

CP Sports

# Performance coach helps boost clutch hitting

Hitting with two outs is now a major strength for the No. 1-ranked Commodores

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Vanderbilt was so serious about improving its clutch hitting in 2007 that coach Tim Corbin brought in a motivational speaker to help the process.

In January, the Commodores received classroom-like lectures from Brian Cain, a self-described "Peak Performance Coach" whose specialty is teaching baseball players to clear their minds in order to relieve pressure and function more efficiently.

The top-ranked Commodores have delivered with impressive consistency this season. They are batting .302 and have 109 runs batted in with two outs. Both totals are far ahead of 2006 numbers.

Corbin said the teachings of Cain, a former college baseball player, have been invaluable.

"It's not something we depend on, but he taught a coping mechanism which the kids can go back to when their minds are speeding up," Corbin said.

"You try to clear everything out of your mind so that when you step foot into the batter's box, it just becomes an action to where you're seeing the ball and reacting."

Improving clutch hitting became a team goal after Vanderbilt batted .259 with two outs in 2006.

In batting cages, players are placed under two-out situations. In team scrimmages, two-out RBIs were rewarded with more points.

"Every day it's a point of emphasis," VU first baseman Brad French said. "The more times you're in that situation, the better you're going to do in the



Vanderbilt's Dominic de la Osa is congratulated after a homer in a recent game. The Commodores have improved markedly in one major statistic this year — batting with two outs. The production in that area is greatly increased and is a big reason VU is ranked No. 1 in the country.

real game."

French said Commodore hitters are taught to be more aggressive with two outs and baserunners in scoring position.

"You know the pitcher is coming right at you with his best stuff because they don't want that run to score," he said. "You want to be selective, but you want to find something up and go after it. You don't want to get behind in the count in a big RBI situation, because then it's the pitcher's game."

The paradoxical key, as Cain preached, is to be aggressive while remaining relaxed.

Five Commodores with at least 20 at-bats in two-out situations are batting .300 or higher. Second baseman Alex Feinberg leads the way at .469.

"That's evolution," Corbin said. "I don't think we could have done that two years ago. You define something you want to do, you model it and then you try to execute it. Once you execute it, you continue to reinforce it verbally. It's like a motor skill."

"Our attention to it has been monumental. It's not luck."

Becoming more productive at money time has helped Vanderbilt to race to its best start in school history and sit atop the national rankings for the first time in school history.

"I've always equated it to blocking a punt in football," Corbin said. "The game can just turn on a dime. Two-run RBIs are the biggest RBIs in baseball."

**The 'K' King:** Vanderbilt junior pitcher David Price became the school's all-time strikeout king when he fanned nine Kentucky batters last Friday. He moved past Mike Willis' mark of 350 and currently has 355.

Price, projected by *Baseball America* to be the No. 1 overall pick in this year's Major League Baseball Amateur Draft, is 6-0 this season with a 3.03 earned-run average. He has struck out 108 batters in 74.1 innings. [CP]

Mike Strainger