With a 7-15 record, eight games below .500, Vanderbilt's baseball team was in danger of not making the NCAA Tournament field for the first time in seven years.

What happened after that makes this the best coaching job Commodores Coach Tim Corbin has done on West End.

Corbin overcame losing key players from the first Vanderbilt team to make the College World Series.

The pitching staff was young and inexperienced. Corbin could not have turned the season around if not for the job turned in by veteran pitching coach Derek Johnson.

They closed the regular season with a 10-2 record and carried over the momentum by winning their first four games in the SEC Tournament, placing them in Sunday's championship game against Mississippi State.

Thanks to five shutout relief innings by State redshirt freshman Ross Mitchell, the former Blackman High southpaw and son of former Sounds and Major League pitcher Charlie Mitchell, State blanked the Commodores, 3-0.

Both teams heard their names called when ESPN announced the field of 64 on Memorial Day. Vanderbilt is the No. 2 seed in the Raleigh (N.C.) regional and opens play Friday against UNC-Wilmington. Mississippi State landed in the Tallahassee (Fla.) regional as a 2-seed and takes on Samford in the opening round.

In recent years, Corbin could afford to take a private peek ahead and get a glimpse of his

team's future.

He had the horses then. Now he's bringing a lot of ponies to the racetrack. There will be no looking ahead this time.

"It's a UNC-Wilmington regional and that's all it is. Nothing more. Nothing less,'' Corbin told reporters after he learned their destination.

This area saw three teams make the field. Belmont, noted more for its basketball team making the NCAA Tournament, put a modest string of going to the baseball tournament for the second straight year under veteran Bruins Coach Dave Jarvis. And Austin Peay won the OVC Tournament to get a bid to play No. 1 seed Oregon in Eugene.

But not many teams in the field attempting to reach Omaha, can match Vanderbilt's rocky road to Raleigh. As they will be taking Chance the Rally Beaver along for the road trip, Chance better be on top of his game.

The worst is behind the Commodores. They proved coming down the stretch they could play with the best in the country.

They don't have a David Price, a Mike Minor or Sonny Gray to virtually guarantee a win on the mound. They don't have a Casey Weathers to close the door shut in late innings. There is no Pedro Alvarez to hit clutch home runs.

Corbin knows there is little room for mistakes with this team. They can't continue to make mental errors in the field or at the plate.

When the pitching was green and unpredictable, Derek Johnson went back to the basics with his players. Doing the little things turned into big results.

It's the way the whole team must play. They can't afford to rely on a five-run ninth inning to eliminate Florida. They pulled off a triple steal in that game, a rarity at any level of baseball.

Ranked 12th in preseason, the Commodores are No. 37 by the coaches. It is their first appearance in months.

It's nothing to get cocky about. It should sound a warning to the players. Don't believe your press clippings when you are down. Don't believe them when you win.

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