

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Nashville, Tennessee, USA

## Vanderbilt Commodores

### Will Sheppard

Press Conference



**Q. What's it like coming down here and talking to all of us and unofficially kicking off college football?**

WILL SHEPPARD: It's definitely a surreal feeling being here and definitely excited to be here and blessed to be here. We had workouts at at 6:00 a.m. this morning, which nobody else did, but that's part of our process and I think what sets us apart from everybody else. Had to take a minute after those workout, to cool off so I wouldn't be sweating in this suit.

**Q. Would you mind kind of just starting by talking about the atmosphere, what the excitement level of this team, and what you guys are feeling in the locker room in trying to build off of last year's success?**

WILL SHEPPARD: I think the words I would use to describe all that would be confidence. There's this confidence, certain confidence in the locker room and throughout the whole facility and program that we're ready to get to this season, putting in the work and ready to showcase it.

**Q. Was that the biggest moment for you, catching that touchdown last year against Kentucky, and what can you tell us about the quarterback situation at Vanderbilt?**

WILL SHEPPARD: Yeah, I think definitely that was my biggest college football moment so far in my career. That was a big one for us and a big game.

Quarterback situation, we have AJ Swann who is set as the starter right now but he's going to keep working. He's got to earn it every day just like everybody else. We have got a bunch of guys after him that are very capable and that we trust to fill in spots if need be.

**Q. Playing in the SEC, you go against the best players in the country, and of course you had a big year last year: 776 yards, nine touchdowns. So far in your**

**college career, who is the best corner that you've gone up against in a game?**

WILL SHEPPARD: There's been a bunch of good ones. Being in the SEC, everybody is pretty good. Freshman year, I didn't play against him that much but Jaycee Horn who is on the Panthers now, he was really good.

Last year, Chris from Mizzou, he was here yesterday, he's really good. I played 7-on-7 high school for a year. Cam Smith for South Carolina, he's really good, too. So there's a bunch of guys.

**Q. You come from a football-crazy state, yet you went to Vanderbilt. What drew to you Vanderbilt and what's been the best thing that you've experienced there?**

WILL SHEPPARD: Coming out of high school, Vanderbilt is my only Power Five offer. So I took it and ran with it, and here I am.

Best moment is probably that Kentucky game. Just the feeling after the game of getting that win in the locker room.

**Q. What have you seen in AJ and his growth from last year to now, and how important is it for your offensive production, that not just you and him but the other wide receivers and him are on the same page from day one?**

WILL SHEPPARD: Him, I've seen a lot of improvement, on the football field, of course and getting stronger and doing what he's got to do there.

But from a leadership aspect, he's really improved there. He's more vocal. He's holding meetings. We are having film sessions. We are on the field doing stuff, working chemistry with him. Definitely confident in him and excited to have a second year with him to build that chemistry and showcase that.

The receiver group, I feel like we are won one of the more underrated groups in the country. We have guys you might not know about yet but coming on this season, I feel like

we all put the work in to showcase that. There's a lot of guys: Quincy Skinner; Jayden; Gamarion; Daveon Walker, who is a young guy who I think everybody in our group I feel like are at the top of the SEC. People might not know it yet, but I think this season will show that.

**Q. When you open up against Hawai'i to kick off the season, you guys will be the first SEC team to open up 2023. How excited this group and how excited are you to have all eyes be on you that Saturday?**

WILL SHEPPARD: Definitely excited. You know, getting that week zero game, everybody is just antsy, ready for college football season.

So everybody is going to be tuned in I feel like and being the first SEC team, I think we're looking forward to it and trying to start off the season with a good note.

**Q. You talked about the momentum that Kentucky win at Kentucky built for you guys. What is it about going against a team like Kentucky and obviously the respect that you guys had to achieve that, what did it do for you guys mentally?**

WILL SHEPPARD: I think any week you go, we are playing in the SEC, the best conference in the world. You're going against top talent no matter who the team is, Kentucky, Florida, Georgia, anybody, you're going to be playing with the best players, best athletes. The momentum from that game, you saw it carried on to the Florida game with a big win there, and I think it's just going to continue to grow and carry us into this season, too.

**Q. Last year you had a lot of back-and-forth at quarterback, and even in games, you were going back-and-forth at quarterback. Having AJ whack this year, is there a benefit to having the same quarterback, and having the same quarterback for the whole season instead of going back-and-forth?**

WILL SHEPPARD: Yeah, I think there's like a stability aspect there. Having the game guy, you look, we've had Coach Lea and we've had pretty much the same coaching staff since he got here, and being able to have that, it creates more chemistry within.

I think the better the chemistry is off the field, the better it will be on the field. Having AJ coming in his second year, not only are we going to be more confident in him but he's going to have more confidence in his self to do what he needs to do.

**Q. So be in the third year of the coaching staff, and yesterday the announcement that Clark is going to be**

**around for a while, how important is it to keep building on that continuity and the ultimate goal of what you guys are trying to build?**

WILL SHEPPARD: You look at all the greatest programs in the world and throughout history, their coaches have been there for a while and they have been doing it for a long time. I think that's very important.

Like I said, building chemistry off the field is going to lead to chemistry on the field, and being able to communicate effectively and getting done the things you need to get done.

**Q. Any games on the schedule you've got circled that would mean a lot to you this season?**

WILL SHEPPARD: I think every game is pretty much circled. Looking forward to playing everybody. There are certain games, of course, where you're going to have more, not necessarily more attention to, but might be more excited for. I personally like playing the bigger teams, the teams that are up there in the rankings and stuff like that. The Georgias, the Tennessees, playing against South Carolina, teams like that, I'm looking forward to them all.

THE MODERATOR: If there's one thing you enjoy the most about playing an SEC game what is it?

WILL SHEPPARD: The atmosphere. It's crazy. Going into those big stadiums, especially teams like Georgia, Tennessee, 'Bama, you know, especially those night games, it's unlike anything else.

**Q. In what did you try do this past summer and now to get better as a wide receiver? You had chances in the past but this summer in particular, what do you try to do to get much better as a wide receiver.**

WILL SHEPPARD: I think the thing that's been the big difference this summer is I've been getting more grades and scouts and stuff like that. I've been looking at the weaknesses trying to turn those into positives going this season.

**Q. (Anything in particular)?**

WILL SHEPPARD: Just certain things within my game that need to be improved.

**Q. What role do you think the City of Nashville plays in recruiting for Vanderbilt and what did you tell football coaches about having the opportunity to live here?**

WILL SHEPPARD: Nashville is a great city obviously. It's



an upcoming, growing city, continually growing. Vanderbilt in general is in the middle of the city, so you've got all these connects from everywhere. They live everywhere in the country. There's CEOs that live here. There's all kinds of internships you can do here. There's that, and not talking just straight football, on the business side of that, there's a lot of great chances to meet people and connect and grow yourself.

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