the Commodores and finished sixth in the Southeastern Conference in scoring last season, averaging just under 16 points per game, and was named first team All-SEC by the league's coaches and second team All-SEC by the Associated Press. Having established himself as one of the conference's most talented three-point shooters, Foster remains the most potent offensive weapon in the Commodore arsenal.

Byars, perhaps the most complete player on the Commodore roster, is also a gifted three-point shooter and a strong perimeter defender. He finished second on the team in scoring last season behind Foster, averaging 12.4 points per game, and led the squad in assists, recording 3.2 assists per game, highlighting his unselfish style of play.

"Shan and Derrick have to be the thrust of what we do because they're our two best players," Stallings said. "Those guys are going to have to lead us to whatever successes we have. They're both multi-talented and multi-dimensional — they can score inside or outside, off the catch or off the dribble. They have to be impact players for us every night."

Although both Foster and Byars embrace their new roles as team leaders, neither of these young stars admits to experiencing any additional pressure as a result of their latest responsibilities.

"The team looks to us for a spark and for energy," Foster said, "and it's our responsibility to lead by example and give it our all every play. I have the same role that I always have, and that's to play every possession like it's my last."

"I'm definitely one of the leaders out there, hands down," Byars said. "That's a role I accept, and that's the role I like. I think my teammates depend on me to do that, and I just let everything else take care of itself."

As Foster and Byars continue to pilot the Commodore offense, their relationship and awareness of one another on the court will largely dictate the overall success of the team. Luckily, it seems Foster and Byars have fashioned that tight bond only time can forge.

"We've been around each other for three years now," Byars said. "We pretty much know each other's games. I look at Shan and I try to help him where I can, and he does the same."

"I think there's a bond of playing together, a trust that's started to come over them," Stallings said. "They're starting to understand what the other one is going through and what the other one needs to do so they can play off one another better than they have in the past."

"The other players look to Shan and Derrick as our go-to guys, the guys that need to produce for us to be successful. I think that in times of need you'll see them look to those two to get us out of tough spots."

Foster, Byars and the Commodores will test their new offense in their first contest of the season tonight at 8 p.m. in Memorial Gymnasium against No. 8 Georgetown. ■

Pregame Warm-up

Why Vandy will win:

- 1. Easy as 1, 2, 3:** The Dores have the advantage with big-time scorers Shan Foster and Derrick Byars on the wings. While Jermaine Beal is only a freshman, he has the size advantage against the Hoyas' Jonathan Wallace.
- 2. History repeats itself:** After beating Georgetown 68-61 last season on the road, why can't the Dores do it again in front of their home crowd?
- 3. It is more fun to run:** While the Hoyas execute the Princeton offense to near perfection, the Dores are better off allowing their athletes to make plays in transition rather than executing in the half court.

Why Georgetown will win:

- 1. Paint party:** The fact that games are usually won in the paint works in Georgetown's favor, especially with Jeff Green and Roy Hibbert in the frontcourt. All five players will need to rebound for the Dores.
- 2. Top 10:** The Hoyas are ranked eighth for a reason: they are good. Georgetown is disciplined and athletic, and Vandy will need to play sharp to pull off the upset.
- 3. Experience:** The Dores enter the season with a lot of unknowns – Beal, Neltner, JeJuan Brown and George Drake, to name a few. It is unfair to expect them to be at their best in game one, but they might have to be close if Vandy wants to win.

one-on-one

DERRICK BYARS vs. JEFF GREEN

Nearly identical in size, Byars and Green can both do it all from the small forward position. Green is strong inside, sets up teammates well and has improved his outside shooting. Byars, meanwhile, is a great passer, has a pure stroke and defends better than anyone.

Derrick Byars #4	
Height	6'7" 226 lbs
Year	Senior
Stats	12.4 ppg, 3.6 rpg, 3.2 apg
Hometown	Memphis, Tenn.

Jeff Green #32	
Height	6'8" 235 lbs
Year	Junior
Stats	11.9 ppg, 6.5 rpg, 3.3 apg
Hometown	Hyattsville, Md.



GAME 1 AT

#8 **GEORGETOWN**
(1-0, 0-0 BIG EAST)

VANDERBILT
(0-0, 0-0 SEC)

GEORGETOWN STARTING LINEUP				VANDERBILT STARTING LINEUP			
PF	34	Marc Egerson	Jr.	PF	41	Ross Neltner	Jr.
SF	32	Jeff Green	Jr.	SF	4	Derrick Byars	Sr.
C	55	Roy Hibbert	Jr.	C	11	Alan Metcalfe	Jr.
PG	2	Jonathan Wallace	Jr.	PG	0	Jermaine Beal	Fr.
SG	22	Tyler Crawford	Jr.	SG	32	Shan Foster	Jr.

Tip-off: Today, 8 p.m. CT
Location: Memorial Gym; Nashville, Tenn.
Radio: 104.5 'The Zone'

Did you know?

Vanderbilt's Davis Nwankwo and Georgetown center Roy Hibbert were high school teammates at Georgetown Prep in College Park, Md. In four seasons, the two led their team to a 76-25 record. Because Nwankwo's playing career was cut short after suffering cardiac arrest at a practice last March, he will be on the bench in a coaching capacity tonight.

FOOTBALL

Just a sophomore, Bennett already breaking records

By Jarred Amato
SPORTS EDITOR

Given all the records wide receiver Earl Bennett has broken already, it is hard to believe he is only a sophomore.

The statistics are mind-boggling. Bennett's 1,130 receiving yards lead not only the Southeastern Conference, but the entire nation as well. His 78 receptions are also first in the SEC, sixth nationally.

Because of his outstanding true-freshman performance of catching 79 passes, Bennett's name appears twice on the list of all-time top 10 receiving seasons in the SEC, and he is the only SEC player who has accomplished this. In addition, Bennett's 157 receptions are the most for any sophomore in SEC history. Florida's Jabar Gaffney is second with 138.

In terms of school records, Bennett is second all-time in single-season receiving yards, just 83 yards behind Boo Mitchell. He is already fourth in total receptions, just 43 behind leader Keith Edwards, and sixth in receiving yardage, 958 yards behind Mitchell.

Over his last three games, No. 10 had 33 catches for 561 yards. His 220 yards against Kentucky last Saturday is the most by an SEC receiver since

Louisiana State University's Josh Reed set the record with 293 yards in 2001.

Moving on up: While many expected Bennett's numbers to drop without quarterback Jay Cutler, sophomore Chris Nickson has performed well in his first season. Nickson's 2,638 yards of total offense (1,988 passing and 650 rushing) are sixth best all-time among Vanderbilt quarterbacks.

Last week against Kentucky, Nickson's 517 yards of total offense (446 passing and 71 rushing) were the second most in school history, just 4 yards behind Whit Taylor.

"We knew Chris was an excellent runner, and not that he is blazingly fast, but he sees holes, he makes great cuts and knows what the play is designed to do," said Vanderbilt coach Bobby Johnson. "We always had confidence in his arm. The thing about Chris, when he decided to come to Vanderbilt, he said he wanted to become a complete quarterback. I think he gets better every week."

Nickson is third in the SEC in total offense and points responsible for, sixth in passing and eighth in rushing.

Bring on the Vols: After beating Tennessee 28-24 in last season's finale, the 4-7 Commodores will be practicing that much harder this

week to pull off another upset, Johnson said.

"I think it helps in preparation," Johnson said. "Your players get fired up during the week; they practice harder, and they practice better."

The victory over the Vols has certainly had an impact.

"It gave us a lot of exposure, especially in the state," Johnson said. "It gave us a lot of credibility. That is an outstanding program. It is tradition-filled. To win in that stadium is an accomplishment. Not many people do it."

Numbers do lie: The Commodores piled up 621 yards of total offense against Kentucky but still lost. It is the team's highest offensive production since beating Davidson on Nov. 22, 1969.

The reason? Three turnovers in Wildcat territory — one fumble on the 4-yard line and two interceptions in the red zone.

"We had several opportunities to take charge of the game, and we just didn't get that done," Johnson said. "To be successful week in and week out — and actually have a chance to win in this league — you have got to take advantage of every chance you get."

While Johnson would not make excuses, he said the fact that Vanderbilt does not have a bye week in the 12-game season certainly makes things more difficult. ■

VANDERBILT SUMMER IN LONDON 2007 INFORMATION SESSION

**4:30 P.M.
THURSDAY, 16 NOVEMBER
126 Wilson Hall**

**PROGRAM DATES:
30 JUNE – 8 AUGUST 2007**

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