

Sports

A look at Vanderbilt athletics

Made in Manhattan

Hard work and dedication follow All-American Pedro Alvarez from New York City to Nashville. By NELSON BRYAN, BA'73

“NEW YORK CITY is my home,” Pedro Alvarez says in an almost reverent tone. “I wouldn’t trade it for any other place.” The city was playground and proving ground for Vanderbilt’s sophomore third baseman, last season’s National and SEC Freshman of the Year.

Among many accolades in 2006, he was picked as a first-team All-American and All-South Region player by *Baseball America* magazine. Commodore Head Baseball Coach Tim Corbin has seen even better performances from Alvarez in his sophomore season. “Pedro is counted on to be a major power source again,” Corbin says. “He has continued to improve and mature a great deal.”

“Growing up, 95 percent of my friends I met through baseball,” Alvarez says. “It’s something I’ve been doing, my dad says, since I was 3 and a half. By the time I started elementary school, every day I was going to a field, practicing with my dad.”

His trainer had him practice with kids five and six years older. “It gave me that competitive edge to keep coming back and wanting to excel.”

Alvarez lived in Manhattan but attended Horace Mann High School in the Bronx, a school renowned more for academics than

athletics. “A lot of people wanted me to go to a powerhouse high school where baseball was one of the top programs, but my dad was big on education.

“I had the opportunity to go to a couple of Yankee games,” he adds. “Shea Stadium also wasn’t so far from where I lived. Funny thing is, I was a Red Sox fan.”

Alvarez got his affinity for the Red Sox through his father, who hails from the Dominican Republic. “He follows a lot of players from the Dominican Republic, and three of them were Red Sox,” Alvarez says. “Baseball is a big part of our culture in the Dominican Republic. Down there, if there’s even a little patch of grass, you see people playing ball somehow—even with a stick if that’s what they have.”



Alvarez was a 2005 Louisville Slugger All-American, the Gatorade and Louisville Slugger New York High School Player of the Year, the 97th-ranked pro prospect in the country by *Baseball America*—and was drafted by the Boston Red Sox. His high school team went on to win the 2004 Ivy League Championship, finishing in second place in the nation, and he now holds school and career records in batting average, home runs, RBI and slugging percentage. His club team, the Bayside Yankees, won the 2005 NABF National Championship.

“A couple of Vanderbilt guys played for

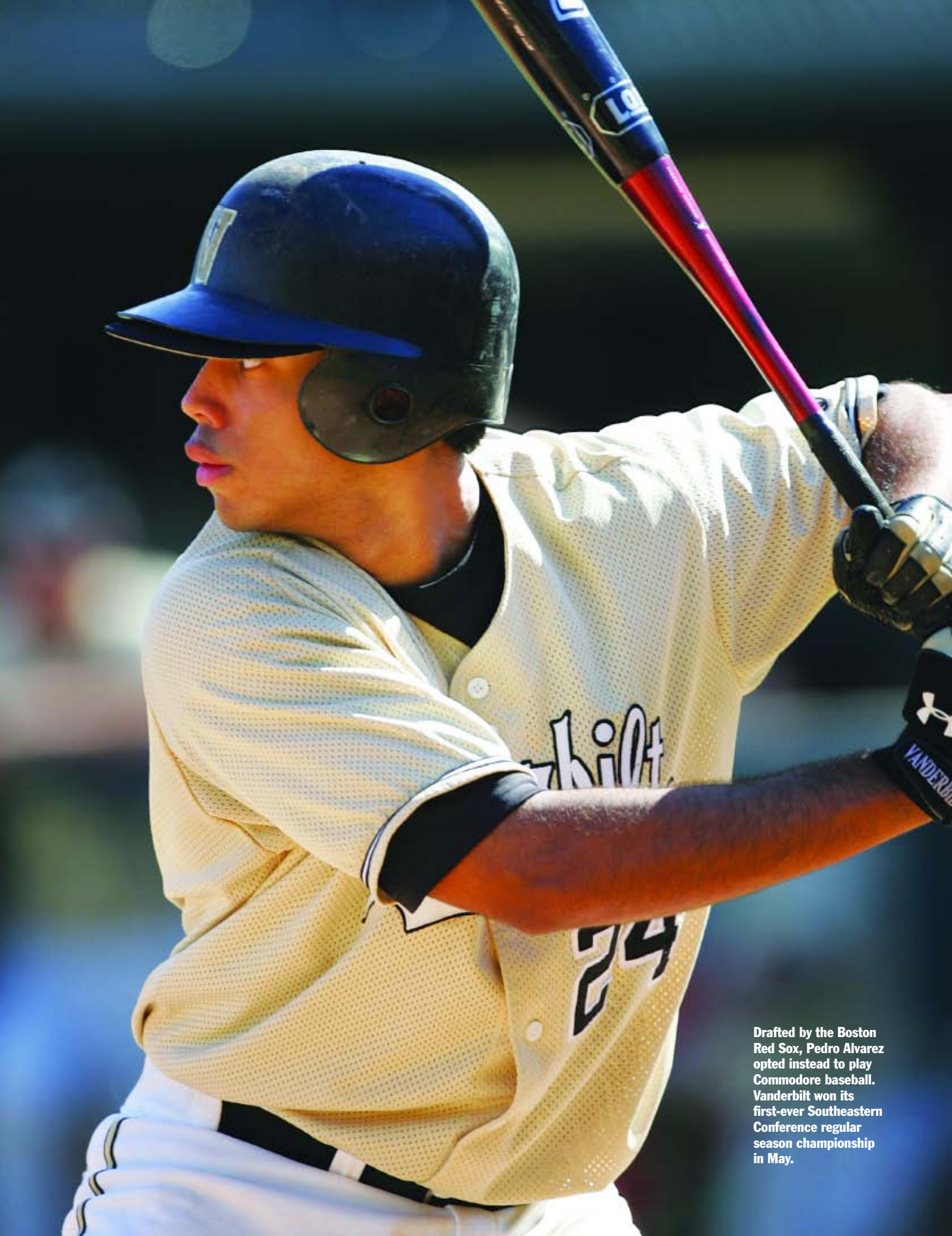
Bayside,” he says. “Like Nick Christiani, Jay Moreland. My junior year we came to a tournament at Hawkins Field, and I got a chance to meet Coach Corbin.” After occasional talks with Corbin—and taking into consideration his draft status with the Red Sox—Alvarez committed to the Commodores.

“I thought at the time that Vanderbilt was the right choice. And now that I’m here, I know I wasn’t ready to start playing pro baseball right away.”

Alvarez was named National Freshman of the Year by *Baseball America*, *Collegiate Baseball* and *Rivals.com*. He was named SEC Freshman of the Year after finishing with a .329 batting average and a school-record 22 home runs and 27 RBI in SEC play. He also was named to the SEC Freshman Academic Honor Roll and to the NCAA Atlanta Regional All-Tourney Team.

A guy’s got to do something in the off-season, so Alvarez joined teammate David Price (a then-sophomore pitcher) on the USA Baseball National Team, with Coach Corbin taking the reins as the team’s manager. Team USA logged a 28-2-1 record and won the gold medal at the World University Championship in Havana, Cuba, last August.

Alvarez is majoring in economics in preparation for life after baseball. “I need a backup plan. What better plan than a degree and a profession? In terms of baseball, God willing, if I can play as long as I can—that means till I’m 50 or 60—then I will,” he says with a smile. “That’s something I want to do for a very long time.” ▼



Drafted by the Boston Red Sox, Pedro Alvarez opted instead to play Commodore baseball. Vanderbilt won its first-ever Southeastern Conference regular season championship in May.



CHRIS LIVINGSTON

Bowlers Strike First with National Championship

The women's bowling team has become the first team in the history of the university to win an NCAA national championship.

The Commodores defeated the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in the last five frames of the seventh and deciding game to win the NCAA Championship on April 14.

"Our student-athletes worked so hard, our coaches worked hard, and this victory on national television is validation that the effort was worthwhile," said Head Women's Bowling Coach John Williamson.

The Commodores, 74-14 on the year and the tournament's No. 3 seed, jumped out to a quick 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven format. UMES came back to tie them with wins in

the third and fourth games. Vanderbilt regrouped to win game five, and the Hawks took game six, setting up a pressure-packed seventh game.

"During the last television timeout in the seventh game," said Williamson, "our kids said they wanted to finish their year by throwing five good balls. And they did."

Freshman Josie Earnest, named Tournament Most

Valuable Player, iced the game with two crucial strikes in the 10th frame. "I knew that I had wanted to be in that moment the entire season," Earnest said, "and when I got there, I focused on making good throws and then hoped and prayed those pins would fall." Sophomore Michelle Peloquin joined Earnest on the five-person All-Tournament team.

Dee Davis Closes Collegiate Career

For Dee Davis, Vanderbilt women's point guard for the past four years, the road to success passed through three states. From Indiana, through Ohio and ultimately to Tennessee, she has fought for and found success at every stop.

"I used to watch the NBA all the time," she

says of her formative years in Indianapolis. "Basketball was something that came naturally to me. In elementary school we didn't actually have a girls' basketball team. We had a boys' team, so I played on that for a while."

Indianapolis also was the beginning of her days playing Amateur Athletic Union ball. "I started playing AAU with older girls, and that got me exposure," she says.

At the age of 13, she moved to Cincinnati, where she caught the eye of Vanderbilt Head Women's Basketball Coach Melanie Balcomb, who was then coach at Xavier University. "She had seen me at every tournament, every camp,



Davis

NEIL BRANKE

every shootout," Davis recalls. "If I had stayed in Indianapolis, I have no idea where I would've ended up playing ball."

A combination of Balcomb's recruiting and proximity to family led Davis to Vanderbilt. "I had a lot of family in Nashville and Clarksville. I used to be the one who had the largest fan section of family. They wore 'Dee Davis #10' shirts in the stands."

In her freshman year as a Commodore, she led the team in assists. As a sophomore she was named second-team All-SEC, and by her junior year she had earned first-team All-SEC honors. Her senior year came full circle when she and fellow seniors Carla Thomas and Caroline Williams led the team to the SEC Tournament Championship, a feat the Commodores last achieved when the trio were freshmen. Davis scored a team-high 19 points in the 2007 championship game.

Davis looks toward the WNBA to extend her career. "I haven't decided for sure what I want to do after that," she says. "I want to use my communications major for sure. I want to do something where I could work with kids. I'll probably coach later down the line."

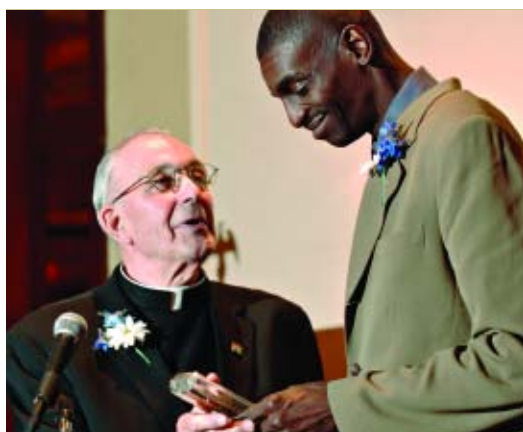


PHOTO BY DEREK GEE

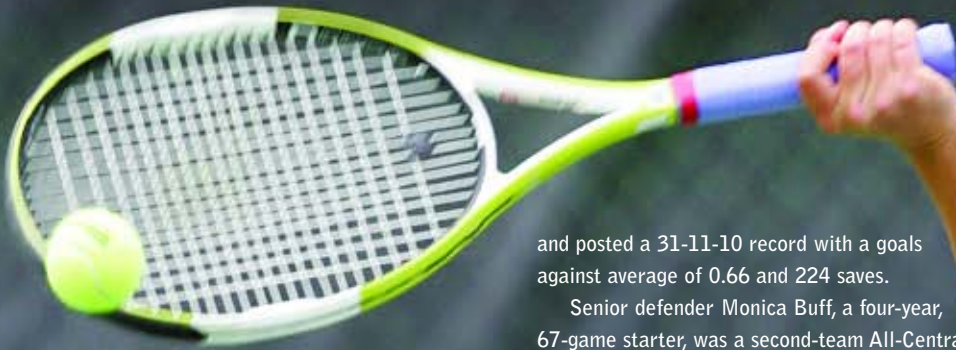
Willie "Hutch" Jones, BA'82, is the pride of Buffalo, N.Y. The 6-foot-8 center earned first-team All-SEC honors in his senior year at Vanderbilt. More recently, he earned the Father Baker Service to Youth Award in Buffalo for the work he has done to enhance

thing this big," Jones said in accepting the award. "It takes a lot of people to make success. When we have children in mind, it's a beautiful thing."



Where are they now?

Sports Roundup



Taka Bertrand in action during the Florida match on April 6

Women's Basketball: SEC Tournament Champs



Vanderbilt's women won the SEC Tournament Championship in a 51-45 victory over LSU on March 4. The Commodores were rewarded with a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament, defeating 15th-seed Delaware State in the first round and losing to seventh-seed Bowling Green in the second. The team finished with a 28-6 season. Along the way they set an NCAA record Feb. 3 by netting a 76.2 percent shooting average in a 91-51 SEC victory over Alabama. That's the highest single-game field goal shooting percentage in NCAA history.

Women's Soccer: Griffin Named All-American Senior Goalkeeper

Tyler Griffin wrapped up her collegiate career as a first-team All-America and first-team All-Central Region selection by *Soccer Buzz*, a Web site devoted to the coverage of collegiate women's soccer. She also was a second-team All-



Griffin

SEC pick in 2006, finishing the season with a goals against average of 0.60, 86 saves, and a 9-4-7 overall record. The most decorated soccer player in school history, she finished as Vanderbilt's career shutout leader with 31,

and posted a 31-11-10 record with a goals against average of 0.66 and 224 saves.

Senior defender Monica Buff, a four-year, 67-game starter, was a second-team All-Central Region pick by *Soccer Buzz* and a first-team All-SEC pick this season.

Football: Postseason Accolades

Defensive back D.J. Moore was Vanderbilt's lone representative on the Southeastern Conference Coaches' All-Freshman Team. Cornerback Darlron Spead was named to the All-Southeastern Conference Freshman Team by *Sporting News*. Sophomore wide receiver Earl Bennett was named first-team All-Southeastern Conference by the Associated Press and third-team All-America by Rivals.com.



Moore

The Commodores held their postseason banquet in December, where three players received the team's top honors. Redshirt senior Steven Bright, who saw action at quarterback, fullback and tight end, received the Vanderbilt

Dedication Award from Head Football Coach Bobby Johnson and his staff, while redshirt sophomore safety Reshard Langford was voted by teammates to receive the Captain's Award. Redshirt senior Funtaine Hunter, a reserve linebacker, received the Commodore Hustle Award, also awarded by the players.

Men's Basketball: Awards Highlight Sweet Season

Senior Derrick Byars has been named SEC Player of the Year, and Head Men's Basketball Coach Kevin Stallings has been named SEC Coach of the Year by the Southeastern Conference coaches. Byars ranked as the league's second-leading scorer, averaging 19.1 points per game. Stallings guided the team to a 22-12 season, finishing second in the SEC East and advancing to the Sweet Sixteen round of the NCAA Tournament.