

CHC: Scotti Madison Talks About His Baseball Career

by Bill Traugher

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This interview with Scotti Madison is exclusive to Commodore History Corner and VUCommodores.com.

Former Vanderbilt baseball great Scotti Madison did not have a stellar major league baseball career. What he did have was a great experience in 10 years of professional baseball that most kids growing up only dreamed about. The Pensacola, Fla. athlete had a tough time deciding on where to display his talents in college.

"My last three choices for college were Alabama, LSU and Vanderbilt," Madison said recently from his Georgia home. "Coach [Paul "Bear"] Bryant recruited me to be a quarterback at Alabama, and Charlie McClendon recruited me to be a quarterback at LSU. I went up to Vanderbilt on a weekend and met with Dr. Rob Purdy, the vice-chancellor of the university, and Mr. Fred Russell [Nashville sports writer].



Scotti Madison

"I sat between these two gentlemen and was going right to left listening to their stories. I had never met in my life two more interesting and distinguished people that had more class and character than these two individuals. They were influential in me going to Vanderbilt."

Madison came to Vanderbilt with a full scholarship to play both football and baseball. On the gridiron, he didn't play as a freshman and was red shirted the following year. In 1978, Madison gained a great deal of experience while starting against Kentucky, Air Force and Tennessee.

On the baseball diamond Madison became one of Coach Larry Schmittou's Commodores leaders. After just two seasons the switch-hitter was named to the All-SEC team, established the team single-season home run record (15) and the career home run record (19). Madison would lead the team in 1978 in RBI's (38), doubles (12), runs scored (42) while batting .313.

"I was supposed to come back and start the next two years for Vanderbilt as the starting quarterback," said Madison. "Fred Pancoast got fired, and George MacIntyre came on board. I was playing baseball in Cape Cod, Mass., and MacIntyre called me up and said, 'Hey, I want you to be my starting quarterback next year.'

"I told him that I didn't want to play football anymore. When I came to Vanderbilt, Vanderbilt signed an agreement that I could play football and baseball, either one

and still be on a scholarship. I decided I wasn't going to play football anymore. I was going to play baseball."

By the time Madison played his last baseball game in a Commodore uniform, his presence in the record book endured. Madison's 49 career home runs have never been topped. He ranks eighth in highest average (.399) and tenth in RBI's (142).

As a senior in 1980, the catcher led the team in batting (.399), hits (81), RBI's (56) and home runs (15). Madison earned First Team All-SEC, First Team All-American and All-South Region honors. These accomplishments came during the last year that Vanderbilt won an SEC championship.

Madison remembered one particular game:



"We were playing Georgia and had a rainout in our stadium," Madison said. "We couldn't play on our field so we played at Tennessee Preparatory School. They had a little field, but it was the only dry field in Davidson County. We played Georgia on a Sunday afternoon. We were beating them 5-0 after five innings. In the top of the sixth inning, Georgia scored five runs. Then we scored two runs to lead, 7-5. While we were batting in the bottom of the sixth inning a thunderstorm came up and it started raining as hard as I had ever seen in my whole life.

"In the top of the seventh, Coach Schmittou said we're going to stall. After every Bulldog batter that came to the plate, Coach Schmittou sent a new pitcher out to the mound. And this new pitcher

would take his customary eight or nine warm-up pitches. Coach Schmittou told them to throw half of them against the screen so the catcher would have to run back to get the ball. It got so ridiculous Georgia put players behind the screen so when our pitcher threw the ball wild, they could retrieve the ball quicker.

"They got a guy on first base and he stole second and we didn't try to throw him out. We were stalling as much as we possibly could. After about 20 minutes of a torrential downpour, the umpire told the players to get off the field. There was a small tarp there and the Bulldog players ran over to put the tarp on the mound. We were all sitting in the dugout laughing since it was raining so hard. We knew that there was no chance that game would be finished. We ended up winning that game."

The Minnesota Twins selected Madison in baseball's regular phase of the 1980 amateur draft. He was a third-round selection, which included Darryl Strawberry as that year's top choice by the Mets. Madison was also selected in the tenth round the previous year by the Giants, but chose to return to Vanderbilt for his senior year.

The future major leaguer was not thrilled when his agent, Robert Fraley, could only get him \$12,000 from Twins tight fisted owner Calvin Griffith. Madison said that he

was Fraley's first client as a professional who later became one of the country's top sports agent. Fraley was killed in the 1999 plane crash that also took the life of golfer Payne Stewart.

Madison played his first professional season with Orlando of the Double-A Southern League. He had a memorable trip with another Twins prospect when spring training broke in 1981. They were assigned to Visalia, Ca. of the California League.

"Kent Hrbek and I were teammates," said Madison. "We got in Herbie's pickup truck and drove from Melbourne, Fla. all the way to Visalia, Ca. We stayed at my family's house in Pensacola. I knew a Vanderbilt girl in New Orleans so we stopped there. I knew a girl in Houston and we stopped there. I knew a girl from Vanderbilt in Phoenix so we stopped there also.

"Then I said, we're pretty close to Las Vegas and I've never been there, do you want to go. He said, `Yeah, let's go to Las Vegas.' Here I am in a pickup truck, blue jeans and a tee shirt and we pull in front of Caesars Palace. We showed up two days late and our coach was so mad. He couldn't say a lot because we were the two best players on the team. That year Herbie makes it to the major leagues in Minnesota. It was an exciting time."

Hrbek did get the cherished call up to the big league team and became Rookie-of-the-Year, while Madison tore up California League pitching with a .342 average. In 133 games, Madison collected 26 home runs, 157 hits and 110 RBI's. He was also a member of the All-Star team.

In January 1982, the Twins traded Madison (and Paul Voight) to the Dodgers organization for Bobby Castillo. The Dodgers had just won the 1981 World Series with Tom Lasorda, Bill Russell, Ron Cey, Steve Garvey, Jerry Reuss and Davy Lopes.

"I got invited to the Dodgers spring training camp two years in a row," Madison said. "After practice and games, Frank Sinatra would be there eating dinner with us at night or Danny Kaye and Cyndi Lauper. It was Hollywood. It was exciting to sit around with celebrities eating dinner with them.

"I was not a Dodger. I did not fit the mold and needed to get out of the Dodgers' organization. I was hoping to get out. So about a week into spring training in my third year, they came up to me and said, `Scotti, you are no longer a Los Angeles Dodger. We've sold your contract to the Detroit Tigers.' I thought this was awesome. When do I have to go? They said, `You leave today and good luck.' They wouldn't tell me at first how much I sold for until I pressed them. They said they sold my contract for \$10,000 and thought they got a good deal. I was somewhat embarrassed."

While in the Dodgers' organization, Madison played for San Antonio (Texas League, Double-A) and Albuquerque (Pacific Coast League, Triple-A). In his best season as a Dodger farm hand, he clubbed 11 home runs with San Antonio (1983) and a .305 average and 57 RBI's.

The Tigers sent Madison to Birmingham of the Double-A Southern League. Madison was again an All-Star playing the entire year with the Barons. Madison batted .273, with 15 home runs, and drove in 83 runs in 133 games. The next season he played a month in Birmingham before being promoted to the Nashville Sounds. The Sounds

were then members of the American Association (Triple-A).

Schmittou was now a part owner and president of the Nashville club.

"It was great being back home, said Madison. "I saw a lot of old friends. People that were Vanderbilt supporters came to the games. If you can't play in the big leagues in baseball, the next best thing for me was living in Nashville, Tenn. where I went to Vanderbilt.

What about rejoining his former college coach?

"I was a pretty headstrong fellow and Schmittou was a headstrong fellow," said Madison. "We certainly butted heads when it came to such things as contracts. I'm a forgiving fellow and he's a forgiving fellow. At the time it was a little confrontational."

Madison said he had great memories in his two stints with the Sounds. He mentioned players as Jack Armstrong, Mike Laga, Leon Roberts, Bruce Fields, Joe Oliver and Marty Brown. Madison was huge supporter of his favorite teammate Skeeter Barnes. Madison was versatile playing catcher, third base, first base, and left field.



While in Nashville (1985), Madison earned a spot on the All-Star team while leading the league in hitting with a .341 average. Madison also led the American Association in slugging percentage (.590) and on base percentage (423). The Tigers noticed Madison's achievements and called him to "The Show".

"I was in Buffalo [Sounds road game] when I was told to fly to Texas' Arlington Stadium and met the Tigers," said Madison. "Darrell Evans and Kirk Gibson was on the Tigers at that time. They kind of took me under their wing. It was pretty dramatic putting on a major league uniform.

"The next season I was also called up to the Tigers. In two seasons, I was 0-for-18. But I wasn't really striking out. I hit the ball hard; it was not falling. I used to have nightmares. I have played all this time in the major leagues and will never get a hit. I used to have these nightmares that I didn't graduate from Vanderbilt, but I did.

"So, finally my first year with the Royals we're playing Minnesota and I'm facing Frank Viola who won the Cy Young. One night against Viola, I hit a fastball for a double in left centerfield. I hit a changeup for another double in right centerfield. I batted right-handed. I hit a curve ball for a double down the left field line. So I'm 3-for-4 with three doubles, my first hits in the major leagues.

"The first time I got a hit in left centerfield, I'm standing on second base. And because of my football mentality, I'm looking for a yellow flag on the field. I thought

there's got to be a penalty somewhere for holding or offsides. I started crying like a little girl after I got my first hit."



While playing for Hall of Famer Sparky Anderson in Detroit, Madison was hitless in two seasons while appearing in eight games. His teammates were such Tiger greats as Lou Whitaker, Alan Trammell and Jack Morris. And, of course, historic Tiger Stadium was home to Detroit.

Madison's hits off Viola came after he was a free agent and signed with Kansas City. He was assigned to Omaha where he had call ups in both years with John Wathan's Royals. In a Royals uniform, Madison batted .267 (4-for-15) in seven games in 1987 and .171 (6-for-35) in 16 games the next season.

Once again a free agent, Madison decided to sign with the Cincinnati Reds organization in 1989. At this time the Sounds were the Reds top affiliate.

"I really didn't think I got a fair shot in spring training," Madison said. "I played pretty well and Pete Rose was my manager. I got called in to the offices and Pete Rose was in there with the general manager. He told me I was going to start the season in Nashville. I told him, 'Pete, I can't believe you. I'm just like you. I love the game of baseball. I don't have that much tools. I hit from both sides of the plate. I play a lot of positions, you didn't give me a chance.'

"I think I took him off guard. I said, 'Pete, I want to know right now. If I'm the best hitter on the Triple-A team during the season and if you need a hitter, am I going to be the first player called up?' Pete said, 'I'll give you my word right now. If you're my best hitter, you'll be the first player I call up because I know you can play a lot of positions.' I looked at him and said, 'I'm going to hold you to your word then.'

Madison was having an All-Star season with the Sounds. Rose was watching the American Association All-Star game on television and soon afterwards, Madison was called to Cincinnati. When Madison reported to Rose, he thanked Pete for keeping his word on the call up.

In Madison's second game in the National League, he got a hit off Montreal's Dennis Martinez. Madison saw considerable playing time with the Reds. He appeared in 40 games batting .173 (17-for-98), seven doubles, seven RBI's and one home run. Madison proudly described his lone major league dinger.

"We were playing San Francisco and I was facing a guy named Craig Lefferts," said Madison. "Lefferts and I played together in 1979 for the USA baseball team that went to Cuba. So, now I'm facing him some 10 years later as a relief pitcher. We were playing in San Francisco. He threw me a pitch and I hit it out. I've got a picture in my house of Pete Rose congratulating me after hitting the home run."

Madison was on the Reds roster when Rose's betting scandal forced him to resign as manager in August 1989. Madison said the situation was difficult for him and the

Reds players. In parts of five seasons playing in the major leagues, Madison totaled 71 games, a .163 average (27-for-166), 12 doubles, one home run and 11 RBI's.

Madison's last season in professional baseball was that year with the Reds. Pete Rose may be a controversial figure in baseball history, but Madison remembers the greatest compliment ever paid to him.

"I'm coming down the runway and we're playing the Braves in old Fulton County Stadium," said Madison. "And I'm carrying my bag with three bats, two catcher mitts, a third base glove, a first base glove, an outfield glove, catching equipment and a dozen baseballs.

"I started laying everything out. And Pete goes to Davy Bristol [Reds coach] who is on the bench with Tommy Helms [Reds coach] and Tony Perez. Pete said, `Guys, look at this. Scotti Madison is the only gamer we've got on the team. Every day he comes to the ballpark and comes to play hard.'

"I said, `Pete, I appreciate that because I'm not playing baseball to make money. I'm playing baseball because I love playing baseball."

Traughber's Tidbit: Vanderbilt football coach Dan McGugin once recruited Truett "Rip" Sewell for his Commodore team in 1930. Sewell could not handle the academic work and quit school after briefly playing on the Vanderbilt freshmen football team. Rip found a job in Nashville at the Dupont Company. After playing on the Dupont baseball team in a semi-pro league, Sewell landed with the Nashville Vols of the Southern Association. He played in six games for the Vols then left for a higher minor league club. Sewell would later invent the "Blooper Pitch" in the major leagues. Ted Williams is the only batter to hit a home run off the pitch in the 1946 All-Star game. Sewell was 143-97 in 12 seasons with Pittsburgh (1938-49) and pitched in four All-Star games. He was a cousin to baseball Hall of Famer Joe Sewell.

Next week read about Joe Davis, Vanderbilt's first dominant tennis player.

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