

Bell proved he could play at Vandy

By STEVE KOWALSKI
STAFF WRITER

Ryan Bell played on winning football teams at Redford Catholic Central and graduated in 1990 with a 3.0 grade point average.

So imagine the kind of adjustment it was for Bell to spend his freshman year in college struggling to keep his grades up while playing on the offensive line for the Vanderbilt University football team, which went 1-10 in 1990 and hasn't had a winning season since 1982.

Bell's demanding freshman schedule included classes in engineering and being introduced on Saturday afternoons to Southeastern Conference football players.

Most players are red-shirted and take a lighter class load to get used to their new surroundings as freshmen.

"The first year made me a tougher person and anything I have to deal with in life will be a lot easier because of it," said Bell, a 6-foot-3, 280-pound senior offensive guard who last fall finished his career by being named to the SEC's second-team.

Bell's grade-point average slumped to .7 after his first semester and he decided to face the truth and change his major from engineering to human development.

After the initial fear of being academically ineligible, Bell has come on strong and will finish his



Ryan Bell
All-SEC pick

degree in four years after taking 11 credit hours in the winter semester.

"I told my parents I did bad (in the classroom) and had to bounce back from it," said Bell, who spent the holidays at his parents' home. "I could have stayed in engineering if it wasn't for football but football is so time consuming. It built a lot of character."

Bell didn't worry anymore about his grades, but he wasn't sure about his future in football after the Commodores fired coach Watson Brown and hired Gerry Dinardo prior to the 1991 season. Some players worry about playing time when a coach brings in a new system and new recruits, but Bell

remained a hub of the Commodores' offensive line, starting his last 27 games.

"Ryan did a great job and got better every year — he really deserved post-season honors," Dinardo said. "We brought in a lot of changes and Ryan accepted them and he was great from a morale standpoint, too."

Bell became a full-time starter as a sophomore when the Commodores went 5-6 and just missed a bowl berth after losing the final regular-season game to Tennessee.

The Commodores have had consecutive 4-7 seasons but beat Kentucky three-straight years and upset nationally ranked Georgia, 27-25, two years ago. They opened the 1993 season with a 30-27 victory at Ole Miss and also gave undefeated Auburn a battle before losing 14-10 in Nashville, Tenn.

Vanderbilt failed to score late in the game after gaining a first down and goal at the Auburn 3-yard line.

"It was a big hummer to lose that game, but we probably gave them their toughest game of the year," Bell said. "They knew they

were in for a fight. We're not as talented as most teams, but we play hard-nosed football."

Bell, a two-way lineman at CC, chose Vanderbilt over Northwestern, Boston College and Wyoming. BC beat Virginia, 31-13, in the Carquest Bowl on New Year's Day in Miami, Fla., and Wyoming lost to Kansas State, 52-17, in last week's Copper Bowl.

"I never got to go to a bowl game, but I don't think the experience I got at Vanderbilt could be replaced," he said. "I got labeled not a big-time player and I wanted to prove I could play in the SEC."

Bell doesn't expect to get drafted by the National Football League but would like to get a shot as a free agent. Bell figures if he gets a professional shot it will be as a center.

"A lot of people thought I'd play in the Blue-Gray (all-star) game because Vanderbilt's not in a bowl," Bell said. "But I'm just glad I got to come home for Christmas. I don't want to hang my hat on pro football but if I get a shot I'll give it my best. I'll be successful in any endeavor. I have great confidence in myself."

Shamrocks win rematch

By STEVE KOWALSKI
STAFF WRITER

Redford Catholic Central hockey player Jeff Helmer was wearing a friend's baseball cap Wednesday night as he left Eddie Edgar Arena and headed into the cold.

Helmer would have been more comfortable wearing a wool hat over his ears but any hat would do after his performance in CC's 8-1, non-league victory over Livonia Churchill.

Helmer scored the hat trick to lead the Shamrocks into the New Year with their sixth win without a loss. Helmer, a junior center, scored his first goal at 12:02 of the second period to give the Shamrocks a 4-0 lead and he scored twice in the third period when the game turned into a rout. Helmer's linemate, Jason Couture, added two goals and a pair of assists and the other winger, senior Jeff Lachapelle, added an assist.

Churchill freshman goalie Mark Felker, who played well in a 3-2 loss last month to CC, didn't have much of a chance against Helmer's line. Churchill fell to 5-4 overall.

"We've been off the ice for a

while (idle since Dec. 18) but we pulled together and came out hard," Helmer said. "We've got a lot of talent and if we can come together, we can make it work. We've slowed our game down a bit and it's opened up the passing lanes."

Pete Davis, Dan Hunt and Jon Heady added one goal each for the Shamrocks and senior goalie Mike Brunneau was sharp again in net. Recording single assists were Heady, Greg Vaquera, Chris Gonzalez and Chris Wagienka.

The Chargers broke the shutout bid late in the third period when center Jim Pollock scored with an assist from Mike Coon.

The lopsided game turned ugly at 14:13 of the second period when 14 penalties were called after a stoppage of play. Two CC players received game misconducts and one player from Churchill received a game misconduct.

The Chargers also lost center Jason Samelko early in the third period because of a knee injury.

"It was just a total bad team effort," Churchill forward Chris Kiehlner said.

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