

'DORES WHO LOVE TOO MUCH

*Forget pompoms. Shaved heads, ritual fires
and psychological warfare are fair game for these fans.*

It's hard to be a fair-weather Vanderbilt fan. Sure, there are wins—even some dazzling victories—but as anyone can tell you, the agony of defeat is all too familiar to Vanderbilt sports fans. Undergraduates who view sporting events mainly as an excuse to see and be seen are rank amateurs compared to these stalwarts. What inspires such devotion? For some, it's love of the school. For others, love of the game. Here's a tribute to some of the fanatical faces who cheer for the Commodores, rain or shine, win or lose.

By CLAIRE VERNON SUDDATH, BA'04

Photography by DANIEL DUBOIS

A man with a very intense, almost pained expression is getting a haircut. He is wearing a black barber's cape. A barber is using clippers on his hair. The background is a barbershop with shelves of products and a mirror.

VANDY LANCE

Mouth of the South

Lance Smith, known on campus as "Vandy Lance," is a Nashville UPS driver who has been a Vanderbilt fan since 1965. "I didn't have the grades or money to go to Vanderbilt," he says. But he's fiercely devoted to the school. In 1995 Vandy Lance allowed his head to be shaved on television during Midnight Madness festivities, when the Vanderbilt men's basketball team opens practice. A few years later he won a 1979 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme during a free-throw competition. He got into an altercation with Vince Gill at a Vanderbilt-Belmont game and "cried like a baby girl" when the women's basketball team made it to the 2004 Sweet 16 NCAA Tournament.

Which sport is his favorite? "I played basketball, but I know how important it is to win at football, and I actually have the most fun at baseball." How diplomatic of him.

His season basketball tickets are right behind the opposing team. "A lot of the coaches know who I am. We shake hands, say 'Are you ready?' 'I'm ready,' and then we get it on. I don't curse. I don't say anything mean. But I *am* obnoxious, and I never shut up."



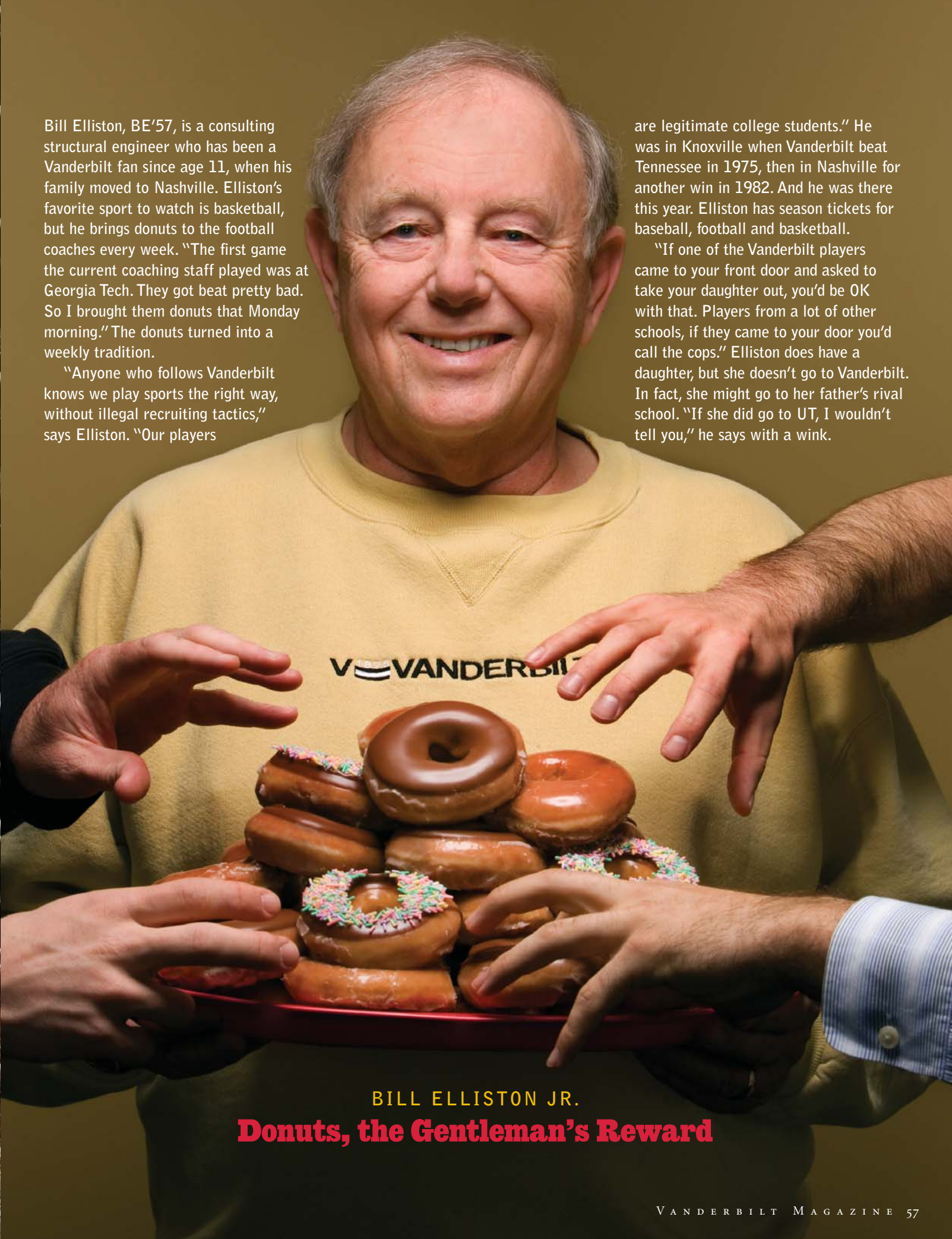
BRIAN REAMES

Come Rain or Come Shine

"I was just a walk-on," says Brian Reames, BA'87, of his Vanderbilt football career. "I had no illusions about how good I was. My decision to join the team came from a desire to contribute to Vanderbilt any way I knew how."

As an alumnus and fan, Reames has season tickets to football, basketball and baseball games. "I'll watch a soccer or lacrosse game here and there, too." He and Vanderbilt friends host tailgating parties to draw fans. "We're there rain or shine." Reames burns memorabilia from the opposing team—hats, t-shirts, pompoms—in a ritual he calls "The Ashes of Defeat." The ashes help him stay psyched, no matter the outcome of the game.

Reames speaks highly of baseball player Worth Scott, whose 2003 home run defeated the University of Tennessee and sent Vanderbilt to its first Southeastern Conference Tournament since 1996. "That was my favorite sports moment," he says, "until this year in football." He has been to almost every Vanderbilt-UT game during the past 20 years and says this year's win is the defining Vanderbilt experience for him. "I knew we'd win eventually. I went to as many games against UT as I could, waiting for it to happen. This was the year it did."

A photograph of Bill Elliston Jr., an older man with grey hair, smiling and holding a large red tray filled with various donuts. He is wearing a yellow sweatshirt with the Vanderbilt logo. Several hands are reaching towards the donuts from people off-camera. The background is a solid olive green color.

Bill Elliston, BE'57, is a consulting structural engineer who has been a Vanderbilt fan since age 11, when his family moved to Nashville. Elliston's favorite sport to watch is basketball, but he brings donuts to the football coaches every week. "The first game the current coaching staff played was at Georgia Tech. They got beat pretty bad. So I brought them donuts that Monday morning." The donuts turned into a weekly tradition.

"Anyone who follows Vanderbilt knows we play sports the right way, without illegal recruiting tactics," says Elliston. "Our players

are legitimate college students." He was in Knoxville when Vanderbilt beat Tennessee in 1975, then in Nashville for another win in 1982. And he was there this year. Elliston has season tickets for baseball, football and basketball.

"If one of the Vanderbilt players came to your front door and asked to take your daughter out, you'd be OK with that. Players from a lot of other schools, if they came to your door you'd call the cops." Elliston does have a daughter, but she doesn't go to Vanderbilt. In fact, she might go to her father's rival school. "If she did go to UT, I wouldn't tell you," he says with a wink.

BILL ELLISTON JR.

Donuts, the Gentleman's Reward



BILL HAWKINS

Bred in the Bone

"My dad went to Vanderbilt, my grandfather and grandmother went to Vanderbilt, my aunt went, my sister-in-law went, and so many cousins and uncles and relatives I'm afraid to even count," says Bill Hawkins, BS'82.

Bill started going to games as a child with his father, Charles Hawkins III, BA'54. "Dad grew up five blocks from the football stadium, so he went all the time with his father. When I was little, I used to sell Cokes and popcorn at basketball games, which let me in without a ticket," Hawkins says, as if the close association with the players still excites him.

Bill's father and grandfather both played baseball and football at Vanderbilt, and when the baseball stadium needed renovation, the Hawkins family was happy to oblige. Charles Hawkins III—the first Vanderbilt pitcher to earn All-SEC honors—donated \$2 million to the renovation project. "My dad wasn't one of those people concerned with titles or names," Bill says, "but he was in a position to give the money and so he did." Charles was on hand to toss the first pitch in the renovated field named after him—a bittersweet memory for Bill since his father's death in 2004. Bill takes his three children to sports games just as his father once did for him.



MARY ANNE SUGG

Thicker Than Water

"I almost didn't buy tickets this year," says Mary Ann Sugg, BA'51, whose family has had season football tickets since 1936. "The friend I went with didn't want to go anymore. He gets really upset when Vanderbilt loses." Sugg didn't know who else to take, so she considered giving up her spot. "I couldn't do it, though," she says. "I'd be breaking the streak."

And what a streak this year turned out to be. Vanderbilt beat the University of Tennessee for the first time since 1982. Although Sugg wasn't there this time since the game was in Knoxville, she remembers witnessing the win 23 years ago. "My parents were still alive back in 1982, but they were ill. My father listened to the game on the radio, and he was so happy. And you know what? That night he died. But I was happy he got to hear that last game."

Now in her 70s, Sugg goes to every home football game. "To tell you the truth," she says in a hushed voice, "I think I like basketball better." She has only been a basketball fan since 1952, but women's basketball is her favorite sport. "It's not so run and gun. As soon as they start dunking the ball, it will become just like the boys' game."