

# CHC: Vandy's First TSU Game a Battle

by Bill Traugher

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This week the Big Blue of Tennessee State will enter Memorial Gymnasium, an unfriendly environment for college basketball foes. The Tigers will be making their sixth appearance ever against their cross-town university--all on the Commodore's campus.

The teams first met on December 8, 1973 as first-round victors in the Vanderbilt Invitational Tournament. Ed Martin's TSU club raised its record to 3-0 with a win over Middle Tennessee State, 63-59 in their first-round match. Vanderbilt also won their first-round game with a romp over Nebraska 82-58 and the Commodores third victory of the young season.

Senior Jan van Breda Kolff, F-Troopers Butch Feher, Joe Ford and Lee Fowler led Vanderbilt for head coach Roy Skinner. Other top Commodores were Terry Compton, Bill Ligon and Jeff Fosnes. The Tigers were led by Little All-American center Leonard Robinson, Gilbert Williams, Richard Rucker, Jethro Brown and Richard Martin.

The game was close throughout as Vanderbilt could only manage a 40-38 halftime lead. The 14, 500 fans were witnessing a great battle as the Tigers lost a 62-61 lead when Compton scored a basket with 3:57 left to put the Commodores up 63-62. Vanderbilt was forced to go to its outside game as Robinson was clogging the middle. TSU would score a bucket to lead 64-63.



Jan van Breda Kolff

Jimmy Davy of *The Tennessean* wrote:

"With Vanderbilt leading 65-64 on two foul shots by Terry Compton with 32 seconds showing on the clock, State held the ball for a late, perhaps final shot.

"The man State coach Ed Martin wanted to shoot was the muscular, deadly accurate Robinson.

"Closely guarded by Vandy's Lee Fowler, Robinson shot from outside the key and then raced for the rebound, running into the back of rebounding Ford.

"So it was Ford, the calm little Mayfield, Ky. shooter, went to the line with seven seconds to play."

"Ford hit two pressurized one-and-one foul shots to put Vanderbilt ahead 67-64. Robinson

made a sensational last-gasp buzzer beater to make the final score Vanderbilt 67, TSU 66.

Robinson was named the tournament's MVP and was the game's top scorer with 28 points and 14 rebounds. Williams collected 14 points while Martin added 10 for the Tigers.

Compton led the Commodores with 20 points followed by van Breda Kolf, 12, while Ligon and Fosnes recorded 10 points. Vanderbilt actually held the rebounding edge with a 39-33 advantage. Fosnes and van Breda Kolf each had 10 boards for the contest.

Martin, who would later become an assistant coach at Vanderbilt under C.M. Newton, said after the close encounter:

"Well, we didn't win it, but I can't believe we lost either. I can't say a John Brown thing bad about the way my guys played. We came into a Southeastern Conference team's gymnasium as the visitors in our hometown and we lost by one point. I'll never be ashamed of that.

"Not only that, but we lost to one fine basketball team. I'm glad we kept the trophy here in Nashville anyway--we kept it in the family. In fact, I'd say 'All in the Family' started at nine o'clock tonight instead seven because we showed there's some pretty darn good basketball played in this town, didn't we?"

Tennessee State continued the season with a 25-6 record and making the NCAA Division II Tournament. Leonard would become a Converse All-American; participate in two all-star events--the Russian-American Series and the Hawaiian Classic. The Baltimore Bullets also drafted him into the NBA.

Skinner said after the game:

"That was one heckuva game, almost too close. I think our shooting did it. They played zone well, but gave us the outside shot. We're too good shooters to pass that up.

"That's the first time I've seen him and that was something else," Skinner said about Robinson. "I'm glad we don't see him again this year."

Vanderbilt would finish the season at 23-5 (15-3 SEC) and SEC co-champions with Alabama. The Commodores were made the SEC representative in NCAA Tournament by its two regular season victories over the Tide. In the National Tournament, the Commodores lost to Marquette, 69-61 in the first round of the Mid-East Regionals. They also lost the consolation game to Notre Dame, 118-88.

Senior van Breda Kolf would become the SEC's MVP with First Team honors averaging 10.9 points and 9.7 rebounds per game. He also played two years in the American Basketball Association and eight years with the NBA.

TSU and Vanderbilt would meet four more times in the future with the Commodores winning each time--1995 (93-74), 1997 (94-64), 2003 (85-64) and 2004 (87-65).

*If you have comments or suggestions you can contact Bill Traughber via e-mail  
WLTraughber@aol.com.*