A look at fall athletics

In the Trenches

Both on and off the field, Brett Beard is determined to produce winners. By Nelson Bryan

With a new coaching staff now in place, Beard is excited about the 12-game schedule and Vanderbilt’s football future. “I think they’ve finally gotten a coaching staff that’s fit for this program,” he says. “They recruited well this year for the time they had, and there is a bright future ahead for Vanderbilt football. We lacked discipline, and these guys are bringing the discipline. I think in the end—if not this year, for sure next year—we’re finally going to turn this thing around and win a bunch of games.”

Beard’s reputation at the University as a community volunteer is equally as respected as his football prowess. He was named by the athletics department as Vanderbilt’s representative to the Southeastern Conference’s Good Works Team. Only one athlete from each of the 12 member schools is given that honor.

“He’s one of our shining stars,” says Kevin Colon, director of life skills with the athletics department. “He has a heart of gold. He spends time in elementary schools on read-me day and visits Children’s Hospital.”

The Edgewood Community Center, an inner-city center that schedules after-school activities for at-risk children, occupies much of Beard’s non-football time. “The kids come over for tutoring after school. I help take care of the kids and sometimes tutor others.” Another focus of his attention is Backfield in Motion, a nonprofit organization that offers inner-city kids a chance to play football. “Instead of having to pay money, they have to come for tutoring several hours during the week. I’ve also taken time to read books to elementary schools.”

A resident of Birmingham, Ala., Beard decided to become a Commodore because of his familiarity with Nashville and Vanderbilt. His parents both graduated from the same Nashville high school, and he has an older sister who lives here. “This is where we always came during the summer,” he says. “Everything revolved around Nashville, and I used to come to Vanderbilt basketball games when I was younger.”

Life after Vanderbilt holds a lot of promise for Beard. He would like to pursue a professional football career if possible. Beyond that, he wants to be a coach. “I never really thought of coming here until I got the opportunity. I get to come up here, spend time with family, and my parents don’t have to travel far. I get to play football in the SEC and, most important, I get a good education to fall back on if football is not in the future.”

Brett Beard

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEIL BRAKE
Balcomb Named Women's Basketball Coach

MELANIE BALCOMB was named VANDERBILT’s new head women’s basketball coach last May. She coached the previous seven years at Xavier University in Cincinnati and was the winningest women’s basketball coach in Xavier history. She recorded her best record in 2000-01 when the Musketeers went 31-3 and advanced to the NCAA Tournament’s Elite Eight, defeating Tennessee in the Sweet 16. After the 2001 season, Balcomb was named “Coach of the Year” in the Atlantic 10 Conference.

“This is an ideal fit for me,” Balcomb says. “I am excited to be coaching at a university that has high standards and high aspirations. Baseball is important to Vanderbilt, and its commitment is obvious. We will work very hard to continue this program’s tradition of successfully competing at the highest level and doing so with integrity.”

Balcomb compiled a record of 135-78 at Xavier while winning one Atlantic 10 Conference regular-season title and making three NCAA Tournament appearances. Her teams also won two Atlantic 10 Conference tournament championships and made one appearance in the WNIT.

In the last three years, Xavier had a 5-1 record versus the Southeastern Conference with victories over Vanderbilt, Kentucky (twice), Mississippi State and Tennessee. Vanderbilt also registered the lone victory, which came in Nashville last season.

She succeeds former women’s coach Jim Foster, who accepted the head coaching position at Ohio State University. And Tom Collen, former head coach at Colorado State University, who resigned a day after being hired at Vanderbilt because of a perceived discrepancy in his résumé.

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Balcomb, 48, has a 28-7 record with the Commodores. The Commodores defeated Tennessee, 63-48. In that game, Balcomb named Coach of the Year award.

Balcomb is one of the program’s all-time great runners, has appeared in the NCAA Championships, and won the SEC Steeplechase Championship.

Balcomb, a second-team All-American in both singles and doubles for the 2002 season and was one of only 12 players nationally to earn both accolades. She finished the season with a 23-9 singles record at the number one position and a number 14 national ranking. She teamed with Tsoubanos at number three doubles, and the duo posted a 27-6 record and advanced to the quarterfinals of the NCAA Doubles.

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