

CHC- The Magic of Memorial is Historical

by Bill Traugher

Jan. 17, 2007

When the construction of Memorial Gymnasium was near completion in 1952, the state-of-the art facility was one of the finest in the South. The basketball gods were so impressed; they slipped some magic dust in the overhead steel rafters--or so says a myth.

Since that first game campus game on Dec. 6, 1952, a 90-83 victory over Virginia, the magic dust has been sprinkling on Vanderbilt players from time to time. Some Commodore basketball players have been transformed into heroes causing students to charge the floor. Evidence will show that the Magic of Memorial is not a slogan, but a part of Vanderbilt basketball history.



Doug Yates and Bob Polk

The latest examples that the magic is plentiful can be traced the current Commodore basketball team. Last week against Tennessee and 3.7 seconds on the clock, Derrick Byars grabbed a [Ross Neltner](#) inbound pass. Byars raced to the right of the basket, but missed a contested layup. [Shan Foster](#) took the rebound from the left side and his put back was good as the buzzer sounded. Vanderbilt beat the Vols 82-81.

Last December with Vanderbilt tied with Toledo 93-93 in overtime. There were 13 seconds remaining in the extra period when freshman guard [Jermaine Beal](#) drove the length of the floor. He found an opening and attacked the goal for a layup with 4.4 seconds on the clock. Beal was fouled on the play and added the free throw as Vandy hung on to win, 98-93.

In the Nov. 30, 2005 game against the visiting Oregon Ducks, the Commodores were trailing 75-73 with 3.7 seconds remaining and the full length of the court to conquer. Senior guard Mario Moore took the inbound pass, dribbled into the frontcourt and launched a running 35-footer that never touched iron. Vanderbilt won, 76-75.

The potency of the magic dust was evident when Vanderbilt played Wichita State during the 2005 postseason NIT. During a March Madness moment, Vanderbilt was tied with the Shockers, 63-63 with an impossible .07 seconds left. With the ESPN audience and Memorial faithful expecting overtime, Corey Smith accepted a Jason Holwerda full-length court pass. Smith banked in a basket and the Shockers were shocked, 65-63.

The magic goes back to the 1950's and just a small portion of these fabulous

finishers are highlighted.

March 5, 1959 vs. Baylor: During the final game of the season, in a year an experimental 24-second shot clock was used, the Commodores were trailing in the second half by as much as 11 points. After cutting the lead to one point with just seconds left, Doug Yates hit a jumper from the top of the circle for the 61-60 Commodore victory.



Roger Schurig

Before Commodore legend Barry Goheen was born (I'll get to him later) there was Roger Schurig (1963-65). Schurig, a St. Louis, Mo. native, was known as the clutch player not only at Vanderbilt, but also in the SEC. His two free throws with seven seconds left against Kentucky in 1963 gave the Commodores a rare win in Lexington.

"I never felt pressure," Schurig said from his St. Louis home. "I guess there could be pressure if you were shooting free throws. I think when you are in the flow of the game it's like you just shoot it and you aren't thinking. But, when a kid gets on a free throw line nothing is happening except you are bouncing the ball getting ready to shot a free throw."

These are some of Schurig exploits:

Jan. 2, 1963 vs. Western Kentucky: While being tied with the Hilltoppers 69-69 with 30 seconds left, the Commodores held the ball for one final shot. Roger Schurig took the ball to the left side of the basket. Schurig put up a one-handed shot with two seconds that swished through the basket. The Commodores won the non-conference game, 71-69. In the previous game in the Poinsettia Classic at Clemson, Schurig was the hero with a final bucket at the buzzer to win the championship over Furman, 69-68.

Jan. 16, 1963 vs. Tennessee: Vanderbilt got a break when the Volunteers missed a free throw with three seconds left and a 68-68 score. In overtime, Roger Schurig was the go-to guy when he canned a lunging jumper with four seconds left for a 74-72 Commodore victory.

March 2, 1963 vs. Georgia Tech: The Commodores fought such an emotional game with the Yellow Jackets that with two minutes in the game, the Vanderbilt crowd of nearly 8,000 were warned about tossing debris on the floor. A technical foul against the Commodores was threatened. The game had been tied 11 times and neither team could build a lead of more than four points. Trailing 74-73, Roger Schurig hit a jump shot at the buzzer for the 75-74 Vanderbilt win.

"The game that was I most proud was the Tennessee game," Schurig reminisced. "That was huge because we did not like Tennessee. Maybe in a couple of games we would run a play involving me. If we were running a play sometimes it just happened to be me that got the ball and I put it up. And in five or six games it went in.

"At Kentucky, I knew what was on the line. I would think to myself, 'I really need to make these. They've got to go in.' I thought about the consequences about what would happen if I made or didn't make them. I can still remember being on that free throw line because it was such a big deal to beat the Cats. I believe it had been 30-something years since we'd beaten them in Lexington."

More Memorial Magic:

Jan. 6, 1964 vs. Kentucky: When the second-ranked Wildcats came into Memorial Gymnasium, the fans were ready for a close game. The game was tied at 83 when John Ed Miller took and inbounds pass and penetrated towards the goal with seconds remaining. Surprised that his Wildcat opponent didn't cover him closely, Miller pulled up at the free throw line and swished the game-winner. Commodores upset Adolph Rupp's men, 85-83.



Tom Hagan

Feb. 8, 1964 vs. LSU: John Ed Miller found himself in a similar situation as in the Kentucky game one month earlier. The Commodores put on a late surge to cut into a second half Tigers eight-point lead. With four seconds left and the score tied at 64, Miller tossed another shot from the foul line, but missed. All-American center Clyde Lee was in position to grab the rebound and scored the winning basket. Vandy wins, 66-64.



Bo Wyenandt

Dec. 12, 1967 vs. Davidson: Third-ranked Vanderbilt managed to send the game into overtime at 75 when eighth-ranked Davidson came to Nashville. With the score tied at 79, Vanderbilt held the ball with 1:24 remaining and took a timeout with 19 seconds left. Tom Hagan managed to get off a shot with three seconds left for the thrilling end, 81-79.

Dec. 16, 1967 vs. Duke: The Blue Devils took a 75-74 lead over the Commodores with 26 seconds remaining. A timeout was called at the 17-second mark by Vanderbilt to draw up a play. Bo Wyenandt was the hero this time as his jump shot with two seconds left gave the Commodores a 76-75 victory over the stunned Blue Devils.

Jan. 5, 1974 vs. Alabama: In a physical game with the Tide, Vanderbilt was trailing 72-71 as guard Butch Feher missed the second of a pressurized one-and-one free throw opportunity. An alert Terry Compton battled the missed free throw away while Feher

scrambled for the loose ball. Spotting teammate Joe Ford open, Feher passed the pass, but Ford was immediately covered. Feher dashed under the basket. Ford threw a bullet pass to Feher who made a layup with just five seconds left. Vandy wins, 73-72.

Next week read part two of the Magic of Memorial Gymnasium starring Barry Goheen.

Traughber's Tidbit: Vanderbilt won its first championship as members of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association in 1919-20. Coach G.T. Denton led the Commodores to a 14-4 record. They beat Georgia Tech in the final conference game, allowing the Yellow Jackets just one field goal in the 32-3 victory. The championship trophy was mailed to the university campus.

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