

CHC- Vandy Victorious in Madison Square Garden

by Bill Traughber

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Vanderbilt basketball coach Bob Polk was in his third season leading the Commodores when one game on December 1, 1949 gained national attention. Polk was Vanderbilt's first full-time basketball coach and brought the Commodores respectability in the Southeastern Conference.

Vanderbilt began the 1949-50 season win a victory over cross-town rival David Lipscomb College, 62-39. The next scheduled game was against New York University, a prominent and powerful basketball team in that time period.

The Commodores got off to an unpleasant start when their flight to New York was delayed. The aircraft originating from California was held by fog. Then just before take-off, a flat tire on the aircraft was discovered.

Vanderbilt arrived in New York City the day before the game and attended a television show their first night in "The Big Apple." They appeared on a nationwide NBC television program by Vincent Lopez and his band. Lopez acknowledged the teams' presence in the audience calling them the players from "Vanderbilt College." Home for the Commodores on their trip was the Taft Hotel.



Dave Kardokus

Starting for the underdog Commodores were Joe Adcock, George Kelly, Pete Robinson, Hank Duvier and Jack Heldman. John Bibb of *The Tennessean* attended the game and wrote:

Vanderbilt's fabulous frosh a year ago became sensational sophomores here last night and led the way as the Commodores stunned a Garden crowd of 12, 745 fans with an upset 65-59 overtime victory over favored New York University's Violets. Dave Kardokus and Jack Heldman, both members of last year's hot-shot freshman outfit, scored the key goals in a triumph which came when the Commodores were making their first Madison Square Garden appearance.

Heldman, sophomore guard, hit a two-handed set shot from just inside the foul circle with one second remaining in the regulation contest to give Vanderbilt an opportunity to go into the extra five minute period with a 57-57 deadlock. The came Vandy's thin-man Dave Kardokus to spearhead, perhaps the most glorious basketball victory in Vanderbilt history. Dave, slender 6-3 forward weighing 160 pounds poured in six baskets, three field goals in the overtime to pace a Vanderbilt attack which registered nine points to NYU's two in the added period.



Jack Heldman

Vanderbilt led at halftime 25-23 as the lead changed four different times in the second half. With 2:10 left in regulation, Heldman hit a shot to give Vanderbilt a 55-53 advantage. NYU reserve, Jim Brasco made a lay-up to tie the game. But later, Joel Kaufman hit a shot to give NYU a 57-55 lead with 11 seconds remaining.

Heldman let go a shot from the right side that came up short and bounced off the rim. But he attacked the goal to get his rebound and fired the historic shot to send the game into overtime. Heldman's shot "brought down the house" in the famous arena.

In the overtime, NYU made a free throw to knot the game at 59 with 1:20 left. The Commodores scored the final three baskets to take the win. Kardokus led all scorers with 19 points, Kelly 12, Heldman 10 and Gene Southwood totaled 7 points. Abe Becker scored a team-high 15 points for the Violets while Kaufman added 14.

Bibb reported:

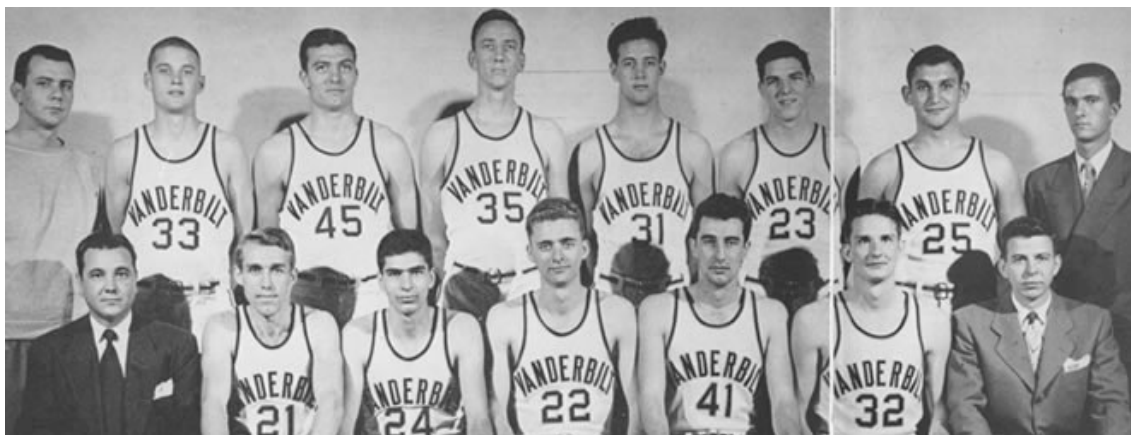
Bob Polk scored still another "first" here last night, when Vandy's jubilant Commodores gave him his first free ride from the floor to the dressing room. It was a sweet sight for the smattering of Vanderbilt fans who were scattered among the throng of more than 12,000 who watched wide-eyed as the underdog Commodores dumped favored NYU.

But sweeter was the sight in the Vandy dressing room where the Commodores sat quivering, alternately crying, screaming and laughing while Polk nervously tried to light a cigarette.

Playing in Madison Square Garden for the first time is almost like giving your opponent 10 points. That's the way veteran Garden hands and local newspapermen sized up Vanderbilt's changes against NYU while watching the Commodores in their short workout yesterday morning.

"They were great, that's all I can say," Polk said after the game.

Vanderbilt concluded the 1949-50 season with a 17-8 (SEC, 11-3) record and second place finish in the conference.



Next week read about the miracle finishes at Memorial Gymnasium.

Traughber's Tidbit: Vanderbilt true freshman guard [Jermaine Beal](#) wears No. 0 on his uniform and became the all-time leading scorer last season at DeSoto High School (DeSoto, Texas). Phil Cox (1982-85) wore No. 00 at Vanderbilt and became the school's all-time scorer with 1,724 points. Matt Freije's 1,891 points broke that record during his Commodore career (2001-04).

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