

Offense Posts Impressive Numbers

Vanderbilt's most productive offensive unit in more than a decade, led by a record-breaking senior quarterback, piled up impressive team statistics and individual achievements despite a 2-9 overall record.

The offense, directed by coordinator Steve Crosby, accumulated impressive statistics, including 201 first downs (highest since 1990) and 4,122 total yards (most since 1988) with a combination of timely passing by senior **Greg Zolman**, clutch receiving led by junior **Dan Stricker**, and the rushing of **Lew Thomas** and **Rodney Williams**. The unit scored at least 27 points in five games for the first time since 1986.

Several key midseason injuries kept the offense from establishing new all-time records in an assortment of team categories.

Quarterback

Greg Zolman broke numerous career team marks with a final season highlighted by a career passing effort versus Kentucky and a show of toughness that revealed his intense competitive nature. He ended his VU career with 38 starts, including his last 34 consecutive games.

In 2001, Zolman had career highs in touchdown passes (14), and passing yards (2,512) career highs. His career numbers - 41 touchdown passes, 596 completions, 1,156 attempts and 7,981 passing yards - are Vanderbilt records.

Zolman's top performances - 29 completions/441 yards against Kentucky and 286 yards/three TD passes versus Mississippi - came in losses. In the Duke win, he took a nasty hit on the opening series, only to bounce back three plays later to led the 'Dores to their highest point total (42).

Junior **Benji Walker**, more of a running threat, was limited to a small role in two games.

Running Backs

Lew Thomas, who started the season in a backup role, was a huge surprise and a leading reason why the 'Dores compiled their highest yearly rushing total (1,475 yards) since 1994.

A senior with limited game experience, Thomas established personal highs in each of the first four games, including a stellar 27-carry, 173-yard effort against Auburn. Against Duke, he was having another career game - 123 yards on eight carries - when he suffered three fractures to his right foot. The injury sidelined Thomas for the year.

Thomas still paced the 'Dores in rushing (675 yards), yards per carry (6.4) and yards per game (96.4).

Rodney Williams, seventh on the Commodores all-time rushing list, did his best to replace Thomas, gaining 155 yards against Duke after the injury. He also ran for 96 and 76 yards against Ole Miss and Kentucky, respectively.

Seldom-used freshman **Norval McKenzie** (13 carries/85 yards) is the only experienced rusher back in 2002.

Receivers

The top receiver was junior **Dan Stricker**, who continues up the all-time Vanderbilt receiving lists.

Stricker, coming off the finest sophomore season ever by a VU receiver, posted career highs with 65 catches and 1,079 yards. He stands third all-time in yards receiving and fifth in catches (138).

Stricker's top game (11 catches/204 yards vs. Kentucky) was surpassed by the effort by junior **M.J. Garrett** (eight carries/219 yards) vs. MTSU in the season opener. Garrett finished second on the team in receptions (27)

but was limited by a shoulder separation. Two freshmen, **Jason Mathenia** (22 catches) and **Brandon Smith** (nine receptions), were among the top receivers.

After making 33 catches in 2000, Commodore tight ends accumulated just 11 receptions this year. The leader, junior **Tom Simone**, averaged 9.6 yards on nine catches. **Nick Getter** was hampered by injuries much of the year.

Offensive Line

For half of the season and prior to a pair of crucial injuries, the Vanderbilt offensive line played perhaps the best of any Vanderbilt unit.

Through five games, the offense averaged 144.8 yards rushing and 253.4 yards passing, and led the SEC with just sack sacks allowed. After an ankle fracture against South Carolina sidelined guard **Duncan Cave** for the season, the Commodores struggled to continue the 500-yard per game pace. The 'Dores were shut out at Tennessee one week after the second major line injury - another ankle fracture to starting freshman left tackle **Justin Geisinger**.

Three linemen - senior right tackle **Pat Green**, junior center and co-captain **Jamie Byrum** and junior left guard **Jim May** - started every game for the Commodores, with Green earning Coaches' All-SEC Second Team honors.

A pair of redshirt freshmen, **Kenan Arkan** and **Brian Kovolisky**, gained valuable experience after replacing Geisinger and Cave, respectively. Kovolisky started four games and played most of two other games. A junior, **Jordan Pettit**, also earned a start at right guard against Mississippi.

Key Injuries Hinder VU Defense

Vanderbilt's defense, among the Southeastern Conference's best in recent years, struggled to maintain the standard in 2001.

After a nightmarish opener against Middle Tennessee, the Commodore's 3-4 defense showed vast improvement with the resumption of SEC opponents, then struggled late in the season after several key injuries to prominent starters.

The statistics - last in the conference in scoring defense and total defense - reveal a defense that fought a year-long struggle against inexperience and injuries.

Despite the 2-9 record, several outstanding achievements were witnessed. The Commodores played their best defense against Alabama, holding the talented Tide attack without a touchdown. Several individual Commodores, including **Antuan Bradford**, **Hunter Hillenmeyer** and **Chuck Losey**, compiled impressive numbers.

Defensive Line

The three starters - senior end **Wally Conyers**, sophomore nose tackle **Brett Beard** and junior end **Chuck Losey** - each achieved their best seasons at Vanderbilt.

Conyers was the leading tackler of the trio with 54 stops. He was third on the team in both tackles for a loss (6.5) and sacks (2). Beard drew double-teams all season, and never complained of a season-long foot fracture that hindered his quickness and range. He finished with 41 tackles. The hard-hitting Losey forced fumbles in each of the first four games, finishing with 37 tackles while sharing the team-high in sacks (2.5). Senior end **Doyle Crosby** was bothered by injuries much of the season, but contributed 28 tackles and a forced fumble.

The line was affected by a lack of depth. Besides Crosby, only junior **Ryan Nungesser**, freshman **Matt Clay** and freshman **Robert Dinwiddie**, saw playing time.

Linebackers

Bradford, a co-captain, paced the four-member linebacking corps. He topped the Commodores in tackles (116), tackles for loss (7.5), quarterback pressures (5) and tied for third in sacks (2). Senior outside backer **Nate Morrow**, also a co-captain, opened the season with 41 tackles in the first four games, but was slowed by a foot fracture midway through the season. He finished third on the team in tackles (71) and sacks (2). The other outside linebacker, sophomore **Hunter Hillenmeyer**, improved with experience. He was second in tackles (72) and among the SEC leaders with four fumble recoveries. Redshirt freshman **Pat Brunner** and junior **Mike Adam** alternated beside Bradford at the second inside linebacker.

Secondary

Injuries affected the secondary more than any other unit. The Commodores' top cover cornerback, junior **Rushen Jones**, was lost for six games after suffering a broken hand in practice. Then, as the team entered the worst of its schedule, junior safety **Justin Giboney** was lost for the year with a torn quad.

Senior safety **Harold Lercius** topped the group in tackles (63). Giboney, while missing three games, still managed 59 stops and a pair of interceptions. Junior **Aaron McWhorter** finished with 43 tackles and an interception. Junior **Jerrol Jackson** and freshman **Lorenzo Parker**, displayed their talent when inserted in the lineup. Jackson had 34 tackles and a team-high three interceptions while Parker contributed 35 tackles, a forced fumble and interception. Junior **Mike Martin**, sophomore **Ian Gaines** and freshman **Nick Lyle** gained experience.

Webb, Hatcher Top Vanderbilt Special Teams

Senior punter **Joe Webb**, **Mike Martin**, **Lew Thomas** and sophomore **Ronald Hatcher** were the top special team's performers.

Webb posted his finest season, averaging 41.4 yards. He had two punts of more than 70 yards, including a 78-yarder against Alabama when he averaged a team-record 57.0 per punt.

The placekicking game struggled all season. Junior **Chuck Folino** made three field goals against Alabama, but failed to make another during the season. Senior **Jimmy Stover** experi-

enced no more success, connecting on only one of four attempts. The four field goals tied for last in the SEC.

Thomas and Martin were standouts on coverage. Martin, named Outstanding Special Teams Player, was involved in six tackles. Thomas' absence protecting Webb against the Florida was apparent as the Gators blocked two punts.

Hatcher was the Commodores' top returner, averaging 20.5 yards on kickoffs and 7.1 yards on 15 punt returns.