

# Sports

A look at Vanderbilt athletics

## Pitch by Pitch

*For Jeremy Sowers, there's no place like the pitcher's mound.*

By NELSON BRYAN

**I**T STARTED INNOCENTLY ENOUGH: a couple of toddlers, barely out of the terrible twos, playing catch with their dad in the back yard. By age 4 or 5, it had escalated ... to Little League. And by age 9, the die was cast. Destination: the mound.

"As soon as we were able, we played with a Little League team," admits Vanderbilt junior Jeremy Sowers. "We've been playing ever since." The "we" he refers to includes his twin brother, Josh. Josh is a righty. Jeremy's a leftie.

"It's just always been a part of my life," Sowers says. "When we were living in Miami, we started pitching around 8 or 9 years old. It seemed like back then, if you could throw a strike, you pitched, and I was able to throw a strike. So I pitched."

He's still pitching. And he's still throwing strikes. In his freshman year at Vanderbilt, he was named to the Collegiate Baseball/Louisville Slugger All-American Team. His 85 strikeouts ranked first in the SEC among all freshmen pitchers and sixth among all SEC pitchers. This past season, his second, he led the SEC in batters struck out, with 123. He had the second-best ERA in the conference (2.50) and finished in third place in opposing batting average (.223), innings pitched (115), and runners picked off (5).

Sowers came to Vanderbilt from Louisville,

Ky. "I was always interested in the academic orientation of a school," he says, "and when I got here for my visitation, it just seemed right. I had been to Wake Forest and Notre Dame, but they didn't seem to be there for me like Vanderbilt was. It was an easy decision."

There was also that \$1 million-plus offer from the Cincinnati Reds to consider back in 2001. "This is more important to me than the Reds were," he says matter-of-factly. "That's why I'm here."

Vanderbilt's baseball media guide says the word that best describes Sowers is "composed." That composure is evidenced on the days he pitches. "During the day, I take it about as easy as I can," he says. After lunch he goes to the field to watch batting practice, talk strategy with batting coach Derek Johnson, stretch and warm up.

"During batting practice, there are some things you can tell—especially about the mentality of a team—just by watching what they do," he says. "If you have guys up there just trying to hit home runs, you know they're not really trying to work on anything. They're more or less showcasing their strength. That will give you an idea how to pitch them. Ultimately, you really don't know how to pitch people until you face them, and you learn pitch by pitch, batter by batter during the game."

The pace of the game is important to Sowers' and the team's success. "We like to keep the game as fast as possible," he says. "The faster

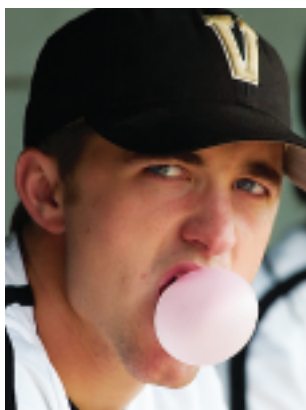
the game goes, the better the rhythm you can find and the more success I think you'll have. A lot of the games I've pitched in have been less than two and a half hours. That's about where you want to keep it, if not faster. It says you're getting the job done, not walking people, not allowing too many hits, working ahead of batters, forcing contact, stuff like that.

"Last year my velocity was a little slower than it was this year. I've got a better sense of how to pitch this year. As a result of that, my slider's better, my change-up's better, my curve ball's better, my fastball's better, and my strength's better, so I've had more success in striking people out."

Sowers admits that getting the out is the important thing. "Since my primary goal is to get a guy out, I don't really care how it happens. I'd rather get a first-pitch ground out than a strikeout, simply because it means I keep the pitch count down, which means I stay in the game longer, and the game goes faster."

Off the field, he goes into his junior year as a political science major. "That's something that interests me. I enjoy the classes—that and history. I can't say what I really want to do with it."

But of course, Sowers' world orbits around baseball, and he would like to take his game to the major leagues. "Everything I do has something to do with baseball. It takes up an extraordinary amount of time, especially in the spring semester. I'd really like to play baseball as a job. That would be ideal for me. But I'm not taking anything for granted. That's another reason I'm here getting a degree."





Jeremy Sowers



Teammates congratulate Worth Scott after his two-run walk-off homer sealed a three-game sweep of UT and a berth in the SEC Tourney.

## Lewis Named All-American

Vanderbilt right-hander Jensen Lewis has been named to the 2003 *Collegiate Baseball Newspaper*/Louisville Slugger Freshmen All-America Team, announced June 5 by the national publication. He was one of nine relief pitchers and 76 freshmen honored.

A 6-3, 185-pounder from Cincinnati's Anderson High School, Lewis ranked among the top pitchers in the Southeastern Conference in several categories, including saves (fourth with eight), games finished (sixth with 15), appearances (tied for seventh with 25), opposing batting average (eighth at .236), and games in relief (10th with 21).

## Four Vanderbilt Pitchers Combine for School's First Perfect Game

Four Vanderbilt pitchers combined for what was believed to be the first perfect game in school history as the Commodores defeated Western Kentucky 4-0 on May 6 at Nick Denes Field in Bowling Green.

Freshman right-hander Jensen Lewis started for Vanderbilt with six strikeouts in five innings to earn the win. Freshman right-hander Nick Pilkington entered in the sixth inning and retired all three batters he faced while recording one strikeout. Sophomore left-hander John Scott retired the side in order in the seventh inning. Freshman right-hander Matt Buschmann pitched the final two innings,

striking out two in recording his fourth save of the year.

The perfect game is only the eighth in Southeastern Conference baseball history. It also marks Vanderbilt's first no-hitter since Doug Wessel's in 1971 against Belmont.

## Football: VU Graduation Rate Ranks Among I-A Leaders

The Vanderbilt football team has been recognized as one of seven I-A universities to graduate at least 90 percent of its eligible student-athletes, according to the American Football Coaches Association.

"We are proud of the recognition regarding our success with graduation rates in the football program," says Commodore Head Coach Bobby Johnson.

The Vanderbilt football program is a two-

time winner of the Academic Achievement Award. The team was recognized with Notre Dame in 2001 for graduating 100 percent of its 1995-96 freshman class. The Commodores also shared the award with Duke and Boston College in 1996.

Of the 102 responding I-A member universities, 31 were recognized for graduating 70 percent or more of its football players. The overall graduation rate was 59 percent, one percent less than the previous year.

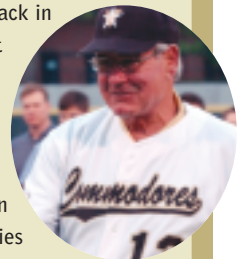
According to the AFCA release, Vanderbilt and six other universities—Duke, Boston College, Connecticut, Northwestern, Rice and Wake Forest—were in a group that graduated at least 90 percent of its 1997-98 freshman class of football players. Duke captured the AFCA's prestigious Academic Achievement Award with a graduation rate of 100 percent.



COURTESY OF CHARLES HAWKINS; INSET BY NEIL BRAKE

Hawkins circa '54

**Charles Hawkins**, BA'54, Vanderbilt's first All-Southeastern Conference honoree as a pitcher in 1954, is a successful real estate broker and developer in Nashville. The Charles Hawkins Co. has been in operation since 1962. "We had a wonderful team back in '54," he says, "a team of crackerjack players. We had a lot of fun, but we got serious when the game began." A two-sport athlete, he attended Vanderbilt on a football scholarship and was able to concentrate on his pitching in the spring of '54 because there was no spring football practice that year. He and several of his teammates remain close friends today. The 1954 team (as well as all teams before and after) played on the same field that is known today as Hawkins Field. Thanks to his generosity, Vanderbilt's baseball facilities were renovated to become one of the finest new parks in the nation.



# {Sports Roundup}

## **Tennis: Reynolds Ends Season with Record 46 Singles Wins**

Bobby Reynolds concluded his junior tennis season with an incredible 46-7 overall record, which included a 25-1 dual-match mark. He finished the SEC regular season with an 11-0 record and ended the year by winning 35 of his last 37 matches.

He was named Southeastern Conference Player of the Year and the SEC Tournament's Most Valuable Player. He also was named the NCAA Tournament's Most Valuable Player after



**Bobby Reynolds**

leading the Commodores to a national runner-up finish. Reynolds is the first collegiate tennis player to be named Intercollegiate Tennis Association Player of the Month on three occasions.

## **Tennis: Men End Season as No. 2 in Nation**

The Vanderbilt men's tennis team fell just shy of winning the school's first team national title, as the Commodores fell to top-ranked Illinois in the NCAA National Championship match, 4-3, last spring. The Commodores concluded the 2003 season with an overall mark of 27-4, while the Fighting Illini finished with a perfect 32-0 mark, their first national championship in men's tennis.

Junior Bobby Reynolds was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player, and he and junior Chad Harris were both named to the NCAA All-Tournament team in singles. The No. 1 team of Reynolds and sophomore Scott Brown and the No. 3 team of juniors Zach Dailey and Lewie Smith were selected to the All-Tournament team in doubles.

## **Tennis: Riske and Tsubanos Advance to NCAA Doubles Quarterfinals**

Vanderbilt senior Sarah Riske and junior Aleke Tsubanos advanced to the quarterfinal round of the NCAA Doubles Championship before losing to Florida's No. 1 doubles team, 6-3, 6-2, in Gainesville, Fla. They concluded the season with a 32-8 record.

Riske and Tsubanos were named Intercollegiate Tennis Association All-Americans for the second straight year, ITA National Doubles Team of the Month in January 2002, Riviera/ITA All-American Doubles Champions, and All-SEC Second Team.

## **Golf: Women Tie for 14th at NCAA Tournament**

The women's golf team advanced in its quest to become a perennial national power when it finished tied for 14th at the NCAA Championships.

Freshman May Wood shot a second consecutive 73 (1-over) at the 6,225-yard Birck Boiler-maker Golf Complex-Kampen Course in West Lafayette, Ind., and paced the Commodores' effort. Each Vanderbilt golfer made at least one birdie in the final round, and the team score of 304 (16-over) was its best of the championship. Wood made three birdies in the final round and finished the championship in a tie for 24th place, the second-best NCAA finish ever by a Vanderbilt golfer. Her four-round total was 16-over par.



**May Wood**

PHOTO BY DOWN JONES; INSETS BY NEIL BRAKE

**The Vanderbilt polo team at Riverview Farm**