

SIUE falls to Vanderbilt in Air Force Classic championship

by Eric Hess

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USAFA, Colo. – For a contest that was a one-possession game for a sizeable time, SIUE women's basketball may have felt like Saturday's Air Force Classic championship game against Vanderbilt was one that got away.

Vanderbilt, of the Southeastern Conference, improved to 7-1 while SIUE dropped to 2-5 after a 73-63 win over the Cougars.

"I really couldn't ask more of our team except maybe drop some of those shots late," said SIUE Head Coach [Paula Buscher](#). "This game hopefully will get us prepared and let us know what we need to do differently come tournament time. I was proud of how hard our team played today."

After the contest, SIUE's [Lauren White](#) was named to the All-Tournament team.

The Cougars held the lead after one period 18-17 and was down by just two points after 20 minutes of play 33-31 despite Vanderbilt hitting 7 of 14 shots from three-point range in the first half.

[Donschel Beck](#) led the Cougars offense with 14 points. She was followed by a foursome of players with nine points each – White, [Nakiah Bell](#), [Maddy Greeling](#) and [Gwen Adams](#).

"I thought we all played hard," said Beck. "Everyone did a little something to help us. That will strengthen us."

Buscher said it was one of the most of physical games she has seen as the Cougars' head coach. But SIUE stood up the Vanderbilt, outrebounding the Commodores 47-37 which included 23 offensive rebounds.

"I'm sure that took a little bit of wear and tear because we fought to the end," said Buscher.

After three periods, the lead came back to one point on a pair of free throws from Adams with 14 seconds left.

SIUE had a brief 51-50 lead with 8:02 left to play on a free throw by White, but Vandy responded with a layup by Rachel Bell 20 seconds later. Bell was one of four Vanderbilt players scoring in double figures with 10 points. Cierra Walker led all scored with 21 points, including five three-pointers. Christa Reed and Erin Whalen added 13 and 12 points, respectively.

After SIUE's [Nakiah Bell](#) knocked down a three-pointer with 6:28 left, Vandy's Rachel Bell answered back with a three-pointer of her own that started a 9-1 run for the Commodores.

SIUE still didn't go away, pulling to within two points 64-62 on a pair of free throws by White with 2:03 left. Vanderbilt, however, made its final run of the game edging the Cougars 9-1 in the final two minutes.

"We had our opportunities," said Buscher. "We just didn't knock down some of the shots late in the second half. We did some really good things tonight. I felt like if we had hit more free throws or a few more field goals it might have been a different game."

Air Force Classic All-Tournament Team

Taylor Gordon – UVU

[Lauren White](#) – SIUE

Kailin Davis – AF

Rachel Bell – Vanderbilt

Erin Whalen – Vanderbilt