

CHC- Vandy's Men's and Women's 1909-10 Seasons

by Bill Traugher

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This is a testimony from former Vanderbilt basketball player from 1908-10, Samuel A. Weakley about the Commodores 1909-10 basketball season. In letterform, the undated testimony was sent to Vanderbilt head basketball coach Bob Polk (1948-58, 1960-61) sometime in the 1950s. This is Weakley's reminiscences of the 1909-10 season:

"When practice began for the season, it was clearly evident that Vanderbilt was to have another fine basketball team for McGehee, Neely, Martin, Sorrells, and Brown, the first line men of the team of the previous year, were on the floor in uniform. Weakly was the only sub left from the previous year, but with Pentecost, Freeland, and Nelson (one of Vanderbilt's great "little men," a Sator Martin of his day) on hand they constituted a formidable second line.



1909-10 VU Men's Basketball

"The first road trip demonstrated the caliber of the team. Playing five games on five consecutive nights in five altogether different size gymnasiums, the team won four games. The game that was lost was in the miniature gym at Columbus, Georgia where the crowd was four deep between the playing floor and the wall; no out of bounds as such. One account of the game stated that "At one point in the game one of the spectators reached out and grasped Neely by the throat while he was struggling for the ball with one of the Columbus players." Another "assist" from the spectators was to extend their legs out on the floor as Vanderbilt would pass. So you see, a player never knew how many would be in the act when the play was near the side line.

"The gym in Mobile was lined along the foul line with chicken wire so that there was an out-of-bounds. On the trip between Columbus and Montgomery the train was delayed several hours behind a wreck at Union Springs, Alabama and the team did not arrive until shortly before game time. Likewise on the next day the team did not arrive in Mobile until late in the afternoon and had very little rest before game time. It speaks well for the fine physical condition and stamina and mental attitude of the players that they could play such basketball under such conditions.

"In the Mobile game, Vanderbilt was one point behind when Neely passed the ball

down the floor to Brown, who was in no position for a sure shot; but, Neely realizing that time was about up, yelled to Brown to take a shot, which he did. The ball went through the hoop, putting Vanderbilt ahead by one point. Just then the final whistle blew, ending the game. (Brown to this day does not know how he was that good at goal shooting.) This game was plenty rough, 49 fouls being called. A banquet was held after the game when the delicacies of the Holiday season were served.

"On the way home Vanderbilt defeated the Birmingham Athletic Club by a score of 50 to 30. It should not be overlooked that the YMCA and Athletic Clubs of those days had fine teams made up of men who had played together for years and in some cases with men who had previously played on Northern and Eastern University teams.

"The next game was against an Alumni team, on Feb. 7th, on which were such great players as Stein Stone, Gene Lockhard, Dan Blake and Willard Throop. Only four alumni showed up for the game so Weakly was loaned to them as a fifth player. The Varsity won 41-21 and it was stated in one account that "Youth must be served for the come-back road is a hard one." This proved true, for Weakley a "youth" on the alumni team scored half of their points. One of the largest crowds ever to assemble in the V.U. gym was there, and the student band, 18 strong, made their first appearance in their new uniforms. `When playing at their best they ripped off such seductive strains as, tease, squeeze, lovin and wooing; Oh babe what are you doin.' Or at least that was the way it sounded to the news reporter.

"Cumberland University and Sewanee were defeated in turn, in a decisive manner. The Sewanee game was referred to in the news accounts as "rough but not barbaric." In the Sewanee game Nelson put on a fine exhibition and made six field goals. During the halves of these two games the Gym team of Heriges, Howe, Morrison, Raff and McClure put on a fine exhibition of acrobatics.

"During the latter part of February, during severe cold weather and blizzards, the team made what proved to be a very disastrous four-day trip into Central Kentucky. Neely and Brown were unable to make the trip and Sorrells had a carbuncle on his neck as big as a walnut and could play only a part of the games and Weakly had a boil on the end of his nose which had that olfactory organ swelled to twice its normal size and Nelson had tonsillitis. Even at that, two of the games were in the win-column. In the Louisville game a new Vanderbilt record was set, fourteen field goals by Weakley. The largest number of field goals scored in a game by a Vanderbilt player previously, was eleven by Bob Blake on February 5, 1904 against the Nashville YMCA team and eleven by Bill Neely on February 9, 1910 against Cumberland University (February seemed to be a good month in which to make records).

"The team and players were referred to in local and out of town news accounts in many instances, such as; "Commodores are a great all round team; when at strength, probably the greatest in the South." "Played suburb basketball." "Greatest all-round exhibition ever seen." "One of the best squads ever to represent Vanderbilt." There was hardly a game in which Neely, McGehee, and/or Martin were not cited for their brilliant work. (Another great team of the early days of basketball of Vanderbilt was the team of 1906-07)."

Editor's Note: Also included in the Weakley letter is a testimony from Ada Raines the captain of the 1909-10 Vanderbilt's women's basketball team. Stella Scott

Vaughn was the women's coach and Weakley is credited as a co-writer of the ladies 1909-10 season:



1909-10 VU Women's Basketball

"The co-ed teams always had a way of winning their games under the excellent coaching of Miss Stella Vaughn. The season of 1909-10 was no exception. The season opened on Saturday, November 20, 1909 in the Vanderbilt Gym when the

Vanderbilt co-eds crumpled the hair of the Cumberland University lasses to the tune of 24 to 8.

"The Cumberland team acted the part of the dark cloud which bade fair to make sailing rough and if possible to upset the equilibrium of a Vanderbilt victory; but Capt. Raines steered her cargo of precious freight through the tempest with only the loss of a few hair pins. Thus it looked through the eyes of the reporter.

"Lamar Ryals well remembers to this day how the butterflies flitted in her stomach the night before the game and she was unable to sleep, obsessed with the feeling that she would be unable to make a credible showing in throwing goals. But when the pre-game practice was underway the butterflies left and returned no more, for, the frame as one reporter stated "Miss Ryals, the goal throwing terror, was upon the verge of being the whole thing; she ringing up 10 of the 24 points; all this in addition to the plucky way in which she played after being wafted into dreamland by a sleep-producing jolt upon her auburn curls. Capt. Raines and Miss Young allowed only two field goals to be scored against them during the game. Scores were made by Ryals, 5 field; Stocks, 2 field and 4 foul.

"After this successful beginning of the girls, on Saturday, December 11th, 1909, played a team of former Vanderbilt co-eds players. It was stated that the Commodoreesses spoiled the curls of the Alumni girls 26-19. Quoting further: the game was snappy and fast except the times taken out by the alumni on account of lack of breath and one knockout administered by the younger aggregation. Miss Stella Vaughn did the best playing for the alumni. Capt. Raines when interviewed expressed the opinion that the team would continue to play winning ball. The alumni team was composed of Florence Gates, Lois Amanda Godbey, Mary Lipe, Rose Nelson, and Stella Vaughn (Capt.). These games were played before a feminine audience only and behind guarded doors as had always been the case with Vanderbilt co-ed games No other outside games were played by the team.

"You varsity players look back and think your games were rough; what do think of our games; says Ada Raines."

Editor's Note: The 1909-10 men's basketball team recorded a 10-3 mark while the ladies games are not officially recorded.

Next week read about a few former Vanderbilt basketball players in professional basketball in the 1940's.

Traughber's Tidbit: In the 1960's, Vanderbilt's basketball team had a basset hound mascot. His name was George and he appeared at home games in Memorial Gymnasium. George is buried on the Vanderbilt campus just north of Dudley Field. Another basset hound, Samantha, later replaced George.



George

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