

# CHC: Terry Compton Recalls VU Days

by Bill Traugher

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Vanderbilt basketball fans knew Terry Compton (1972-74) as "The Long Rifle." His deadly outside shooting is still remembered today by fans visiting Memorial Gymnasium. In the recruiting war to gain Compton's high school talents, Vanderbilt Coach Roy Skinner had to work hard.

"I was being recruited by Kentucky, Maryland, Louisville, Western Kentucky and Alabama who were the ones that came after me the hardest," Compton said recently from his Nashville office. "I grew up in Kentucky, so I always grew up being a Kentucky fan. I had a dream of playing for Kentucky, but when it got to the point of signing me it came down between me and another player.

"Adolph Rupp offered me the scholarship contingent on what another player did. Well that eliminated Kentucky. All the other schools were offering me a full scholarship and I wanted to go into an engineering school. I wanted to play in the SEC. So going through the process of elimination it came down to Vanderbilt. Ron Bargar was recruiting me for Vanderbilt and they wanted me. It was close to home and a good fit."

The Horse Cave, KY native played in an era where freshmen were ineligible for varsity competition. As a frosh, he broke Vanderbilt's freshman scoring record with 539 points. Compton averaged 22.4 points per game.

"I don't know how physically I was as a freshman," said Compton. "I only weighed about 165 pounds when I graduated from high school. That freshman year we played a full schedule of about 26 games, which gave me more experience and I became more mature. I probably would not have started on the varsity as a freshman. My playing time would have been limited. For me, the freshman program benefited me physically and mentally."

Compton became an impact for the Commodores varsity in his first season of eligibility. His 455 points as a sophomore was second all-time for a Vanderbilt first-year player. Along with a 17.5 scoring average Compton led the Commodores in scoring.

The Vanderbilt basketball team finished that year with a 16-10 (10-8 SEC) record good enough for fourth place in the conference. Compton would also be named to the All-SEC's



Third Team.

Compton's junior season was very rewarding with an All-SEC First Team selection while the Commodores concluded the season at 20-6 (13-5 SEC) with a tie for second place in the league. This was an era where only the conference champion could advance to the NCAA Tournament.

"One of the games I played in was at the University of Kansas," said Compton. "I remember walking out on that floor in Lawrence that seated about 20,000. That was very intimidating and exciting at the same time. At that time in the SEC there were some interesting places to play.

"We played in Alligator Alley at Florida. We were playing at Memorial Coliseum in Lexington that was always an exciting place to walk into and play. That place was full and loud. At Tennessee, Stokely was always packed. We played in front of some large, loud exciting places."

Compton would once again lead the Commodores in scoring as a junior with 492 points while averaging 17.6 points per game. Vanderbilt's team was very good at this point.

"Quite honestly, we started out the season 8-0 and that possibly was the best team we had at Vanderbilt while I was there," Compton said. "Rod Freeman, who was a senior that year, was playing exceptionally well and he sprained an ankle early in the season. We lost him for about six weeks. And when he came back from the injury, he was hindered. But with Freeman in the lineup with Ray Maddux, we were pretty deep and a talented team. Losing Freeman was a key loss to the team."

Compton was satisfied that during his junior and senior seasons, Vanderbilt defeated Kentucky in all four encounters.

"Coming from Kentucky and playing Kentucky was always exciting for me," said Compton. "Back then we played on a Saturday and then on Monday. Once we were leaving Friday for a road game on Saturday in Lexington and then in Knoxville on Monday.

"We beat Kentucky by 17 points then we traveled down I-75 to Knoxville and beat Tennessee by 17. We played with three freshmen in the lineup. They were known as the F-Troop (Jeff Fosnes, Joe Ford and Butch Feher). That was a big weekend that continued in a great season. We would beat Kentucky four straight times."

Compton earned the name "The Long Rifle" as a freshman due to his tenacity to shoot long-range shots. He was the type of player that liked to use the backboard in aiding his scoring chances.



Vanderbilt finished Compton's senior year at 23-5 and the SEC championship (15-3). They actually tied Alabama for the top spot, but were given the opportunity to represent the conference in the NCAA Tournament due to beating the Tide twice.

"We knew we had some talent and some depth," Compton said about his last Commodore team. "The big unknown for us was the post-play, which we didn't have. That was the year that Jan van Breda Kolf moved from guard to the center position and he ended up being the MVP of the SEC that year.

"That filled in the part that most people felt was missing. Jan filled that role quite admirably. Jan did a lot of things for our team that didn't show up in the stats. Jan was a leader and very knowledgeable of the game. As a college senior, he probably could have been a coach as well.

"At that time a lot of defensive stats were different. Block shots were counted differently. Stops, altered shots and deflections were not tracked in those days like today."

Compton would again lead Vanderbilt in scoring for the third consecutive season with 415 points (14.8 points per game). He also repeated as a member of the SEC's First Team. The Commodores would open the NCAA Tournament in Tuscaloosa, Ala., against Marquette in the Midwest Regionals.

The Commodores lost to Marquette, 69-61. A consolation game was played against Notre Dame and Vanderbilt lost to the Irish, 118-88.

"Marquette had Bo Ellis inside, and they had more quickness than we did," Compton said. "I remember preparing for that game and watching game films. When you watched them warm up, you didn't think they had a talented basketball team. But when the game started, they took over. They were physical, quick and could make a lot of things happen at that time.

"Al McGuire was their coach, and he had a lot of showmanship like (Tennessee) Coach Ray Mears. We lost that game to them, and that was at a time when you lost you played a consolation game. When we finished the consolation game, we were coming off the floor. Coach McGuire was standing there in the doorway. While we were walking back to the dressing room he looked at me and asked, 'How is the zoo out there?' He entertained the crowd as well as anyone."

Entering the 2007-08 season, Compton ranks 17th all-time on the Vanderbilt scoring list with 1,326 points. His numbers would have been greatly enhanced if he played varsity ball as freshman and if the three-point shot existed.

"That would have been fun," Compton said about the three-point goal. "Not only for myself, but also we had Joe Ford, Jeff Fosnes, Butch Feher, Jan, Lee Fowler and Bill Ligon. All those guys could shoot the ball from three-point land. It would have helped us all. That was good thing about our team. If I was having a bad night or Jeff was having a bad night or whoever we always had someone that made up the difference and took up the slack.

"I played with some great teammates that were able to get me the basketball. They did a great job setting screens and being team players. Without my teammates, I would never have the opportunity to score. I was fortunate that I could use either hand being around the basket close. That was an advantage. I used the backboard a lot and I think that improves your percentage and chances of scoring. I was blessed with good hand-eye coordination."

Compton was drafted into the NBA by Kansas City in the fifth round. He was the 78th player selected overall. Compton said he worked a summer job before he was to join training camp when he injured his hand. He said Kansas City had invited him to the next year's camp, but he decided to stay in his engineering job. Compton works today in Nashville for an engineering consulting firm.

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