

Miami Men's Basketball Clips

2019-20

Don't define Miami's Dejan Vasiljevic as only a 3-point shooter

ESPN
Dan Hajducky
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University of Miami sharpshooter Dejan Vasiljevic has made a life out of redefining himself over and over.

Born in Calgary and Alberta-bound until age 6, Vasiljevic and his family would eventually move to Melbourne, Australia, more than 8,500 miles away -- essentially, the opposite side of the world.

"I'm Canadian," the 6-foot-3 combo guard notes without a trace of Australian accent. "But Australia has been home for most of my life."

The son of semipro Serbian handball players, basketball wasn't a priority in his youth. In fact, sports included pretty much everything but basketball.

"My mom was really into soccer," Vasiljevic says. "So, growing up, I played that and tennis for fun with friends. Cricket, too. I didn't really pick basketball up until I was 12."

That might come as a shock to Canes fans: Vasiljevic is currently third in the ACC in 3-pointers made. He's also ninth in 3-point percentage and seventh in true shooting percentage (minimum 50 3-point attempts). With 172 career treys, he's 10th on Miami's career list.

In Melbourne, when Dejan's father, Todor, saw that his son had a knack for basketball, he wanted to mold his game after the late, great Croatian player Drazen Petrovic, the early European expat who helped pave the way for the truly global modern NBA.

"My dad idolized him," Vasiljevic recalls. "He would cut old black-and-white footage so I could see how passionate he was. He wanted me to play like he did."

"He would point and say, 'That's who you can become.'"

That passion took Vasiljevic to the Australian Institute of Sport, and soon afterward, he blossomed on the under-17, U18 and U19 Australian national teams. In 2014, Vasiljevic was an all-tournament team member at the U-17 FIBA World Championship, leading Australia to a silver medal against a United States squad that included current NBA players Jayson Tatum and Josh Jackson.

Given his pedigree, American colleges came after Vasiljevic in hot pursuit.

"Stanford, Miami, LSU, Louisville, Cal-Berkeley," Vasiljevic says nonchalantly. "Miami was the best opportunity, academically and on the court. The coaches wanted to give me an opportunity, and my family loved Miami, so it seemed like the best fit."

Hurricanes head coach Jim Larrañaga was elated.

"DJ is a tough, hard-nosed defender with a unique set of offensive skills," Larrañaga says. "He's got a high basketball IQ, he [can] fill up the basket from deep and has a great feel for the game."

"[We] like recruiting guys from winning situations. DJ is a great competitor, has proven himself in championships on the international level and he's been a terrific fit in our program."

Vasiljevic had an immediate impact, playing every game as a freshman in 2016-17. He set a Miami rookie record for 3-pointers made despite coming off the bench and playing just 17.5 minutes per game. He was starting by his sophomore season, nearly doubling his rebounding total while becoming one of the ACC's most lethal long-distance men, improving his 3-point field goal percentage from 35 percent to 41 percent.

"The first two years were a learning curve," Vasiljevic admits. "It's insane how quick the game is being played. Here, you're playing against bigger, stronger guys who can pass and move."

"I had to consider that and really work on my defense. I'm never gonna be the quickest guy out there, so I always know where I need to be, in the right position at all times. I scout the other team really well."

Another thing about Vasiljevic: He is meticulous. Ask his roommate.

"DJ is very organized," laughs center Ebuka Izundu, Vasiljevic's roommate for the past two years. Vasiljevic's punctiliousness is a subject of debate between the two. "We're both clean ... but he's very clean."

"He plans ahead, he gets things right," Izundu adds. "He comes an hour before games, gets treatment, shoots for a beat, then [centers] his body."

Vasiljevic's meticulousness manifests itself in a pregame routine that resembles a hardened mine worker rather than that of a 21-year-old college junior.

"DJ lives in the gym," Larrañaga says. "He is

constantly perfecting his shot and works tirelessly to improve all facets of his game."

"On game days, I do things at a certain time," Vasiljevic says. "I always stretch with my strength coach at a certain time, always get taped at a certain time. Then I have little pre-game rituals with the team -- I always follow my schedule the day before and the day of a game, so I know what to do and when to do it."

Outside of team scouting sessions, Vasiljevic comes in for solo video scouting. And that nearly 40 percent career mark from 3-point range? Not an accident.

"And I always have to make 300 shots before a game," Vasiljevic asserts. "Well ... 305, actually ... I always do things in order. Always."

Vasiljevic's diligence is also literally embodied in his physical transformation from his sophomore to junior season.

"DJ got injured last year and worked tirelessly to recover in time for this season," Larrañaga remembers. "He got in the best shape of his career and has the opportunity to leave the University of Miami as one of the top shooters in program history."

Shockingly, it wasn't Vasiljevic who led the metamorphosis.

"All the credit goes to my girlfriend, Gemma," he says.

If that sounds cliché, think again; Gemma St. Louis is a pre-med neuroscience and Spanish major at Miami. She engineered a diet and lifestyle plan -- two meals a day, breakfast and an early dinner, and cut out carbs -- that enabled Vasiljevic to lose 25 pounds, shedding 10 percent body fat, while recovering.

Miami has stumbled a bit since starting ACC play. The Hurricanes are 4-9 from the beginning of December and 9-11 for the season. Come March, Vasiljevic knows he will have a decision to make.

"I graduate in May," he says. "I could come back for my senior year and work on a master's or declare [for the NBA draft]."

"But I'm not worried about that right now. I'm just trying to concentrate on the season. I just try to be efficient and do my job. Do what I can for my teammates and do the little things to help my team win."

For a young man who is the composite of cultures and countries on opposite sides of the planet, Vasiljevic has no qualms about his place in the world.

Whatever It Takes

Christy Cabrera Chirinos
HurricaneSports.com
Sep. 25, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – He arrived at Miami two years ago with a glittering resume.

Jordan Brand Classic Regional Team selection. All-Met Player of the Year. DC State Athletic Association MVP. Washington, D.C. Gatorade Player of the Year. And an ESPN Top 50 ranking.

Chris Lykes, for most of his basketball playing career, had known nothing but success.

Then, during his sophomore year as a Hurricane, things changed.

Miami, hampered by injuries and depth issues, struggled through a 14-18 season. There were just five conference wins and there was no postseason berth to celebrate.

Lykes posted impressive numbers -- his 16.2 points-per-game average led the Hurricanes and ranked ninth in the ACC. His individual performances earned him praise from some of the biggest names in college basketball, but the guard wasn't happy.

His individual success meant little if the Hurricanes weren't winning and so, with his junior season looming and a high-profile season opener against Louisville now less than two months away, Lykes has vowed to do everything in his power to make sure this year, Miami is a winner.

"Whatever it's going to take for this team to win more games, I'm going to do," Lykes said. "Whether that means getting more assists or being the defensive leader of the team, I'm going to do it. Winning is what I care about. I think I help set the tone, but at the same time, we have a lot of guys who are hungry. Our freshmen are eager to show that they can play at this level. We've got a lot of guys on the same page right now, but I do feel like it starts with my intensity on both ends of the floor, so, it's a good job for me."

That mindset, that willingness to go above and beyond and to make sure his teammates are involved is exactly what Hurricanes coaches want to hear from their standout junior.

Before Lykes and the Hurricanes traveled to Italy this summer for a foreign tour that included three games against European opponents, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga challenged the 5-foot-7 Lykes to take his game to the next level by not only working on his defense, but finding ways to make his teammates better

and be a leader on and off the court.

The message was heard, with Larrañaga saying he noticed an improved defensive intensity from Lykes and an effort from the guard to distribute the ball evenly.

That, Larrañaga said will make a difference once the season begins and the Hurricanes are facing some of the top teams in the nation in conference play.

"I think he made a sincere effort in doing all the things the coaches were asking him to do," Larrañaga said. "Be a leader on the court, be a leader when you're on the bench, be a leader when you're in the huddle. Talk more. Be more positive. Chris has a tendency to be emotional and we don't want him to lose that. We just want him to channel it in a positive way. ... He handled everything [in Italy]. I was very, very pleased and excited to see the steps he's taken in the right direction."

While he understands why it's important he become the leader his coaches have asked him to be, Lykes concedes that's a task that hasn't always come naturally.

As a freshman, he didn't feel right speaking up while surrounded by older teammates. Even last year as his production on the court increased, Lykes tried to find his voice. But there were times he still deferred to the veterans in the locker room, especially as the losses kept mounting.

Now one of those veterans himself, Lykes knows he's got to step out of his comfort level, especially given how many newcomers are on the Miami roster this season.

He even did some of that Wednesday during the Hurricanes' first practice of the season, pulling a younger teammate aside to offer encouragement and guidance during the workout.

"I think naturally I've always been more of a show-by-example guy, but coaches have really stressed to me that they need me to be a little more vocal. I started a little bit last year, but I think I've matured a lot more and I can do even better job," Lykes said. "I want the young guys to see how intense it's going to be because we're not having a season like we did last year."

And while Miami's coaches have asked Lykes to change some of his approach heading into his junior season, one thing they want to see stay the same is Lykes' passion for the game.

In his first two years at Miami, he's become a

fan favorite in South Florida and beyond.

His ability to drain long shots and connect on no-look passes often draw cheers, while the fearlessness he shows against opponents with a clear size advantage has earned him respect.

"He's an exciting player. You can expect the unexpected from him," Larrañaga said. "I'm not surprised by the unexpected, but he'll make a great move and there's probably no one else on the court that can do it. He's made so many plays in his first two years where the crowd just responded. ... He's like a little dynamo. ... He'll have a very good year if the other guys play well, too."

Next in Miami's PA Pipeline

Alex Schwartz
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CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Lonnie Walker IV was the first one-and-done player in program history.

Ja'Quan Newton scored 1,145 points, a top-30 mark all-time at The U.

Davon Reed won ACC Scholar-Athlete of the Year and went No. 32 in the NBA Draft.

All three hail from the Philadelphia area and, clearly, made their mark in Coral Gables under Jim Larrañaga. Walker matriculated from Reading, Pa., while Newton came right from the City of Brotherly Love and Reed did so from nearby Ewing, N.J., and a Philly-based AAU team.

Miami freshman Isaiah Wong came to The U by way of Monsignor Bonner in Philadelphia and knows of the ties bonding his prior home with his new one.

"It's just a good opportunity to be in a position they were at," Wong said. "I was really following Lonnie Walker. When Miami first recruited me, I was looking up good players and I saw Lonnie Walker played [one season here]. I saw he was from Philly, so he was one of the people I really followed."

A 6-foot-4-inch guard originally from Piscataway, N.J., Wong spent the final two years of his high school tenure at Bonner. It was there that he truly burst onto the scene as a big-time recruit, one who would ultimately finish No. 78 in Rivals' rankings.

Wong averaged 22.2 points, 6.9 rebounds and 3.3 assists per game as a junior playing in the Philadelphia Catholic League, the same league Newton left in 2014 as its all-time leading scorer and a Rivals top-40 prospect.

"I've talked to Newton a whole bunch of times," Wong said. "I [have also] talked to Lonnie a couple of times. They usually come in throughout these past months, just walking in and playing with us."

During the recruiting process, Wong says Coach L did not harp on the Philadelphia connection too much. However, the names did come up, including one in particular.

"He wasn't really talking about them a lot, but they were mentioned, especially Lonnie [because] he was from [the Philly area] and he was like a top [recruit]," Wong said. "I feel like

I can be in the same situation as him, in coming from Philly."

Wong has already had the opportunity to don a Miami uniform three times, averaging 14.0 points on 46.2 percent shooting on the Hurricanes' foreign tour to Italy in August.

The backcourt scorer displayed an impressive game, one that syncs up well with what he feels are his best attributes on the court.

"I say I can hit open shots, I can dribble and I'm a good offensive player," Wong said. "I can play defense. I pretty much can do anything on the court, I feel like. [I'm able to] get players shots and get my own, too."

Wong, who enjoys watching James Harden, feels his strength and defensive focus are two aspects of his game he needs to improve on.

As those improvements come, Wong will look to become the next standout on the list of Hurricanes to go from Philadelphia to the Miami record books.

Beverly Next in Line

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CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Harlond Beverly is aware of who came before him and knows he has big shoes to fill.

A 6-foot-4-inch guard, the Miami freshman was one of the most highly-touted players in the country in the class of 2019. The Detroit native, who comes to The U by way of Montverde Academy (Fla.), placed No. 54 nationally in the 247Sports composite rankings.

Beyond his stature as a ballyhooed recruit, though, Beverly is also stepping into a spot at Miami that has consistently featured high-level success during Jim Larrañaga's eight-year tenure.

While different in their own ways, players such as Bruce Brown Jr., Sheldon McClellan, Trey McKinney-Jones, Davon Reed and Lonnie Walker IV have all occupied the role of a long wing for Coach L, en route to NBA careers.

"That was the focal point of the recruitment," Beverly said. "UM showing me highlights of guys that they had prior to me and showing how they can take things . . . they weren't necessarily as good at and making them better. So, I feel like that was great. It was very appealing for me, so I can improve."

Beverly cited Brown and Walker as players the staff showed him a lot of, also mentioning Shane Larkin, the 2013 ACC Player of the Year and also an NBA player, albeit as a point guard.

Miami, one of two ACC schools to have a player selected in the NBA Draft each of the last three years, clearly knows what it takes to develop wings. However, Beverly also knows much of the onus to keep the lineage alive falls on him.

"I have to give 100 percent every day," Beverly said. "That's what [the coaches said] they did, that's how they improved every day. So, if I want to be where they are at, I've got to do the same thing."

Beverly sees similarities between his style and that of both Brown and Walker, specifically referencing his defensive abilities and overall knowledge of the game.

The 2018 Michigan Class D Player of the Year at Southfield Christian, Beverly does not model his game after anyone who came before him in Coral Gables, or anyone else for

that matter, but rather says, "I just want to be the best version of me."

What does that entail? Well, Beverly lists his height, athleticism, defense, passing and scoring ability as his strengths on the hardwood.

Those are some of the traits possessed by Hurricanes who filled his role before him and found major success.

"It means I've got a lot of work to do," Beverly said of being next in line behind that group. "I'm excited for the season. I can improve; I'm just excited for it."

That excitement will become reality Nov. 5 at the Watsco Center, when Miami hosts Louisville, expected to be ranked top-10 nationally, in the season opener.

Walked His Own Way

Alex Schwartz
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CORAL GABLES, Fla. – When Baltimore native Anthony Walker went to Hope Academy in Stockbridge, Ga., for his freshman year of high school it was not because of basketball. At all.

In fact, Walker, now a freshman forward at Miami, was not even on the hoops team while there.

Rather, his first time playing competitive basketball was as a sophomore, when he returned to the Old Line State and helped lead Perry Hall High School to the first state title in program history. His junior year, Walker again guided Perry Hall to the 4A state crown.

After that—well, basketball factored more into his next decision. Walker made the choice to attend Brewster Academy in Wolfeboro, N.H., for his senior year.

A stellar academic school with a powerhouse hoops program that has featured numerous NBA players such as Will Barton, Donovan Mitchell, Thomas Robinson and TJ Warren, Brewster was the spot Walker felt he had to go for his final year before college.

“I just talked about it for a long time with my family and my mom,” Walker said. “She didn’t want me to go to a different state so soon because I was still in high school, but that just being such a prestigious school, being in one of the best high school leagues [and having] other players on the team that were going everywhere else, like Texas and Ohio State, I just had to go. It was great competition and I just wanted to get better.”

Along with those Texas- (Kai Jones) and Ohio State-bound (Alonzo Gaffney) teammates was Jalen Lecque, who signed a deal with the Phoenix Suns straight out of Brewster. All three were top-55 prospects in the 247Sports Composite rankings, while Joel Brown (Cal) was another highly-touted 2019 recruit whom Walker faced every day in practice.

“Just going against and playing with players that were better than me, going against players that were also the man on their old high school team before Brewster,” Walker explained, “I learned how to play a role that I would have had to learn playing here at The U. So, it was a great experience.”

The NEPSAC, arguably the top prep league in America, features numerous post-graduate, fifth-year players. For Walker, already rela-

tively young for his grade, that meant consistently taking on opponents who were not just extremely talented, but also older than him.

He felt his competitiveness improve throughout the season, which featured a run to the NEPSAC AAA title game. He also felt his confidence rise, both from his good days against elite competition and from bad days when he still hung tough.

While Walker certainly improved on the hardwood while at Brewster, he thinks his time in New England also helped him off the court.

“It definitely prepared me very well for college, me being away from my mom and . . . having to manage my own time and take care of my own self,” Walker said. “So, I think I matured pretty well.”

Now that he is at the college level, the 6-foot-9-inch wing with pogo stick-like bounce, has set some general goals for his freshman campaign.

The goals, though, may not be what one would think, as they are not about numbers or accolades. Rather, they are about continuing to grow and develop, like the decision to attend Brewster was.

“Just to get adjusted to the collegiate level,” Walker said. “Just playing against the best and hopefully making a great impact on this team so going into my sophomore year I can become more of a leader.”

Walker recognizes the needs to improve both his handles and his jump-shot, but knows his leaping ability will help him from the start.

“I heard I’ve got a pretty good second jump, so I feel like I’m a good rebounder,” Walker said of his strengths. “I feel like I’m a great athlete. I feel like I can jump and chase balls in the air that most players can’t.”

One other thing most players also can’t do is play in the nation’s premier college conference, the ACC. However, four years after not even playing high school hoops, Anthony Walker is ready to do just that.

Hardwood Homecoming

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MIAMI, Fla. – Chris Lykes spent most of his morning answering question after question at Operation Basketball, the ACC's annual pre-season media day event in Charlotte, North Carolina.

But the moment his return flight landed in Miami, Lykes' focus was on one thing: finding the fastest way possible to the American Airlines Arena where he hoped to meet his Hurricanes teammates in time to watch the Miami Heat host the San Antonio Spurs.

For most of the basketball fans at the AAA on Tuesday, the Heat's preseason opener likely just marked the unofficial start of a new NBA season. For Lykes and the Hurricanes, though, it was the opportunity to hopefully see two of their own play at the game's highest level.

In the Miami Heat's red and black, former Hurricanes guard Davon Reed. Suiing up for the San Antonio Spurs, former Hurricanes guard Lonnie Walker IV, the No. 18 pick in the 2018 NBA Draft and a former teammate of Lykes' at Miami.

For Lykes and the Hurricanes, that made an otherwise routine preseason game anything but.

"That's probably one of my best friends. To be able to him do what I want to do in my life one day, it's cool. I tried to get here right off the plane to support him," said Lykes, who sat with teammates Nysier Brooks, Harlond Beverly, Deng Gak, Filippos Gkogkos, Willie Herenton, Anthony Walker and Isaiah Wong. "These guys, most of them haven't even met Lonnie or Davon and they're still here supporting them. That shows you what the culture is at Miami."

That support and that Miami culture is part of what made Tuesday night's game memorable for both Walker and Reed themselves. Though the two did not play together at Miami, they built a relationship after Reed served as Walker's official host when the former McDonald's and Jordan Brand All-American visited Coral Gables during the recruiting process.

Since, both have been rooting for each other.

"He showed a lot this summer in Summer League. He's a great talent. I knew that when Coach [Jim Larrañaga] was recruiting him and I hosted him on his visit," Reed said. "I'm

glad that we got to see him put on that Miami Hurricanes uniform. ... I've got much love for him and he's got much love for me. But when we're between those lines, it's nothing but competition."

Said Walker, "That's the dream. I think this shows what type of players we produce at the University of Miami and what type of players Coach Larrañaga picks and how he produces them to become NBA players. Tonight is about showing what we've got."

Along with having played at Miami for Larrañaga, Walker and Reed share similar goals entering the season: both are looking to prove they're worthy of roster spots for their respective teams.

Walker tore the meniscus in his right knee during his first preseason game last year and spent part of his season with the Spurs' G League team in Austin where he averaged 16.6 points while learning the Spurs' system.

He eventually appeared in 17 NBA games last season, but now healthy, Walker wants to be a consistent part of the rotation for the five-time champion Spurs.

"He's made a big step forward through the summer. He gained an understanding in how to play, how to use his athleticism in a positive way and better decision-making, that sort of thing," San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said of Walker. "There's a lot of great athletes in this league, but those who figure out how to play and make their teams better are the ones you really value. So we are trying to get him down that path."

Reed, meanwhile, knows he faces a challenge to make the 15-man roster in Miami where he recently signed an Exhibit 10 contract with the Heat. His deal is limited to a \$50,000 guarantee if he were to play for Miami's G League affiliate in Sioux Falls this season, but Reed is hoping to show the Heat he's worthy of a two-way deal or even something more.

"I just feel like [the Heat and I] kind of share the same identity. Nothing's been given to me in my short career so far. I feel like I've kind of been counted out and I feel like they like the underdogs that are scrappy," said Reed, who was a second-round draft pick of the Phoenix Suns in 2017 and split last time last season between the Indiana Pacers and their G League affiliate, the Fort Wayne Mad Ants. "Despite what's happened to me so far, I'm not going to let that slow me down. I know what I can and will accomplish and what I'm capable of and I'm looking forward to being

here and finding my footing here."

Said Heat coach Erik Spoelstra of Reed, "He fits in very well. He has Heat DNA just in terms of his competitiveness, his drive, his want, his toughness. All of those things tend to play well with us. He just has to keep showing it every day. There are no guarantees, but our program, we feel, is a good one for people who embrace it and are able to be consistent and reliable, even as they go to Sioux Falls."

Whatever the season holds for both Reed and Walker, hopes are high, not only for them, but for the college program for which they once played and is looking to return to postseason form after a tough showing last year.

There's hope, too, the number of Hurricanes in the NBA will continue to grow.

"It's a testament to Coach L and his staff, the job they've been able to do in recruiting to get these good players, have them fit into the system and have them buy in to what Coach L preaches," Reed said. "I think he teaches some things we can all use when we hopefully become pros, especially on the defensive end. But he also teaches you how to play the right way and the score will take care of itself. I look forward to the next wave of players coming in and hopefully making it to the NBA. He's done a good job the last few years getting somebody drafted. It's been awesome and I look forward to that continuing."

Stone Comes Home

Alex Schwartz
HurricaneSports.com
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CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Keith Stone had a bevy of options to pick from when deciding where to spend his final year as a college basketball player.

After making the choice to transfer from the University of Florida, Stone considered programs such as Arizona, Arkansas, Maryland, Nevada and USC. Ultimately, though, the allure of playing close to home won out and he made the call to head to the University of Miami as a graduate transfer.

"It's a pretty funny story, Coach L has been in my corner since day one, ever since I was a kid," Stone said of Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga. "He always wanted me to go to the University of Miami. He [was at] almost all of my travel ball games when I was younger and the opportunity to come here just seemed right with the guys.

"The year they had [last season], I want to help them improve and teach the young guys like Anthony Walker," Stone continued about why he selected Miami. "But overall, I just came here for family because everyone can come see me play now."

A native of nearby Deerfield Beach, Fla., Stone graduated from Zion Lutheran High School as a consensus four-star, top-100 prospect. After redshirting at Florida as a freshman in 2015-16, he helped the Gators to 68 victories over the past three years, including five in the NCAA Tournament.

The 6-foot-8-inch redshirt senior forward averaged 6.2 points per game during his time at Florida, including 8.8 per outing in 2017-18, and started 39 contests.

His career as a Gator, however, came to a sudden halt Jan. 19 in a road game at Georgia. Stone was off to a nice start in the rivalry contest, tallying eight points in nine minutes, but when he went for a chase-down block, he landed awkwardly and tore his ACL, ending his season.

"The day it happened, I thought my career was over," Stone explained. "I thought the sport wasn't for me. 'I got hurt on my ACL, there's nothing coming back from this,' [was what went through my mind], but the more days I work at it, the confidence is growing again. I'm in a new area and new place with new coaches and I just feel a lot happier."

Fast-forward nine months and Stone is clos-

ing in on finishing the rehab process. While he still has work to do, he sees himself getting stronger, cutting and jumping better, as well as doing more lateral movement.

"It's been a grind," Stone said. "It [had] been a tough couple weeks [at first], but overall, it has been great to me because I'm losing weight. The coaches have been great, just pushing me to be really good."

Stone has spent a lot of time in the training room working with physical therapist Julia Rapicavoli and athletic trainer Cory Kaplan. Strength & conditioning coach Phil Baier, hired just a few weeks ago, has also gone straight to work on trying to get Stone back to full strength.

While the names and faces of the staff helping him may be fairly new to the first-year Hurricane, Stone is grateful for the support he has received during his rehabilitation.

"Cory has been a great help, he's helped me through a lot of things," Stone said. "Julia . . . has been great helping me with everything and I appreciate everything she's done for me out here, working me out and spending a lot of one-on-one time with me. [She is] just getting me back the proper way instead of the quickest way."

Stone is not yet ready to return to game action and he is not setting a timeline for himself of when he wants to back on the court in that capacity. Rather, he thinks he will have a feeling of when that time is right.

"I'm not going to push it and I'm not going to just sit there and baby it," Stone explained, "but I'll know in a practice when I'm ready to come back."

When that time does indeed come, the Hurricanes will welcome Stone's presence on the hardwood with open arms, while his family, of course, will be just a short drive away to come watch him play.

Brooks Brings Winning Ways to The U

Alex Schwartz
HurricaneSports.com
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CORAL GABLES, Fla. – In three years at the University of Cincinnati, Nysier Brooks was a part of 89 victories, including two AAC Tournament championships.

Few players in college basketball can boast the same type of winning pedigree as the 6-foot-11 center from Philadelphia. And now, after he decided to transfer to the University of Miami, it is the Hurricanes who will benefit from Brooks' experience.

"I feel like I can bring a winning culture and a winning leadership because I have been on teams that have had 28-plus wins each season my last three years. So, I just feel like me showing the younger fellas not what to do, but how to do it and how to go about certain things [is something I can add]," Brooks said. "When it's time to be serious, be serious. There are going to be times for fun and games, that's part of basketball, but I just really want to impact them on how hard they need to work, to let them know that playing hard is not something you can just turn on and off.

"You got to work hard in the weight room, you got to work hard in practice, you got to work hard in the training room and then you have to come in here and work hard by yourself," Brooks continued. "Because [you get better] when you come in the gym at night working hard, two or three hours a night, analyzing and dissecting your game and trying to overcome [your obstacles]."

After averaging 8.1 points, 6.3 rebounds and 1.5 blocks per game while starting 35 contests in 2018-19, Brooks had myriad choices when he elected to transfer following the season. One of those was the chance to follow his departed coach, Mick Cronin, to UCLA. Another was 2019 NCAA runner-up, Texas Tech, while other programs such as Baylor, Georgia, LSU, Virginia Tech and West Virginia were involved.

Brooks ended up making the choice to attend Miami. The connection he felt with Jim Larrañaga and his coaching staff during the recruiting process when he was a high school standout was still there and that meant a lot to the defensive stalwart.

"Miami was a place that was highly recruiting me before I committed to Cincinnati. We had a wonderful relationship coming into my commitment to Cincinnati," Brooks explained. "Even after I committed, they wished me the best of luck and just wished that I would con-

tinue being the person that I was even after the process of coming to Cincinnati.

"When I entered my name in the portal, a lot of schools were hitting me up. A lot of schools that I'm not going to mention were giving me some backlash, but Miami just showed that they were a respectful group. The coaches were well put together—class and commitment," Brooks added. "So, when I left Cincinnati, I was like, 'Okay, I'm going to see what options I have, who I like and who loves me' because you have to go with who loves you. I just felt like Miami had the same energy they had before and after I committed to Cincinnati, and when I put my name in the portal."

Ever since getting to Coral Gables, Brooks has taken on a vocal leadership role with his new teammates. While it can be difficult to lead while not playing—Brooks will sit out the 2019-20 season in accordance with NCAA transfer rules—and difficult to lead as a newcomer, neither has been an issue for the new Miami big man.

For Brooks, leadership is not about how long you have been around or whether you are on the court. Rather, it is about much more than that, including learning from those around you.

"There isn't one leader that is always liked . . . Some people love me, some people hate me; that's their decision," Brooks said. "I am going to be the same way with everybody and, of course, deliver a message to different people depending on the person because everyone receives a message differently and responds differently. To the people who see me as a newcomer and don't really want to follow my lead, that's up to them because it's not technically my lead. I'm leading the way the coaches want me to lead. I'm another attachment of the coaches, just in a player form.

"Yes, I'm not playing this year, but I'm just trying to impact the team, giving them the best knowledge I know about winning. It may seem a little different with me sitting on the sideline, but I'm a person who has played the game for a while and I hope they can take my advice into consideration because I'm not trying to steer them in the wrong way," Brooks continued. "I'm just trying to help out as best as I can. I'm always going to be here for them to learn something. And I can learn something; leaders are the best learners. I can learn something from the younger guys that I might not be able to see the first time, but they teach me something. So, it's a give and take thing; you give respect to get respect."

Although he is not playing this coming sea-

son, Brooks does have some goals he hopes to achieve during his time off. While they may not be quantifiable like averaging a certain number of points or reaching a particular blocked shots total, they are important nonetheless.

For Brooks, this year in residence is about improving so he can make an impact on the court when he does suit up in 2020-21, as well as making his mark off the floor.

"I'm just trying to make sure I learn the game a lot more because you can never learn the game enough. [I am trying to] get my body and mind stronger," Brooks said. "Something I'm actually looking forward to off the court is actually joining the [student-athlete advisory] committee to just help with rules and regulations on NCAA sports. So that's going to be fun, [as is] giving back to elementary schools around the community in Miami and just trying to help as best as I can."

Whether it is with his teammates or in the community, there is no doubt the Miami basketball program is better off with the addition of Nysier Brooks, not just for his physical talents, but for his leadership abilities that have been on display since day one in orange and green.

Canes Hoops: 2019-20 Season Preview

Austin Pert
State Of The U
Oct. 16, 2019

The Hurricanes are off a disappointing 2018-19 campaign, falling short of expectations and missing the NCAA Tournament. Key returnees and newcomers will hope to lead Miami to a bounce-back year.

The 2018-19 season was largely one of frustration, disappointment and confusion for the Miami Hurricanes. They were fresh off a heartbreaking loss to Loyola Chicago in the first round of the NCAA Tournament, but had at least made the big dance in each of the previous three seasons. UM had been picked to finish 10th in the preseason Atlantic Coast Conference media poll amid concerns surrounding an uncertain roster, but every one of Jim Larranaga's Miami teams had finished higher in the final league standings than predicted in the preseason.

What unfolded however, was one of the more disappointing seasons of Larranaga's tenure in Coral Gables. Junior Dewan Hernandez being ruled ineligible to play right as the season commenced was an omen that spelled trouble in the season ahead. By March, the Canes sat at just 14-18 overall and 5-13 in ACC action. 2018-19 was the first losing season under Larranaga, and was the worst overall season by record since 2006-07. Before former walk-on Willie Herenton earned a full scholarship late in the campaign, Miami had been down to just seven scholarship players.

In 2019-20, the Hurricanes are looking to bounce back from their first year without any postseason basketball since 2013-14, and just the second in Larranaga's UM career after three consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances. Primarily a younger squad, Miami will still look to its upperclassmen to lead the team to a bounce-back year.

Offseason Recap

After signing no recruits in the 2018 class due to an investigation into Miami's role in the Adidas corruption scandal, Larranaga and his staff recovered to sign three 2019 high school graduates in Harland Beverly, Isaiah Wong and Anthony Walker. The three have all enrolled at UM.

Larranaga was also able to pull a couple of transfers to Coral Gables through the ever-magical transfer portal. Graduate transfer Keith Stone should be an instrumental piece in the post to help the Canes rebuild much-needed depth down low. Nyzier Brooks also comes to Miami from Cincinnati, but will sit out the upcoming season and play in his final year of eligibility in 2020-21. Oklahoma transfer Kameron McGusty sat out the 2018-19 season after coming to Coral Gables and is set to play his first of his two remaining seasons of eligibility.

The highlight of the offseason was August's team trip to Italy. The Hurricanes played three games against European competition in Rome, Florence and Northern Italy, all resulting in wins. From both a basketball and team bonding perspective, the trip was a huge success.

By the Numbers

For the first time, the ACC has scheduled league games on opening night. Miami will open their season on November 5 at home when they take on the Louisville Cardinals.

Chris Lykes made the All-ACC second team. The point guard averaged 16.2 points in each of his 32 starts, to go along with 3.2 assists per game and a three-point field goal percentage of .318. Three freshman will sport orange and green this season, who together made up the ACC's No. 6 recruiting class in 2019, while ranking 30th nationally. Four-stars Beverly and Wong made up two of the nation's top-100 recruits accounting to 247.68 forward

Walker comes to Coral Gables from New Hampshire, where he'll be featured in a much deeper front court rotation.

Four key players from 2018-19 don't return for the upcoming season. Anthony Lawrence II graduated and finds himself as a free agent in professional basketball following a brief stint in the Israeli league. Zach Johnson also graduated after a single year with the Canes. Johnson came as a graduate transfer from Florida Gulf Coast. Anthony Mack left the program after his red-shirt freshman season with UM, while last year's center Ebuka Izundu has found a home with Real Betis in Spain after spending the summer in the Golden State Warriors' organization.

Larranaga will have to choose five players to make up the starting lineup. With so much in flux after losing several players from last year while also welcoming a handful of newcomers, the starting lineup has been a curiosity among fans.

Lykes, DJ Vasiljevic, and Sam Waardenburg are the only returning players with more than one start. McGusty was a spot starter with the Sooners in his two years with the program and will likely slide right into UM's starting lineup.

The biggest question will be who takes over at center. Izundu provided the team with a security blanket down low, and his absence leaves a void that will prove tough to replace. Rodney Miller and Deng Gek are the returning players from prior seasons in the low post, with Gek in the closing stages of injury rehab from last year before being back at full strength. Forwards Walker and Stone may also play with their backs to the basket at times this season, with the latter having experience starting.

Six full seasons have passed since the magical 2012-13 season, the best year in program history since reestablishment in 1985. 2013 was the only time the program won a conference tournament title, along with being a sole champion of a league regular season. Shane Larkin and Trey McKinney-Jones were leaders of that team, while Larranaga was that season's consensus national coach of the year. If there is a level that the Hurricanes are trying to reach, this year or any year after, this is it. Seven ACC teams made the NCAA Tournament a year ago. Virginia won the championship in a thrilling final over Texas Tech. Duke and their elite freshman class led by Zion Williamson was upset in the Elite Eight by Michigan State. North Carolina, Florida State and Virginia Tech made the Sweet 16, while Louisville and Syracuse were both defeated in the first round.

Miami lost eight games a season ago by seven points or less, representing just over half of their total losses (UM was 14-18 overall). Three consecutive close losses to Seton Hall, Rutgers, and Yale put a damper on the season not long after it started. An 88-85 OT loss at UNC on February 9 was especially tough to swallow after the Canes gave up a last minute lead in regulation. The Hurricanes were picked to finish ninth in the ACC in 2019-20, right between Syracuse in eighth and Pitt in 10th.

Larranaga's team will play 10 non-conference games this year, beginning with FAU on November 8. UM will travel to UCF on November 12, and will also be on the road for the Big Ten/ACC Challenge, taking on Illinois December 2. Another potential marquee non-conference game may fall on November 22 at the Charleston Classic in South Carolina, with the possibility of playing Florida in the tournament's second round. Such a matchup will be determined by the results of the first round of the event.

For the first time in conference history, the ACC expands their conference schedule to 20 games per team. This will provide a challenge for Miami and every other conference foe, faced with two additional games against teams in arguably the nation's toughest league.

Backcourt

The backcourt was the Canes' biggest strength a season ago.

Despite losing Lonnie Walker, Bruce Brown and JaiQuan Newton, Miami finished in the top half of the ACC in several shooting categories, including free throw percentage, three-point field goal percentage, and points per game. Lykes was also 10th in the conference in scoring. Vasiljevic should continue to be the team's primary three-point threat, who comes into his senior season eighth in program history in three-point field goals off a .367 shooting percentage from beyond the arc a season ago.

McGusty should make an instant impact in his first season as a Hurricane. In addition to averaging eight points per game as a sophomore, the Katy, TX native shot over 42% from the field and 33% from three-point range, improving to 40% from range in Big 12 action in his last season with the Sooners.

With Lawrence and Johnson gone, the Canes will be lacking a ton of depth at the guard positions, and may need freshman Wong, Beverly, or former walk-on Willie Herenton to step up in times of inevitable injury or foul trouble.

Frontcourt

When Miami was stripped to just seven rotational players last year, the lack of depth was felt especially down low, with just two to three natural post players available for much of the season. Hernandez's ineligibility combined with Gek's injury was a one-two punch that made life difficult for Larranaga. The biggest saving grace was Izundu's year in the paint, having quietly scored just under 11 points and pulling down over eight rebounds per game, and shooting 65.5% from the field, an all-time single-season program record and good second in the conference a season ago behind only Zion Williamson.

While Larranaga will have to get used to not having Izundu around anymore, he'll have a much deeper arsenal in the frontcourt. Sam Waardenburg returns for his redshirt junior season, having scored in double-figures five times and having shot over 35% from three-point range last year. The New Zealand native's athleticism may also allow him to stretch the floor and play small when needed.

Gek will look to have a breakout season as a redshirt sophomore, having recorded 2.5 points and 4.1 rebounds per game over his 11 appearances before being sidelined due to injury. Fans will get to see Miller's progression after taking last year off to continue developing.

Stone, who started in each of the previous two seasons at UF, is a factor when healthy. Before missing most of SEC play due to a knee injury, the incoming senior averaged around six points and four rebounds per game, and nearly nine points per game as a sophomore. Freshman Walker can also be a factor down low, potentially giving the Hurricanes a five-man rotation at the '4 and '5 positions. Brooks meanwhile will take a redshirt per NCAA regulations.

Bottom Line

Miami is coming off a disappointing season, one that was certainly their worst since the arrival of Jim Larranaga from George Mason. The Hurricanes lose several key contributors from that squad, making this season a bit of a rebuilding project by some accounts. But the combination of upperclassman leadership and fresh blood—of both youth and experience—can guide UM to a bounce back year. The Canes, pegged to finish ninth in the league, can put themselves in postseason contention by just meeting preseason expectations in the nation's hardest conference.

Upcoming season offers a unique test for Coach Larranaga

Todd Forrest
State Of The U
Oct. 17, 2019

Head coach Jim Larranaga and the University of Miami men's basketball program will venture into uncharted territory when the 2019-20 campaign officially tips off next month.

For the first time since Larranaga's arrival in 2011, the Hurricanes are coming off a losing season in 2018-19. Moreover, last year marked just the second time that Miami didn't qualify for a postseason tournament (2013-14) under Coach L.

Needless to say, this coming season will present Larranaga with one of the toughest assignments of a coaching career that's on the doorstep of its sixth decade. Miami's disappointing 2018-19 season marked Coach L's first losing record since going 9-18 in year one at George Mason in 1997-98. In year two, Larranaga's Patriots rebounded with a 19-11 mark, a conference title and an automatic berth in the NCAA Tournament.

Unfortunately, bouncing back to the tune of 10-plus wins in a talent-laden Atlantic Coast Conference will pose a challenge that Larranaga didn't face in the Colonial Athletic Association.

And for the most part, the media agrees.

The Canes were picked to finish ninth in the ACC – which is an improvement of two spots from its 11th place finish a year ago – but that will likely leave them as one of the “first-out” among the NCAA Tournament's bubble teams. Last year, seven ACC teams reached the Big Dance, with nine teams going dancing in each of the previous two seasons. Prior to its record number of nine selections in 2017 and 2018, the previous high-water mark for the conference was seven selections in 2007, 2009 and 2016.

Still, the reputation of Larranaga has many believing in a slight turnaround from a 2018-19 season that was hampered by the early suspension, and eventual ineligibility, of star big man Dewan Hernandez.

This year, Miami must replace the loss of three-year starter Anthony Lawrence (13 ppg, 7 rpg), along with Ebuka Izundu (12 ppg, 8 rpg) and Zach Johnson (12 ppg). But still, Coach L returns a solid backcourt to surround preseason Second Team All-ACC selection Chris Lykes (16 ppg, 3 apg).

Lykes, a 5-foot-7 guard from Maryland started all 32 games for Miami last season and is the ACC's second-highest returning scorer behind Louisville's Jordan Nwora. Playing alongside Miami's spark plug point guard is the sharpshooting Australian, DJ Vasiljevic (12 ppg), who shot 37-per-

cent from long distance last season.

Joining Lykes and Vasiljevic in the backcourt is Kam McGusty, an Oklahoma transfer who is eligible this season after starting 25 games in Norman as a sophomore, two seasons ago. Another transfer guard is Keith Stone, a former Gator that is coming off an ACL injury in January. A graduate transfer, Stone (6 ppg, 4 rpg last year) is eligible immediately and should make an impact as soon as the Deerfield Beach native is healthy.

Despite the losses of Lawrence and Izundu, the Canes' frontcourt has experience with junior Sam Waardenburg, who made 11 starts and averaged 25 minutes a game last season. The 6-10 New Zealander provides Miami with an inside-outside threat, hitting 38-percent of his threes and 77-percent of his free throws.

Also returning are centers Deng Gak and Rodney Miller, who should both see increased minutes. The 6-10 Gak was the 16th rated power forward in his class but was redshirted in 2017-18, then suffered a season-ending knee injury on Dec. 1 of last year. Prior to going down, Gak was averaging 15 minutes-per with one start.

Meanwhile, the 7-foot Miller was redshirted last year after playing 15 games as a sophomore in 2017-18. A 4-star recruit out of high school, Miller participated in the 2014 Nike Elite 100.

As for the Hurricanes fresh out of high school, Larranaga will have a solid crop of freshmen at his disposal this winter.

Highlighting the recent recruiting class is 6-4 combo guard Harlond Beverly. Out of Montverde Academy, Beverly was a 4-star recruit and the ninth ranked combo guard in America. Originally from Michigan, Beverly transferred to Florida's Montverde Academy, the former stomping grounds of D'Angelo Russell, Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons.

Another highly touted combo guard in the class is 6-3 Isaiah Wong. The 4-star recruit was ranked as the No. 12 point guard by Rivals and the No. 16 shooting guard by ESPN.

Rounding out the class is 6-9 forward Anthony Walker out of Brewster, New Hampshire - the same school that produced Donovan Mitchell. A 4-star prospect by ESPN and the No. 33 power forward in the nation, Walker chose Miami over Kansas, Maryland and Pittsburgh, among others.

Additionally, Larranaga's Canes added Cincinnati transfer Nysier Brooks (8 ppg, 6 rpg), who will sit out this season per NCAA transfer rules.

The returning experience in the backcourt, combined with the injection of youth should provide

Larranaga with enough ammo to keep Miami near the top-eight in the ACC, and in contention for an NCAA berth. The biggest question mark, however, could be depth as an injury at an inopportune moment could easily derail the season.

ACC Outlook

With six ACC players selected in last summer's NBA Draft lottery, there could be room for an outsider to crash the three-team party (Duke, UNC, UVA) that's sat atop the conference in recent years. Unfortunately for Canes fans, many feel that team will be Louisville. And with Florida State and NC State on the rise, the Canes are likely more than a year away from contending for one of the four double-byes in the conference tournament.

With road games at Clemson, Georgia Tech and Virginia Tech the Canes should pick up the ACC road win that eluded them last season. The biggest remaining question mark is tightening up a defense that allowed the most points (71.1) during Larranaga's tenure in Coral Gables.

It's a safe bet to assume Miami will improve on its winless road record inside the ACC. One can also guarantee that Larranaga will place an emphasis on boosting his team's defensive effort, as well.

“It's all about guys working together, identifying your role, and making a great contribution to the team effort,” Larranaga said at Operation Basketball Media Day, earlier this month. “Whether you are a veteran player like DJ and Chris, who really know their role because they've been doing it for a long time, or a freshman who comes in and has to learn what his role is going to be, it's all about teamwork.”

The good news: Larranaga has not suffered consecutive losing seasons since 1991-92 and 1992-93, during his days at Bowling Green.

The bad: The Canes are still probably two years away. The last time one of Larranaga's Miami squads didn't reach the NCAA Tournament, they failed to qualify the following year, despite advancing to the finals of the 2015 NIT.

In 2016, they went on two win 27 games and reach the Sweet 16.

NCAA Tournament, NIT or neither? We will see when Miami's season gets underway on Oct. 30 with an exhibition vs Flagler. The first official game is Nov. 5 vs the previously mentioned Louisville at the Watsco Center in Coral Gables. While Louisville is a conference game, the ACC gauntlet won't get underway until a New Year's Eve showdown at Clemson.

Canes Hoops: Chris Lykes Looks to Leap into his Junior Season

Austin Pert
State Of The U
Oct. 22, 2019

Lykes was arguably Miami's best overall player a season ago. In spite of the point guard's small stature, he'll continue to have a big role in 2019-20.

"If he were 6-5 or 6-6, he'd be Michael Jordan," said coach Jim Larrañaga two seasons ago. But Larrañaga wasn't referring to either of his two future NBA draftees in Lonnie Walker or Bruce Brown. Nor was he referencing any of his past players who have gone on to play professional basketball.

The player he was talking about was none other than Chris Lykes, all five feet and seven inches of him, then just a freshman and playing behind then-PG Ja'Quan Newton.

"It doesn't matter your height," Larrañaga continued, a month into the 2017-18 season. "What matters is the size of your heart."

But it's been about far more than heart for the Mitchellville, Maryland native. Even in an otherwise disappointing season last year, Lykes' numbers were beyond impressive, ranking sixth in the Atlantic Coast Conference in points per game, with 16.2. He scored in double-figures in all but five games a season ago. The guard also scored 20 or more points in 10 games, including a career-high 28 points on January 3 against North Carolina State.

But for Lykes, it's now about more than just stats.

"Proving that I do belong in the ACC," said Lykes about what last year meant for him. With a thin roster a season ago, "It was tough playing with seven guys, but I feel like we were in every game. I scored pretty well, but I could do a little better with efficiency, but I think that was the biggest jump."

When it comes to fear, Lykes prefers to turn what casual observers may believe to be is a negative into a positive.

When asked about his size being a positive instead of a liability, the point guard concurred with the assessment. "I always think [like] that. At my size, even if I don't believe that [on a given night], it's good mentally to believe that. Coach [Larrañaga] was the first major coach to tell me it was an advantage."

In terms of role, better depth of the post positions can play into the hands of Lykes at the top of the lineup, so long as the bigs do their job.

"Coach [Larrañaga] has made it an emphasis, he wants us to get in the paint, and kick out to find shooters," Lykes said prior in the offseason. "That's the best and easiest shot... now we have a lot of guys that can do that."

As a sophomore, the guard averaged over 16 points across every game all of last season. With another offseason of development and a roster upgrade, things are looking up for Lykes in Coral Gables.

Miami has blend of “youthful enthusiasm and veteran experience”

Christopher Stock
247Sports - InsideTheU
Oct. 22, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The Miami Hurricanes held their annual media day on Tuesday, which was the first time head coach Jim Larranaga and players were made available to the local media.

Returning players discussed their desire to put last year's 14-18 season—the worst since 2006-07—behind them. Not only was it the worst record in Larranaga's eight seasons at Miami, but it broke a string of three consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances for only the second time in school history.

The Hurricanes, pegged to finish ninth in the ACC, are looking to get back to the postseason this year behind a combination of key returners and talented newcomers with the season starting in two weeks on Nov. 5 against Louisville, a projected top-10 team when the preseason AP Poll is released.

“We're trying to improve, we have a lot of improving to do to have the season that we'd like to have,” Larranaga said. “We have a good group of guys who are working very hard to make that happen, but we also have one of the most challenging schedules—not only in Miami basketball history, but in the history of the ACC and I say that very honestly without exaggerating. The schedule is ridiculous because this year we have jumped to 20 ACC games and we open up the season at home against Louisville, who is projected to be top 5 in the country and ESPN has them as a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament. We certainly have our challenges, but as any competitors would tell you they love the challenge and competing against the best and that's what we do every night in the ACC.”

Junior point guard Chris Lykes is Miami's leading returning scorer after averaging 16.2 points a game, which was ninth in the ACC. He was a preseason All-ACC Second Team pick as the league's second-highest returning scorer.

It looks like Miami will open the season with a starting lineup consisting of Lykes, senior shooting guard Dejan Vasiljevic, junior shooting guard Kameron McGusty, junior power forward Sam Waardenburg, and junior center Rodney Miller.

The reserves look to be freshmen guards Isaiah Wong and Harlond Beverly, who were both top-100 recruits, sophomore power forward Deng Gak, and freshman power forward Anthony Walker. Graduate transfer forward

Keith Stone is not expected to be ready to start the season due to a knee injury sustained in January while at Florida.

“We kind of have a unique blend,” Larranaga said. “We have five veteran players who have been practicing a lot together because they know most everything we do and then we have a core group of three freshmen and Deng Gak and Keith Stone. Deng has been here, but has been injured and hasn't played a lot of minutes and then Keith and the freshmen are brand new to the program and are learning. We've got a good blend of youthful enthusiasm and veteran experience.”

Wong and Beverly have been developing a bond since their arrivals and the two talented guards are often paired up together in practices.

“Ever since we went to Italy, me and him were struggling together, but I feel we overcame that and we both are going to do good together,” Wong said.

Lykes has been pleased with how the team has united in the offseason, which included playing three exhibition games in Italy in August.

“Usually it takes a while to gel together and be really chemistry-oriented, but this team has been one of the quicker teams I have seen gel together,” Lykes said. “I think the freshmen are close and the older guys are allowing them to learn the culture. They just fit in perfectly and I feel they picked the right school. It's going to be good and I'm excited.”

While the most experienced five project as starters, Larranaga stressed there is competition for playing time.

“There's competition every single day,” Larranaga said. “There is nothing that is guaranteed. You've got to earn everything you get—your playing time, your success doesn't come from something you did in the past whether you did it in high school or you did it in practice or you did it in the last game. You've got to continue to perform very, very well because there's always someone ready to take your place—except last year when we didn't have anybody. We just didn't have enough guys.”

Facing Louisville in the opener is something Lykes is looking forward to although he wants the team to understand the importance of every game.

“I like it, I like tough games,” Lykes said. “I like being a part of tough games. It makes it feel so much better when you win. We're just

getting to the point where we need to understand that every game matters—that's what we want the younger guys to understand too. Not let up when the competition isn't stacked up as much as we are.”

UM basketball coaches offer cooking tips, previews of their teams. This is what they said.

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Oct. 22, 2019

The 2019-20 University of Miami basketball season began with a cooking lesson from women's coach Katie Meier and men's coach Jim Larranaga.

Meier greeted her five freshmen Tuesday morning with the following question: "Are you an ice cube? Are you a potato? Or are you an egg?"

They weren't sure what to make of the odd question, so she explained.

"I said, 'It's time. You're ready. I boiled the water this morning. What happens to an ice cube? It melts. Well, are you an ice cube? What happens to a potato? It gets soft. Are you a potato? What happens to an egg? It gets hard. Be an egg! That was my speech.'"

Meier said she won't tolerate any ice cubes on her team.

The coach shared the story with reporters during Media Day at the Watsco Center. Larranaga followed Meier at the microphone, and added his version of the allegory.

He told of a coach who was trying to motivate his team, so he boiled water in three pots. In one pot, he put carrots. In another, he put eggs. In the third, coffee beans. He asked them, "What happened to carrots? They went in hard but came out soft. Eggs went in soft, came out hard. The coffee beans, they changed the water and made it delicious, a cup of coffee." The idea is are we going to be soft, hard or make things better?"

Both Hurricanes teams are eager to make things better this season.

The women went 25-9, were seeded fourth in the NCAA Tournament, but lost at home to Arizona State in the Round of 32 when they flubbed an inbound play in the closing minutes. The men, with a roster of seven healthy players most nights, finished 14-18 overall, 5-13 in the Atlantic Coast Conference and failed to make the post-season for the first time in six years.

Meier's team, led by ACC Preseason Player of the Year Beatrice Mompremier, has high hopes again. The Canes were picked to finish fourth in the ACC by league coaches, and Mompremier, a 6-4 center, chose to forego the WNBA Draft and stay in school for her final season.

"I'm particularly excited about this year's team with the return of Beatrice Mompremier, and 'premier' is a really good hashtag for her because I really do believe she's the best post player in the country and one of the best players in the country," said Meier. "We're fortunate to have her, and she is very determined on expanding her game and making sure the team is successful.

"A lot of times you're in the situation with her with all the hype, accolades and pressure that you worry about yourself. But I've actually seen the most unselfish Beatrice this year than the three years that I've coached her. She's going to play with a tremendous amount of pressure on her this year and part of my job is to make sure that pressure stays, but doesn't turn into stress."

Mompremier, a Miami High grad, gained valuable experience representing the United States in the Pan Am Games and training with the U.S. national team over the summer. She shrugged off the preseason awards.

"It's great recognition to get, but I don't think it really matters at this point," she said. "You still have to come out and play your hardest every night."

UM athletic director Blake James said of Mompremier: "Credit to Katie for bringing such a talented young woman into our program and continuing to develop her as a player. The recognition by the league is them realizing the great things she accomplished last year and the opportunities for even better things this year."

Junior guard Mykea Gray also trained with Team USA and got tips from guards Diana Taurasi, Sue Bird and Skylar Diggins. "They talked to her the entire time about how to be a point guard, how to lead, what things to say," Meier said. "She is playing a bigger role this season. It's her time."

The men's team returns two starters — guards Chris Lykes and DJ Vasiljevic — and added freshmen Harlond Beverly, Anthony Walker and Isaiah Wong. Grad transfer Keith Stone from the University of Florida is rehabbing after knee surgery. One of the biggest stories is the transformation of 7-foot center Rodney Miller, who redshirted last year while he slimmed down 45 pounds.

"If he can stay healthy, he may be the most improved player in the ACC," Larranaga said.

Miller changed his eating habits, and battled his weight all last season. "There were days I'd get on the scale and nothing changed, so

that was hard," he said. "I used to feel sluggish on the court, and now I have energy, don't feel the time go by. I am quicker, can guard ball screens. It feels great."

The men play an exhibition Oct. 30 against Flagler and open the regular season at home against powerhouse Louisville. The women's exhibition is Oct. 29 against Nova and they play Jackson State Nov. 10.

Freshman SG Harlond Beverly brings plenty of excitement to Miami

David Luke
247Sports - InsideTheU
Oct. 27, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — It probably won't take long for Miami Hurricanes basketball fans to take a liking to freshman guard Harlond Beverly.

That's because Beverly (6-4, 185) is a high flying dunker that can jump 42 inches and has a consistent three point stroke.

"I view myself as a big, athletic guard that can play point guard, shooting guard, or small forward," Beverly said of his game. "I feel like I can pass pretty good, play pick and roll, and defend."

Beverly is probably UM's best leaper and he shared what type of dunks he likes to pull off when he is having fun by himself in the gym.

"I can do some through the legs or some 360 dunks when I am messing around," Beverly said.

Beverly says he understands that he will need to be a consistent three point shooter as he takes the jump up to the college level. He's pleased with the consistency he has shown in that regard since UM started practicing this preseason.

"I have been shooting really well from three since we have been practicing," Beverly said. "That has been a big focus for me."

Beverly also doesn't lack any confidence. He feels like he's made a smooth transition from the high school level to college.

"There isn't anything that I feel like I'm absolutely struggling on," Beverly said. "The coaches will tell me what I've done wrong and I will fix it and then we move on from there."

It hasn't taken Beverly long to make a strong impression on his UM teammates.

"Harlond is a guy that makes good reads out of the pick-and-roll," Kameron McGusty said. "He is a good passer and a good shooter. He is very athletic. He has a 40 inch vertical and it shows on the court."

Beverly is from Detroit, Michigan, but played his senior season at Montverde Academy in the Orlando area.

Beverly averaged 14.0 points per game at Montverde and helped lead the team to a 22-3 record and a No. 4 spot in the USA Today Super 25 national rankings.

As a junior at Southfield (Mich.) Christian, Beverly averaged 16 points, six rebounds, six assists, and three steals while leading his team to a Class D State Championship.

According to 247Sports, Beverly ranked as the No. 69 overall player in the country in the 2019 recruiting class.

Beverly was joined in Miami's 2019 recruiting class by talented guard Isaiah Wong, who ranked as the No. 87 overall player in the country according to 247Sports, and Anthony Walker, who ranked as a three star prospect by 247Sports.

He's enjoyed getting to know his fellow freshmen since arriving at UM.

"I like both of those guys," Beverly said. "We hang out a lot and our dorms are right by each other. I didn't know them at all before I got here, but they are great guys to be around and I look forward to playing with them in the future."

Beverly shared his thoughts on both Wong and Walker as players.

1 COMMENTS

"With Isaiah, I have never seen somebody of his age that can score like he can," Beverly said. "I have played against a lot of good players and he can really, really score. He can make threes, mid-range pull-ups, dunks, lay-ups—you name it and he has got it. Anthony Walker plays hard. He is a really good athlete that is a lot more skilled than he gets credit for. I think he can put it on the ground and shoot threes."

Miami will hold their exhibition game against Flagler on Wednesday, October 30th. The Hurricanes will tip-off their regular season by hosting No. 5 Louisville on November 5th at 6:30 p.m.

No longer undermanned, Miami Hurricanes men's basketball looking for bounce-back season

David Furones
South Florida Sun Sentinel
Oct. 22, 2019

Miami Hurricanes men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga was giving an inspired response to a simple question a reporter asked about the positions where he still sees competition for playing time heading into the season.

"There's competition every single day," said Larrañaga at UM basketball's media day on Tuesday afternoon. "There's nothing guaranteed in this world. You've got to earn everything you get. Your playing time, your success doesn't come from something you did in the past, whether you did it in high school or you did it in practice or you did it in the last game.

"You've got to continue to perform very, very well because there's always someone ready to take your place."

Then it hit him. That wasn't something he could've said last year when the Hurricanes often had to clash with the elites in the Atlantic Coast Conference with a significantly undermanned roster.

"Except last year when we didn't have anybody," said Larrañaga, to laughs from media members on hand. "We just didn't have enough guys."

Miami only had seven recruited scholarship players available much of last season as the team went 14-18, and 5-13 in the ACC and without a postseason appearance to show for it. It was the result of a few factors.

There was the lack of a 2018 recruiting class with UM in the middle of the indictment in the FBI college basketball trial involving adidas — the program was later redacted from it. Sophomore Bruce Brown and freshman Lonnie Walker IV made the decision to go pro after the 2018 season. Forward Dewan Hernandez was ruled ineligible by the NCAA. Forward Deng Gak went down with a knee injury early in non-conference play. Center Rodney Miller was taking a non-medical red-shirt season to better condition himself and develop his game.

The Hurricanes now have some manpower to accompany returning guards in junior Chris Lykes and senior DJ Vasiljevic, who had to endure last season where, although often fighting, they were simply too worn out to compete down the stretch of games.

"I think a lot of the guys just want to forget about last year," Vasiljevic said. "Me and Chris have said this before, that if college basket-

ball games were 35 minutes, we would've won most of our games because the last five minutes is where we just lost gas."

Said Lykes, "These guys, I know they'll come to war with me every time. They're not afraid. They came to this school for a reason, to play in the ACC."

Lykes led UM with 16.2 points per game last year and this season was tabbed as a pre-season All-ACC second-team selection.

Miller lost 45 pounds, and Larrañaga feels he will be a most improved player candidate in the ACC. A key addition comes in redshirt junior guard Kameron McGusty, who last year sat out due to NCAA transfer rules as he came over from Oklahoma. Redshirt senior forward Keith Stone, a Deerfield Beach native, Zion Lutheran High grad and Florida transfer, is rehabbing from February surgery on a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his knee and is aiming to contribute once available.

Miami also got right back to recruiting well with its 2019 class and welcomes a pair of freshman guards who were given four-star ratings by 247 Sports out of high school in Isaiah Wong and Harlond Beverly.

The Hurricanes, who open the regular season at home on Nov. 5 with a conference game against Louisville, are projected to finish ninth in the ACC.

Mompremier to lead women's team

At the heart of the Miami women's basketball team's efforts to make a deeper run than the second-round NCAA Tournament appearance of a year ago is redshirt senior forward Beatrice Mompremier.

Mompremier was recognized as the ACC Preseason Player of the Year, but she would much rather have the award that comes after the games are played.

"It's a great recognition. I'm excited about it, but I feel like it really doesn't matter until the end of the season and I actually get it," Mompremier said.

Miami women's coach Katie Meier said Tuesday that Mompremier is "the best post player in the country" and one of the best overall, especially when she lets her competitiveness out.

"She wants to be in the pressure," Meier said. "There's sometimes in practice where you're like, 'Is that really the ACC Player of the Year?' Then you say, 'Okay, losers run' and you make it competitive, and she is the best

player in the nation in those moments."

UM men's basketball team opens regular season with huge test against Top-5 ACC rival

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Oct. 29, 2019

preseason AP Top 25. Beatrice Mompremier, the ACC Preseason Player of the Year, had a double-double in 15 minutes against Nova -- 16 points, 11 rebounds. Freshman Brianna Jackson had 11 points and 11 rebounds.

The University of Miami men's basketball team will have almost no time to ease into the 2019-20 season. The Hurricanes play one home exhibition game Wednesday night against Flagler College and then return to the Watsco Center Nov. 5 for their regular-season opener against No. 5-ranked Louisville.

Miami is coming off a disappointing 14-18 season in which it won just five of its 18 Atlantic Coast Conference games. Things are even more difficult this season. UM will play 20 ACC games, including 11 against teams that reached the 2019 NCAA Tournament.

"We have one of the most challenging schedules, not only in Miami basketball history, but in the history of the ACC and I say that very honestly without exaggerating," said UM coach Jim Larranaga. "The schedule is ridiculous ... We open up the seasons against Louisville, who is projected to be in the top five in the country and ESPN has them as a No 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament. We certainly have our challenges."

UM returns a pair of double-digit scorers in junior guard Chris Lykes and senior guard DJ Vasiljevic. Lykes, a preseason second-team All-ACC pick, is the second-leading returning scorer in the league with 16.2 points per game.

Two other players expected to play big roles are junior guard Kam McGusty, who sat out last season after transferring from Oklahoma, and redshirt junior center Rodney Miller, who lost 45 pounds and brings newfound energy to the post game.

Redshirt sophomore forward Deng Gak is back after missing the final 24 games last season due to injury. Three freshmen join the team — guard Harlond Beverly, forward Anthony Walker and guard Isaiah Wong.

"We have a lot of improving to do," Larranaga said. "We have a good blend of youthful enthusiasm and veteran experience."

Flagler, which finished 8-20 (5-17 PBC) during the 2018-19 season, is led by Gedi Juozapaitis. The sophomore guard/forward is the Saints' leading returning scorer (14.3 points per game) and rebounder (8.2).

The UM women opened their season Tuesday with a 90-46 win over Nova Southeastern. The Canes, who finished last season 25-9 (12-4 ACC), are ranked No. 18 in the

Fifth-ranked Louisville dominated Miami 87-74 in season opener. Here's what happened

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Nov. 5, 2019

The first sign that Tuesday was no ordinary season-opening night for the University of Miami men's basketball team: 18 NBA scouts requested seats.

The second clue: There was a traffic jam outside the Watsco Center, the student section was full, and nearly one-quarter of the crowd of 7,000-plus was occupied by opposing fans.

Fifth-ranked Louisville was in town for the toughest home-opener in Miami program history, and the Hurricanes found out in a hurry that they are not yet ready to compete with the elite teams of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

The Cardinals dominated both ends of the court, made Miami pay for every mistake, and cruised to an 87-74 victory that was more lopsided than the score.

The loudest, happiest fans in the arena were the red-clad Louisville fans, including actor Bill Murray, whose son, Luke, is a Cardinals assistant coach. Some of those fans plan to stick around for Louisville's volleyball game against UM on Friday, and the football game on Saturday.

Louisville forward Jordan Nwora, a Preseason All-American and Preseason ACC Player of the Year, led all scorers with 23 points on 8-of-16 shooting. He also had 12 rebounds, 10 on the defensive end, two assists, two steals, and three blocks. Nwora was one of five Cardinals in double figures, along with Dwayne Sutton (16), Ryan McMahon (16), Samuel Williamson (13), and Steven Enoch (11 points, 12 rebounds).

Other than a two-minute stretch during which three UM freshmen came off the bench to give the Canes a spark and a 16-9 lead, the game belonged to the Cardinals. Louisville answered Miami's early lead with a trio of McMahon three-pointers and a 17-0 run. By halftime, the Hurricanes were trailing 45-26 and frustrated.

"Our whole team struggled on the offensive end, we turned the ball over," said UM coach Jim Larranaga. "First game, great opponent, we were forcing things. That happens. You really want to play well. We lost a little bit of our patience and tried to do things we couldn't do."

The Cardinals outshot Miami 53% to 35% in the first half, scored at will in the paint, and

showed why they are considered among the nation's top teams. Miami, meanwhile, turned the ball over nine times before intermission and had only four assists.

Louisville opened up a 72-40 lead midway through the second half before the Canes went on a late run to make the final score respectable.

"Louisville played very good start to finish, they're a Top 5 team, and played like that," Larranaga said. "Our guys played the first 10 minutes like we wanted to, but we turned the ball over and gave them easy opportunities. We played much better late in the game."

UM point guard Chris Lykes, one of the team's bright lights in an otherwise forgettable 2018-19 season, struggled much of the night before finding his shot in the final five minutes. His left leg wrapped to protect a knee contusion, Lykes was outmanned and forced into ill-advised shots in the first half. He missed seven of his first nine shots before making six in a row late to finish with a team-high 18 points and five assists.

"Nerves, big game," Lykes said of his sloppy start. "We got down on ourselves, but I'm proud that we fought back in the end."

DJ Vasiljevic, who had 16 points, said: "We could have lost by 30-plus, but we didn't give up and only lost by 13."

Oklahoma transfer Kam McGusty added 12. The freshmen played with a lot of energy, but had mixed results. Harlond Beverly had nine points, Isaiah Wong went 1-for-6 for two points, and Anthony Walker had nine points and five rebounds in 17 minutes.

Larranaga said he expects all three freshmen will improve as the season progresses, and he has high hopes for them.

"I was pleased for 32 minutes," said Louisville coach Chris Mack. "The last eight minutes, give Miami credit, they hit some shots, but we weren't the same team in the last eight minutes...We didn't play with the same gusto the last eight minutes."

Normally, at this time of year, the Hurricanes are easing their way into the season with non-conference games against mid-majors and hyphenated teams. This year, they were thrown into the fire on opening night as the new ACC Network wanted league games on opening night.

Asked how he felt about opening with such a strong conference opponent, Larranaga said:

"That wouldn't be my choice. I'd like to play someone we beat by 20. Hey, this is a top five team. Question is can we improve enough that we are with them at the end?"

The Hurricanes are back home Friday night against Florida Atlantic University.

Miami basketball team pulls away from FAU in second half

Alan Rubenstein
Canes Warning
Nov. 8, 2019

Freshman Harlond Beverly impressed for the second game in a row with 14 points, Chris Lykes led the Hurricanes with 15 and the Miami basketball team used balanced scoring in a 74-60 victory over Florida Atlantic on Friday night at the Watsco Center. The victory is the first for Miami this season.

Miami lost their season opener 87-74 on Tuesday night at home against Louisville in a game that was not that close. The Hurricanes needed a 14-0 run to finish the game to make the score semi-respectable. Beverly was impressive in the game against the Cardinals with nine points. He added four rebounds and three assists Friday.

Beverly shot 6-9 from the floor and made two of his three-point attempts against the Owls. The freshman has made 9-16 field goal attempts in the first two games of his collegiate career. Redshirt junior center Rodney Miller had a bounce-back game after struggling against Louisville.

Miller finished with 12 points, four rebounds, two assists and two steals against Florida Atlantic. Miami had good balance against the Owls. Sam Waardenburg scored nine and D.J. Vasiljevic and Kam McGusty each scored eight. Waardenburg nearly had the first double-double of his career as he secured 11 rebounds, five offensive.

Miami needed a 10-2 run to close the first half and take a 35-26 lead into the half. The Hurricanes extended the lead to 15 early in the second half. A 15-3 run by FAU cut the Miami lead to three before the Hurricanes answered a few minutes later with a 12-0 run to return the lead to 17 and put the Owls away.

The Miami basketball team next plays their first road game of the season in Orlando against Central Florida on Tuesday. The Knights are coming off of a 24-9 season and advanced to the second round where they lost to Duke. UCF is coached by 1986 National Player of Year from Duke Johnny Dawkins.

UM basket This is why Harlond Beverly was a key in the Miami Hurricanes men's basketball victory ball coaches offer cooking tips, previews of their teams. This is what they said.

Walter Villa
Miami Herald
Nov. 8, 2019

think they've made it ... but not yet. They still have a lot to learn."

Harlond Beverly hit a three-pointer and flashed a big smile.

It was a small yet significant moment in Friday night's 74-60 Miami Hurricanes' victory against visiting Florida Atlantic University.

"I hate losing," said Beverly, Miami's 6-4 freshman combo guard said in a TV interview. "Whatever it takes to win, I'm going to do it."

Beverly did plenty Friday, coming off the bench to score 14 points, which was one less than teammate Chris Lykes' game-high total of 15. Beverly also had a game-high four assists in 27 minutes, making 6-of-9 shots from the floor and 2-of-3 on three-pointers.

His only issue was at the foul line, where he went 0-for-2.

Beverly is one of three freshmen on Miami's roster, joined by 6-3 guard Isaiah Wong and 6-9 forward Anthony Walker, who each scored four points.

That trio represents fresh hope for Miami (1-1), which missed the NCAA Tournament last season and lost its opener in decisive fashion on Tuesday to fifth-ranked Louisville.

Wong and Walker appear to be raw, but Beverly looked like the best player on the court for much of Friday's game.

FAU had cut Miami's nine-point halftime lead to three at 51-48 with 10:29 left in the game. But Miami responded with a 17-2 run that included a layup, dunk, assist and three-pointer by Beverly.

Still, Beverly has a long way to go to match some of his fellow freshmen in the ACC. North Carolina's Cole Anthony, for example, scored 34 against Notre Dame on Wednesday to set the ACC record for most points by a freshman in his first game.

One night prior, Virginia Tech's Landers Nolley scored 30 points in his collegiate debut against Clemson.

Furthermore, Beverly, Wong and Walker have even more pressure on them because there are no true sophomores on UM's roster. They are the full extent of Miami's current youth movement.

"I love those guys," Larranaga said of his three freshmen. "They are learning. They

MBB Tops FAU, 74-60, for First Win

Alex Schwartz
HurricaneSports.com
Nov. 8, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The University of Miami men's basketball team notched its opening win of the season Friday night, 74-60, against Florida Atlantic.

Junior guard Chris Lykes paced a balanced scoring attack with 15 points for Miami (1-1, 0-1 ACC) to help head coach Jim Larrañaga earn his 100th home victory at the Watsco Center.

"I thought, offensively, the ball was shared quite frequently," Larrañaga said. "I'd like to shoot the three a little bit better and get to the foul line a good bit more. The only way to do that is to move the defense and create an advantage; we haven't learned to do that well enough."

Neither team led by greater than three points in the first 17-plus minutes of the opening half until an 8-0 surge in 1:34 put Miami ahead by nine, 33-24, with 1:14 to go before the break. The Hurricanes went on to take a 35-26 edge into the intermission.

Redshirt junior forward Sam Waardenburg tallied team highs in points (nine) and rebounds (seven) before the break, while redshirt junior center Rodney Miller, Jr., scored more points in the opening half (eight) than he previously totaled in any full game. Defensively, Miami held the Owls to just 11-of-35 (31.4 percent) shooting in the first 20 minutes.

The Hurricanes took a then-game-high 16-point lead, 46-30, with 16:10 on the clock, but Florida Atlantic (1-1) countered with an 18-5 burst to trim its deficit to three, 51-48, with 10:29 remaining.

Miami, however, responded with a 16-2 run to stretch its edge back up to a game-best 17, 67-50, with 5:08 to play. The spurt was capped by back-to-back 3-pointers by freshman guard Harlond Beverly and senior guard Dejan Vasiljevic.

"I think any time a team makes a run and you respond to it, that's a very good sign that you pulled together instead of pulling apart," Larrañaga said. "When you come together, guys are willing to do what's necessary to win the game and our guys did that tonight."

The Owls never pulled any closer than 14 the rest of the way and that proved to be the final margin of victory for Miami.

Beverly scored 14 points on 6-of-9 shooting

in his second collegiate game, while redshirt junior center Rodney Miller, Jr., logged a career-best 12 points on 5-of-6 shooting for his first double-digit outing.

Waardenburg finished the game one point shy of his first double-double, notching nine points and a career-best 11 rebounds, the latter mark leading all Hurricanes.

Just two Owls reached double figures and none scored over a dozen points, as sophomore center Karlis Silins recorded 12 and graduate student guard Cornelius Taylor had 10. Sophomore forward Madiaw Niang paced all players with 12 rebounds.

Miami finished with an 18-6 advantage in points off turnovers after forcing 15 and committing just six, as well as recorded a 42-28 edge in paint points. The Owls shot just 34.8 percent (23-of-66) from the floor and 27.3 percent (6-of-22) from long range.

Up next for the Hurricanes is another in-state clash, as Miami is set for its road opener Tuesday at 9 p.m. against UCF at Addition Financial Arena in Orlando, Fla., live on CBS Sports Network.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2019-20 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

- Miami improved to 24-1 all-time against the Owls, including 16-0 at home and 4-0 in Larrañaga's tenure.

- This is the 21st time the Hurricanes have defeated Florida Atlantic by double figures and the average margin of victory across all 24 wins is 18.9 points per game.

- Miami's 24 victories against Florida Atlantic are tied with Boston College and Florida for its fourth-most against any Division I foe, trailing only Stetson (49), Florida State (36) and Jacksonville (27).

- Larrañaga, who entered the evening with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 646-432 in 36 years as a head coach, including 176-98 in nine seasons at Miami.

- Larrañaga improved to 100-31 (.763) in home games at the helm of the Hurricanes, including 51-8 (.864) in non-conference action.

- For the second time in as many games this season, Miami used a starting lineup of Lykes, Miller, Jr., Vasiljevic, Waardenburg

and redshirt junior guard McGusty.

- Vasiljevic recorded two made 3-pointers to up his career total to 205, passing Adrian Thomas for sixth place on Miami's all-time list.

- Waardenburg, who totaled all of his points in the first half and matched a career high with four made field goals, reached 250 points in his college career.

- Lykes surpassed 850 total points and recorded the 45th double-digit scoring game in his 66th outing as a Hurricane.

- Miller, Jr., reached 50 points as a collegian, 18 of which have come in the first two games of the 2019-20 season, as well as posted the first two assists and steals of his career.

Miami basketball faces tough road fest at Central Florida: game information

Alan Rubenstein
Canes Warning
Nov. 10, 2019

Central Florida advanced to the second round of the 2019 NCAA tournament and was eliminated in a heartbreaking loss to Duke. The Miami basketball team travels to Orlando with a 1-1 record. The Hurricanes defeated Florida Atlantic 74 -60 on Friday night after an 87-74 loss to Louisville in the season opener last Tuesday.

The loss to Louisville was not as close as the final score. Miami had to use a 14-0 run to close the game out to reach the final margin. Freshman Harlond Beverly has been a revelation for the Hurricanes through the first two games. Beverly has proven the ability to play on or off the ball.

He has handled backup point guard duties behind Miami junior Chris Lykes and has also played with Lykes in some lineups. Through two games Beverly is third in Miami in scoring at 11.5 points per game, second behind Lykes with three assists per game and tied for second behind Lykes averaging one steal per game.

Beverly is shooting 50 percent from the floor and 42.9 percent on three-point attempts. Central Florida has a different look than last season. The Knights lost fan-favorite 7'6 center Tacko Fall. Fall was an intimidating presence in the middle for the Knights on the offensive and defensive ends of the court.

This season UCF is lead by 6'11 forward Collin Smith and 6'5 guard Dazon Ingram. Smith and Ingram combined for a third of the Knights shots in their season-opening 73-69 victory over Prairie View A&M Saturday. Ingram scored 16 and had seven rebounds and two assists. Smith scored 14 with five rebounds and four assists.

Brandon Martin scored 12 with four rebounds, Cesar Dejesus had 11, five and three and Frank Bertz eight and seven rebounds. Smith is UCF's only returning starter. Like the Miami basketball program, the Knights are rebuilding their roster this season. The meeting on Tuesday night is the first of a home and home series.

McGusty, Beverly send Miami past UCF 79-70

AP
Nov. 12, 2019

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Miami coach Jim Larranaga was quick to note that his team went winless on the road last season. On Tuesday night, his Hurricanes' stingy defense ensured they would only need one try to better last season's road record.

Kameron McGusty scored 17 points and grabbed 10 rebounds, Harlond Beverly had 15 points, and Miami beat UCF 79-70 at Addition Financial Arena.

The Hurricanes (2-1) pulled away in the early stages of the second half with a 14-2 run over a span of 4:16. Beverly, who scored seven of his team's points during the decisive run, punctuated it with a floater in traffic to give the visitors a 52-41 lead.

"I thought that was a really hard-fought contest. Both teams were very physical with each other," Larranaga said. "Both teams battled. Last season, we did not have a single road win. So, for this team to start out this season in our first road game and play as well as we did, score as well as we did, defend as well as we did, with a number of young guys stepping up and really helping us, it's really a very satisfying victory."

UCF (1-1) never managed to get back within fewer than six points after the Hurricanes' second-half outburst. The Knights were their own worst enemy at times, as they committed 17 turnovers and shot only 42 percent (5 of 12) from the free-throw line.

Those giveaways more than accounted for the final scoring margin, as Miami finished with a 21-10 advantage in points off turnovers.

"Coach has been drilling us on our defense, keeping up the intensity on defense for a whole 40 minutes. I think we were really locked in," McGusty said. "I think our defense was really what put us over the edge."

"Most of the time, they were unforced turnovers," UCF coach Johnny Dawkins said. "It wasn't anything where they were pressing and trapping. So, just too many unforced turnovers, which means we have to value the ball a little more, keep it simpler when we're on the floor."

For UCF, Frank Bertz and Darin Green, Jr. each scored 13 points.

Miami: Predicted to finish ninth in the ACC, the Canes could find themselves squarely on the bubble for an NCAA Tournament at-large bid. They have done little to alter that notion in the early stages of the season. Miami's results continued to follow the proverbial script, with wins over Florida Atlantic and UCF coming on the heels of their opening loss to No. 5 Louisville.

UCF: There are likely growing pains to come for the Knights, who are replacing almost every key contributor from a team that came one shot away from knocking off Duke in last year's NCAA Tournament. UCF narrowly avoided a loss at the hands of Prairie View A&M in its season opener and was left to rue a series of turnovers that allowed Miami to pull away.

SUNSHINE STATE OF AFFAIRS

With the win, Miami moved to 82-7 in games against Florida schools from outside the Power Five conferences since 1985-86. Larranaga is 14-2 in such games as the Hurricanes' head coach.

A FOUL PERFORMANCE

UCF forward Collin Smith played only seven minutes in the first half, and 23 minutes overall, before fouling out with eight points and three rebounds. His extended absence was noted as a key factor by both Larranaga and Dawkins.

"It definitely disrupted us," Dawkins said. "I feel Collin is one of the best bigs in the country. When he gets in foul trouble like he did early, and we have to sit him 10, 11, 12 minutes, that's difficult for any player. I thought he did a great job of responding in the second half, but by then, we were fighting an uphill battle. He has to understand his value on the floor, and he has to do a better job of ensuring he doesn't put himself in position to pick up fouls."

That message seemed to have registered with Smith, who had a simple answer when he was asked what he could learn from Tuesday's game. "Try not to foul," he said.

BIG PICTURE

Miami basketball gets big road win at Central Florida

Alan Rubenstein
Canes Warning
Nov. 12, 2019

The Miami basketball team got its first road win of the 2019-20 season with a 79-70 victory at Central Florida on Tuesday night. Redshirt junior Kameron McGusty, a transfer from Oklahoma led four Hurricanes in double figures with 17 points and a career-high 10 rebounds. Freshman Harland Beverly continued to be impressive.

Beverly finished with 15 points, four assists, shot 6-11 from the floor and made one of his two three-point attempts. Miami got off to a good start. The Hurricanes took a 17-7 lead six minutes into the game off a layup by freshman forward Anthony Walker. Walker was the Hurricanes stat sheet stuffer against the Knights.

Walker had six points, two rebounds, one assist, two steals and two blocks. He shot 3-6 from the floor. A 16-5 Central Florida run gave the Knights their first lead 25-24. Miami held UCF scoreless over the last 2:44 of the first half to take a 30-29 lead at halftime. McGusty carried the Hurricanes in the first half with 13 points.

A 13-2 run early in the second half led by Beverly and Walker gave Miami a 52-41 lead and the Hurricanes never led by less than six the remainder of the game. The Hurricanes pulled gradually pulled away in the second half and won 79-70.

Senior Dejan Vasiljevic tied his season-high with 16 points and had four rebounds, four assists and two steals. Junior point guard Chris Lykes had 11 points and three assists, but five turnovers. Lykes was just 2-6 from the floor and is making 42.9 percent of his field-goal attempts this season.

Winning at Central Florida should help Miami in March as the Hurricanes try to return to the NCAA Tournament after missing it last season with a 14-18 record. The Hurricanes have a lot more depth this season after playing primarily using a seven-man rotation in 2018-19. The Hurricanes used nine players on Tuesday night.

Next up for Miami is Quinnipiac on Saturday afternoon at the Watsco Center. Quinnipiac will play its first game of the season on Wednesday night against Brown. The Bobcats are coached by Baker Dunleavy son of former NBA Coach Mike and brother of former NBA player Mike Jr.

MBB Inks Top-100 Recruit Matt Cross

HurricaneSports.com
Nov. 13, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – University of Miami head men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga announced Wednesday the signing of consensus four-star forward Matt Cross to a National Letter of Intent.

A native of Beverly, Mass., Cross is a 6-foot-6, 225-pounder who plays for one of the nation's top prep basketball programs, Brewster Academy in Wolfeboro, N.H.

"Matt is the definition of hard-nosed. He's an outstanding 3-point shooter, a great team-oriented player and has an extreme toughness that will allow him to compete against the best players in the ACC," Larrañaga said. "Matt is joining us after a year at Brewster Academy, which has produced some of the best college and NBA prospects. So, he will be very well-prepared for the challenges in the ACC."

Hailing from the same high school Miami freshman forward Anthony Walker graduated from, Cross checks in as the No. 80 prospect in the nation in the 247Sports Composite.

ESPN considers Cross the No. 81 player in the country, including the No. 16 power forward, while Rivals has him No. 83 overall and No. 13 among power forwards. According to 247Sports, Cross held offers from schools such as Butler, Florida, Georgia Tech, Indiana, Iowa, Penn State, South Carolina and Texas A&M.

During the 2019 Nike EYBL season, Cross averaged 31.4 minutes, 23.3 points, 9.5 rebounds, 2.7 assists and 1.6 steals per game for BABC. He scored 15-plus points in all 18 of his appearances, posting 20-plus 15 times and logging a high of 30, while registering 11 double-doubles.

Cross' 23.4 points per game during the 13-game regular season ranked seventh in the league of players with at least five outings, while his 9.5 boards were sixth-best. On the list of players to finish an EYBL season top-10 in both scoring and rebounding, Cross joins an elite group that includes DeAndre Ayton, Marvin Bagley III, RJ Barrett, Miles Bridges and Michael Porter, Jr.

The Hurricanes, 2-1 on the young season, resume play Saturday at 2 p.m. against Quinnipiac at the Watsco Center, live on ACC Network Extra.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and

Facebook.

The 2019-20 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank on expectations in the nation's hardest conference.

MBB Charges Past UCF, 79-70, in Orlando

Alex Schwartz
HurricaneSports.com
Nov. 13, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The University of Miami men's basketball team earned a 79-70 win Tuesday night at UCF in its first road game of the season.

Buoyed by a game-best 17 points and a career-high 10 rebounds from redshirt junior guard Kameron McGusty, who posted his first collegiate double-double, Miami (2-1, 0-1 ACC) led for over 34 minutes at Addition Financial Arena.

"Well, he got himself off to a great start," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said of McGusty. "We ran a set play for him on the first two possessions and he scored on both of them. Then he got himself to the foul line and made some free throws. He was able to just keep that aggressiveness throughout the game and when he is playing like that he is hard to handle."

Miami jumped out to 12-3 lead in the first 4:05, with McGusty tallying eight of the game's first 15 points. Just minutes later, though, UCF (1-1, 0-0 AAC) went on an extended 20-7 run to take a three-point lead.

McGusty, however, scored the final four points of the half, including a buzzer-beating jump-shot after a steal near midcourt. The back-to-back baskets put the Hurricanes ahead by one, 30-29, at the break despite shooting 12-of-31 (38.7 percent) from the floor, including 2-of-13 (15.4 percent) beyond the arc.

The Knights went 11-of-26 (42.3 percent) overall and 4-of-10 (40.0 percent) from deep, but committed eight turnovers to Miami's three.

After UCF took a 39-38 edge in the second half, the Hurricanes countered with a 14-2 run in just 4:25 to take their then-largest lead of the game, 52-41, with 12:48 to play.

The Hurricanes extended their advantage to as many as 15 points, 68-53, and the Knights never got any closer than eight the rest of the way. A layup in the closing seconds brought the final margin down to single digits.

"Winning on the road is the most difficult thing you can do and we were not able to do it a single time last season," Larrañaga said. "Now, with a little deeper team—we played nine guys tonight—we were able to get a road win in our very first road game. So, I think that is a confidence builder for us."

Three Hurricanes joined McGusty in double figures, including senior guard Dejan Vasiljevic notching 16 points on 6-of-12 shooting to go along with four rebounds and four assists.

Freshman guard Harlond Beverly scored a career-high 15 points on 6-of-11 shooting, adding four assists to co-lead the team alongside Vasiljevic. Junior guard Chris Lykes finished with 11 points and went 6-of-7 from the stripe.

Senior guard Frank Bertz and freshman guard Darrin Green, Jr., co-led UCF with 13 points apiece, while redshirt junior guard Ceasar DeJesus added 11.

The Hurricanes shot 17-of-30 (56.7 percent) in the second half to finish the game 29-of-62 (46.8 percent). Miami also went 16-of-22 (72.7 percent) from the line, while the Knights shot 5-of-12 (41.7 percent).

Miami will now return home to the Watsco Center, where it squares off with Quinnipiac Saturday at 2 p.m., live on ACC Network Extra.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2019-20 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

- Miami improved to 8-2 all-time against UCF, including 4-0 on the road and 2-1 in Larrañaga's tenure.

- Since the program's rebirth in 1985-86, Miami is now 82-7 against Florida's 10 non-Power Five schools, including 14-2 under Larrañaga and 17-4 on the road.

- Larrañaga, who entered the evening with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 647-432 in 36 years as a head coach, including 177-98 in nine seasons at Miami.

- For the third time in as many games this season, Miami used a starting lineup of Lykes, McGusty, Vasiljevic, redshirt junior center Rodney Miller, Jr., and redshirt junior forward Sam Waardenburg.

- Tuesday's victory was Miami's first in a true road game since a 91-88 decision at ninth-ranked North Carolina on Feb. 27, 2018, snapping a 10-game skid.

- McGusty's double-double was the first of the season by a Hurricane, with the most recent prior one coming March 12, 2019 by Anthony Lawrence II against Wake Forest in the ACC

Tournament.

- In his 100th game as a Hurricane, Vasiljevic surpassed 900 points and registered his 44th double-digit scoring outing.

- McGusty, who tallied the 30th double-digit scoring game of his career, reached 75 made 3-pointers as a collegian.

- In addition to his career high in rebounds, McGusty also matched his top assist total as a collegian with three.

- Lykes logged his 46th double-figure scoring game of his career, including his third in as many contests this year.

- Beverly reached double figures in the scoring column for the second time in his young career.

- UCF redshirt senior guard Dazon Ingram was ejected from the game with 6:11 to play after being issued a Flagrant 2 foul.

Kameron McGusty worth the wait as Miami men's basketball rolls over Quinnipiac

Walter Villa
Miami Herald
Nov. 16, 2019

The Miami Hurricanes had to wait one year for Kameron McGusty and 20 minutes of game action for Dejan Vasiljevic.

Pretty soon, their wait for Keith Stone will also be over.

All of that was the upshot of Miami's 80-52 win over visiting Quinnipiac on Saturday afternoon.

Miami (3-1), which won its third consecutive game after getting routed by Louisville, got a career-high-tying 22 points from McGusty, a 6-5 junior shooting guard who sat out last season after transferring from Oklahoma.

Vasiljevic had 17 points and a career-high-tying 10 rebounds. But he went 0-for-5 in his second scoreless first half of the season.

Stone, a 6-8, 245-pound graduate transfer from the Florida Gators, has been cleared to practice in full, starting on Monday.

"That's the best news we got this week," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said of Stone. "He hasn't played since [ACL] surgery in January, and he will need to get up to speed and go through some practices.

"He's a stretch four who can shoot three-pointers but with a huge body. He's a good defender who moves his feet well."

Miami could've used Stone early on Saturday as the Canes made just 1-of-11 three-pointers in the first half. The Canes grabbed their first lead at 12-11 and never trailed again, taking a 29-24 advantage into the break.

Vasiljevic, a senior who led the ACC in three-point shooting percentage as a sophomore, said he wasn't worried after his scoreless half.

"I don't think about anything — those 20 minutes are over with," Vasiljevic said about his mind-set at halftime. "I just went back out thinking that the next shot was going to go in."

That was exactly what happened as Miami's 8-0 run to start the second half featured two Vasiljevic buckets — a three-pointer and a layup.

Vasiljevic finished the game shooting 4-of-11 from the floor, including 3-of-9 on three-pointers.

Larranaga said he had a good idea what ailed Vasiljevic in the first half.

"In our scouting report, we told him that [Quinnipiac] zones a lot," Larranaga said. "He puts a lot of pressure on himself to be the zone buster. He wants to break up the zone with a lot of three-pointers."

Vasiljevic admitted he was putting too much pressure on himself.

"I told the guys we were playing too tense," he said. "We weren't having fun in the first half. We needed to relax, and that's when we started making shots."

With Vasiljevic finally heated up, Miami made 11-of-15 on three-pointers in the second half.

McGusty, who shot 7-of-11, including 4-of-6 on three-pointers, on Saturday, said he spent the year away from game action dedicated to honing his game.

Larranaga said Miami assistant coach Chris Caputo worked with McGusty on three-pointers on a daily basis.

"I stayed in the weight room and also working on my jumper and my playmaking," said McGusty, who also scored 22 points against Kansas while with the Sooners. "I bonded with my teammates, and I got in better condition. I can see improvements."

THIS AND THAT

- Miami center Nysier Brooks's mother, Monique Brooks, passed away on Wednesday.

Brooks, who is sitting out this season after transferring from the University of Cincinnati, was with the team on Saturday after flying home to Philadelphia.

"When he led us know there was a chance she was going to pass, he flew up to Philly to be with her," Larranaga said. "He knows this is his family as well, and he will get a lot of support from us."

Added McGusty: "That [loss of Brooks' mom] was very tough. ... We're a close group. He knows that anytime he needs to reach out he can. I'm praying for him and hoping for the best."

- Vasiljevic on Stone: "I recruited him. I told him to come and have a good run with us, and he decided to come."

Miami hits the road for a tournament. Here are the details

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Nov. 19, 2019

Coach Jim Larranaga is about to learn a whole lot more about his University of Miami basketball team as the Hurricanes head to Charleston, South Carolina, to play three games over four days in the Charleston Classic.

The Hurricanes (3-1) play their first game Thursday at 11:30 a.m. against Missouri State (2-2) at the TD Arena. The University of Florida plays St. Joseph's in the other half of the bracket, and the winners face each other Friday at noon. On Sunday, the Canes play Buffalo, Connecticut, Towson State or No. 18 Xavier.

"Every team presents a different set of challenges, and while Louisville was very skilled and athletic, Missouri State is the most athletic team we've faced so far," Larranaga said. "They rely on their athleticism to create scoring opportunities, whether it's driving to the basket or with offensive rebounds. They like the game to be physical and in the paint."

Miami heads to the tournament after an 80-52 home victory over Quinnipiac last Saturday. The Canes went 11-of-15 from 3-point range in the second half, setting a program record for 3-point makes in a half against a Division I opponent in the ACC era (2004-present).

Redshirt junior guard Kam McGusty, who transferred from the University of Oklahoma and sat out last season, led all scorers with a career-high-tying 22 points. Senior guard D.J. Vasiljevic had his second double-double with 13 points and a career-high-tying 10 rebounds. Junior guard Chris Lykes scored 12 points and freshman guard Harlond Beverly added 10.

Larranaga has been pleased with McGusty's contribution to the team. At 6-5, he can play three positions, handle the ball, drive to the basket and shoot from the perimeter. Freshman Harlond Beverly is also a "Jack of all trades," said Larranaga, and has proven he has good court vision and can find the open man to create offense for teammates.

Lykes "showed real growth" in the Quinnipiac game and at practice Monday and Tuesday, Larranaga said, especially on the defensive end. "I hope what I saw are signs of what we'll see from Chris the remainder of the season. If he does that, it changes everything for us."

Vasiljevic, as the lone senior, is also encouraged by the team's improvement since the loss to Louisville in the opener.

"Coach L has been stressing that we improve on defensive rebounding because we were getting beat there, and we did that against Quinnipiac," Vasiljevic said. "Guys have been getting after the ball in practice and we will have to do that against Missouri State because they are tough and aggressive."

Following its three games in Charleston, the Hurricanes will play on the road against Illinois in Champaign, Ill., Dec. 2 at 9 p.m. in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge. Larranaga is hopeful that University of Florida transfer Keith Stone will be ready to play against the Illini after recovering from knee surgery. He has been cleared to practice, and coaches and teammates are impressed with what they have seen.

Vasiljevic leads Miami to 74-70 win over Missouri State in Charleston Classic

Pete Jacobelli
Sun Sentinel
Nov. 21, 2019

Dejan Vasiljevic had the situation he wanted — game on the line and the ball in his hands.

Vasiljevic had a career-high 25 points, including a pair of clinching foul shots with 1.2 seconds left, as Miami outlasted Missouri State 74-70 to start the Charleston Classic on Thursday.

The Hurricanes had built an 18-point lead midway through the second half, yet needed Vasiljevic's free throws after the Bears rallied back to cut their deficit to 72-70 on Tyrik Dixon's basket with 1.8 seconds to go.

That's when Vasiljevic took the inbounds pass, got fouled and easily swished through his free throws to seal the game.

"I played for a long time, had a lot of big moments and made shots," said Vasiljevic, a senior. "It's gives confidence."

Miami is the lone two-time tournament champion and improved to 8-0 all-time at the eight-team event. They will face Florida on Friday for a spot in Sunday's finals.

Missouri State (2-3) will face St. Joseph's Friday.

Vasiljevic helped Miami open an 18-point lead midway through the second half before Missouri State went on a 12-0 run to cut things to 64-56 with 7:31 to play.

But Kameron McGusty made a field goal and Vasiljevic finished a three-point play to extend Miami's lead and the Bears could not recover.

Vasiljevic surpassed his previous high of 22 points set last February in a win over Clemson.

McGusty added 19 points and Chris Lykes 11 for the Hurricanes.

Gaige Prim led Missouri State with 18 points, 14 in the second half. Tulio Da Silva had 12 points and a game-high 17 rebounds.

Vasiljevic had two of his four 3-pointers to start Miami's 22-13 run that closed the opening half. His first one put the Hurricanes ahead for good, 19-17, with 8:03 remaining and he followed with another long-range basket. McGusty had five points and Harlond Beverly four points in the stretch to send Miami into the break ahead 38-30.

Miami coach Jim Larranaga didn't think there was any magic to his team playing in Charleston, where it won titles in 2009 and 2014. "The only game I care about in Charleston is the next one," he said.

Blackshear's 20 lift Florida to 78-58 win over Miami

Associated Press

Nov. 22, 2019

CHARLESTON, S.C. -- Florida coach Mike White's not sure where his Gators will end up this season. He just finally likes the direction they're headed.

Kerry Blackshear Jr. had 20 points and 11 rebounds as Florida beat state rival Miami 78-58 Friday to advance to the Charleston Classic championship.

ADVERTISEMENT

The Gators (4-2) were sixth in the preseason Top 25, but fell out after losses to Florida State and UConn in their first four games. White does not believe winning the first two games in Charleston mean the struggles are over, only that his team is learning and improving every time out.

"I'm not one of these 'I told you so' guys," White said. "We're still figuring out each other. I do think we're going to be a lot better than we are now in couple of months. Does that mean we're ranked 37th? 14th? I don't get caught up in that."

White did enjoy what he thought was Florida's best game of the year. Much of that was Blackshear, the Virginia Tech grad transfer who now has a chance to win a second straight Charleston title after helping the Hokies hoist the trophy last November.

He also bounced back from an awful first game Thursday where he picked up two quick fouls and sat for most of the half before getting ejected for a flagrant foul early in the second half.

Blackshear said the foul was accidental, but he's got to be smarter than that going forward if he wants to be a leader for Florida. He's also happy with giving his latest teammates a try for a title.

"It's definitely good feeling," Blackshear said. "Being with a team that I like to be around helps me with the adjustment."

Blackshear scored Florida's first eight points, and his 3-pointer later in the period closed the Gators' 20-2 run.

Still, Miami (4-2) rallied to tie things at 45-all in the second half on Chris Lykes' high-arcing 3-pointer. Noah Locke, though, followed with a 3-pointer to start a 15-4 run that put Florida ahead to stay.

The Gators will take on No. 18 Xavier or UConn on Sunday night for the tournament crown.

Miami, whose perfect 8-0 record at Charleston ended, will vie against the Xavier-UConn loser for third place Sunday.

This game had a higher intensity given the schools' long athletic history and position as two of the biggest, most successful programs in the Sunshine State. The teams have met 69 times, but only seven of those games have come since 1990. Their last meeting was also an early-season tournament, the Advocare Invitational in Orlando, Florida, where the Gators topped the Hurricanes 65-56.

Whenever one side threatened to gain control, the other fought back in a first half that seemed more like a game near the end of a season instead of the beginning. At one point, Blackshear looked behind as he went back on defense and saw four bodies on the floor after fighting for a rebound.

Lykes had 16 points to lead Miami.

BIG PICTURE

Miami: The Hurricanes had few answers for Florida's inside game and were outrebounded 34-25. And when Miami's shots were not falling in the second half (the Hurricanes made just 3 of 17 attempts), the Gators took advantage. It was Miami's largest loss to the Gators since falling 101-81 in 1988.

Florida: The Gators started the season No. 6 in the rankings and fell out after falling to Florida State and UConn in its first four games. Florida, though, has made strides in looking like the Top 10 team it was projected to be this season.

DEFENSIVE WORK AHEAD

Miami coach Jim Larranaga said his team must improve its defense if it hopes to have the year it wants this season. He said there were too many instances of mistakes made by younger players still learning, especially as Florida took control the final 15 minutes.

ONE GAK

The game featured the Gak brothers, one on each side. Gorjok Gak is a 6-foot-11 junior for the Gators while Deng Gak is a 6-10 sophomore with Miami. But only Deng Gak saw action as Gorjok continues dealing with a shoulder injury. Deng finished with four points and three rebounds in 11 minutes.

UP NEXT

Miami will face either No. 18 Xavier or UConn in the third-place game here Sunday night.

Florida plays for the championship against No. 18 Xavier or UConn to close the tournament Sunday night.

Carlton leads UConn to 80-55 win over Miami in Charleston

Associated Press

Nov. 24, 2019

CHARLESTON, S.C. -- UConn needed a pick-me-up after its double overtime loss to No. 18 Xavier on Friday night, perhaps no one more than junior point guard Alterique Gilbert.

Huskies coach Danny Hurley said the whole team was down Saturday and especially Gilbert, the target of social media after he lost control of his dribble on UConn's final chance against the Musketeers. So no one was happier than Hurley with Gilbert's steady, solid play in an 80-55 win over Miami on Sunday as the Huskies captured third place at the Charleston Classic.

"I just couldn't be prouder of how he led this team," Hurley said.

Josh Carlton had 16 points while freshman James Bouknight continued to make himself indispensable to the Huskies with 13 points. Christian Vital had 14 points while Brendan Adams had 13. Gilbert led UConn with seven assists and directed his teammates throughout.

At one point, Gilbert threw a perfect pass to Akok Akok as he soared high for an alley-oop finish. Hurley was so thrilled with Gilbert he rushed out to bear hug him on the next time out. At the end with 90 seconds and UConn up big, Hurley called time out so Gilbert could hear the cheers of UConn fans as he came off the court.

"After that loss, it was Alterique that helped us bounce back," Carlton said.

The Huskies capped a week that started last Sunday with a win over then-15th-ranked Florida and continued here with two more wins and that oh-so-close defeat to Xavier.

"I don't think anyone's had a week like us in college basketball" this season, Hurley said.

The Huskies might have a few more surprises ahead after handily topping the Hurricanes (4-3) in the first meeting between the former Big East Conference rivals in 11 years.

The Huskies' youth was on full display, led by Bouknight, the highly regarded freshman who made his debut this week in Charleston after missing his team's first three games with legal problems.

Bouknight, the 6-foot-4 guard from Brooklyn, New York, led UConn with 19 points against Xavier and continued his solid play in this one. He made six of seven field goals and added three rebounds, two assists and a steal -- all off the bench.

Another freshman, 6-9 Akok, had seven boards and six of his team's nine blocked shots.

Miami dropped its second straight after an opening win Thursday against Missouri State. The Hurricanes fell to state rival Florida on Friday.

Dejan Vasiljevic led Miami with 11 points.

"I don't think it's a secret that we're not there" yet defensively, Miami associate head coach Chris Caputo said.

BIG PICTURE

Miami: The Hurricanes struggled in the second half of their past two losses. They were outscored 33-13 over the final 15 minutes of the Florida defeat and 62-35 the last 25 minutes against UConn.

UConn: The Huskies are returning to the Big East next season and look ready to make an immediate impact with the young talent they're developing. Bouknight, Akok, Brendan Adams, who also had 13 points off the bench, and Jalen Gaffney are underclassmen who are improving. Christian Vital had 14 points for UConn.

LARRANAGA PLAYING HURT

Miami coach Jim Larranaga dealt with a pulled muscle this week that limited his mobility, including on the bench where he would sit while Caputo filled the role of walking the sidelines, talking to players and officials.

CHANGE OF FORTUNE

The arena interview room has large glass windows to the outside where fans can see coaches and players talking to media. Several pounded the glass and cheered as Hurley began speaking. It wasn't that way Friday night after Xavier, Hurley joked, "I was pretty lonely."

UP NEXT

Miami is off next week and plays at Illinois on Dec. 2.

UConn returns home to play Maine on Dec. 1.

Gak's Return Includes Family Reunion

Christy Cabrera Chirinos
HurricaneSports.com
Nov. 26, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – A year ago, he seemed poised to be a contributor for the Hurricanes.

With Dewan Hernandez sidelined and Rodney Miller redshirting, Deng Gak – then a redshirt freshman – played in each of Miami's first seven games last season, making the first start of his Miami career in the eighth game, a matchup against Yale in the HoopHall Miami Invitational.

But Gak's season ended that December night on the floor of the AmericanAirlines Arena. He left the game with a knee injury and days later, had surgery that sidelined him for months.

Since, he's gone through treatment and done the rehabilitative work to get back on the court, something he's been able to do in recent weeks as the Hurricanes have started a new season.

And last week, while Miami was in Charleston, Gak had the opportunity to do something he'd never done before: face off against his older brother, Gorjok Gak, a center at Florida.

No, the brothers weren't on the floor together at the same time, and maybe his big brother's team got the best of his, but it was an experience that meant the world to Gak.

"Not many people can say they've played against their brother or sister in a high-level collegiate basketball game," Gak said. "I'd never played against him before. That was the first time, so it was good to go out there and go against the team he's on. It might have been better for him watching me play, since he couldn't be out there. ... It really meant everything, though."

That sentiment is easy to understand, especially given how basketball has impacted both brothers' winding journeys.

Deng Gak was only three months old and his brother just a toddler when their family moved from Egypt to Australia. There, the brothers grew up playing soccer before they grew tall enough that friends and family encouraged them to try basketball.

"We tried it and we loved it," Gak said, simply.

Deng Gak makes a play
Before long, the brothers joined the Savannah Pride, an Australian youth basketball program founded in 2006 to help better the lives

of families from South Sudan.

It was while playing with the Pride that Gak and his brother met a growing number of young athletes and refugees from South Sudan who shared their background and were able to help the brothers understand more about their family's home.

"The majority of the kids that had come into Australia, some of them were from single-parent homes and didn't have much guidance. Having that little community we had, the Savannah Pride, that was big. A lot of my friends could have gone the wrong way, but that was something that helped direct them. It wasn't just for basketball, it was about everything," Gak said. "It was real cool to get to know some of them. My family moved to Australia in 1998 and the majority of the refugees started moving in the early 2000s. ..."

"All through kindergarten and first and second grade, there weren't that many people that looked like where we were from, besides my family. So, as I got exposed to that community, it opened me up. I started learning more about where I was from from them ... Some of them came over when they were like 8 or 9, so they had experiences they remembered from South Sudan and Egypt. I learned more about myself and where I was from because of them."

Eventually, basketball brought Gak and his brother to the United States.

Gorjok would play at Victory Rock Prep in Bradenton before signing with Oklahoma State. A coaching change there paved the way for him to eventually enroll at Florida. Deng, meanwhile, played high school basketball at Blair Academy in New Jersey before signing with Miami.

And that, ultimately, set the stage for the brothers to have their shared moment last week at the Charleston Classic, even though Gorjok was sidelined by a shoulder injury.

Still, given all that brought them to that moment, the game was special, especially since Deng Gak is still trying to get back feeling like himself on the court after last year's injury.

"I'm so grateful right now to be playing. When you have something taken from you like that, you appreciate it more. So I'm very grateful," Gak said. "Not playing for an entire year, you feel like everybody else has a head start. You feel like you're a little bit behind, so I just want to catch up once again, that's one of my biggest goals. I want to be able to have an impact as much as I can. I feel like I have a

chance to play and help our team win."

And the Hurricanes believe he has the potential to do exactly that.

"He's got a knack to block shots and he's got the knack to be a presence at the rim," Miami associate head coach Chris Caputo said of Gak. "I think he really had a good weekend here [in Charleston] with what he was able to contribute defensively. He really gives us the ability to block shots."

MBB to Compete in 2020 Cayman Islands Classic

HurricaneSports.com
Nov. 29, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The University of Miami men's basketball team will travel to the Cayman Islands for its Thanksgiving tournament next season.

The Hurricanes are one of eight teams set to take part in the 2020 Cayman Islands Classic, as announced this week by Caymax Sports LTD. Action will take place Nov. 23-25 at John Gray Gymnasium near Seven Mile Beach.

Miami is joined in the field by Kansas State, La Salle, Nevada, North Texas, Northern Iowa, Ole Miss, Oregon State, Southern Miss and Western Kentucky.

The Cayman Islands are located in the western Caribbean Sea, approximately one hour away from Miami. Next year will be the fourth edition of the Cayman Islands Classic, with George Mason taking the crown in 2019.

The Hurricanes are 15-9 in, in-season tournaments under the direction of ninth-year head coach Jim Larrañaga, claiming titles at the 2014 Charleston Classic and 2015 Puerto Rico Tip-Off. Miami also reached the championship of the 2018 Wooden Legacy.

Miami is 4-3 (0-1 ACC) in 2019-20 and resumes play Monday at 7 p.m. ET against Illinois in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge, live on ESPN2 from the State Farm Center in Champaign, Ill.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2019-20 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

Miami holds off furious Illinois comeback to win 81-79

Associated Press

Dec. 2, 2019

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. -- Chris Lykes scored 28 points and Miami held off a furious second-half comeback to beat Illinois 81-79 on Monday.

Illinois (6-2) trailed 50-31 at the half -- at one point down by 27 points -- and was outplayed at every level by Miami (5-3) before making adjustments and outscoring the Hurricanes 48-31 in the second half.

"In the first half, we were hitting on all cylinders," said Miami coach Jim Larranaga. "But we started to get into foul trouble and had to make some adjustments. They also shot very well in that second half."

Dejan Vasiljevic scored 20 points, Kameron McGusty 13 and Sam Waardenburg 12 for Miami.

Kofi Cockburn scored 23 points to lead Illinois. Trent Frazier scored 14, Ayo Dosunmu had 12 and Andre Feliz added 11 points for the Illini.

The Hurricanes put together a series of runs in the first half and jumped out to a 25-9 lead with 12 minutes left before the break. Illinois answered late in the half with a 7-0 run that featured a 3-pointer from Alan Griffin, a layup by Dosunmu and a jumper by Da'Monte Williams.

"We started slow and they were really hitting their shots," Feliz said. "They're a tough team, and we just weren't with it tonight. We have to get better."

SO CLOSE

After clawing its way back, Illinois had a chance to win it at the buzzer. Feliz hit a layup with less than a minute to play to pull the Illini to within one point, 80-79. With two seconds left and a chance to win the game, Dosunmu drove to the basket and was called for an offensive foul. That sent Lykes to the line, where he sank one free throw to ice the game.

"To be down by as many as 27 points and to have the ball in our hands with a chance to win it, that's really something," Illinois coach Brad Underwood said. "I'm very proud of the effort we made in that second half."

But Underwood knows his team has to play better early in the game, a trend for the Illini this season.

"That's on me," he said. "I did a very poor job of getting our guys ready. We'll get better."

ONE FOR THE ROAD

Larranaga was happy to come to Champaign and leave with a victory against a tough Big Ten team on the rise.

"We got our second road win of the season," he said. "Those are tough to come by."

DOUBLING KOFI

Larranaga knew coming in his team would have problems with Cockburn, Illinois' 7-foot freshman center.

"Kofi is big and strong and he's really hard to guard one-on-one," Larranaga said. "So, we made some changes going in and double teamed him, what we call our 4-5 trap. It was pretty effective."

"I thought Kofi was huge tonight," said Illinois teammate Giorgi Bezhanishvili. "He's just dominating out there, and I am so happy for him."

BIG PICTURE

Miami: The Hurricanes looked unbeatable in the first half and seemed fatigued as the game progressed. But overall, they got the job done and handed Larranaga his 650th career win in his 36th season.

Illinois: The Illini have been slow starters all season and this time, it hurt them badly against a very good Miami team. Illinois needs to find a way to play two

consistently good halves before Big Ten Conference play starts.

UP NEXT

Miami: Hosts Alabama A&M on Dec. 14.

Illinois: Things get tougher when Illinois travels to (hash)5 Maryland for an early Big Ten Conference game on Saturday.

Chris Lykes leads Miami to impressive 81-79 win at Illinois

David Lake
247Sports
Dec. 2, 2019

The Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team had plenty of time to stew on their last performance.

UM had eight days to learn from a rough 80-55 loss to UConn at the Charleston Classic on November 24th.

After an impressive 81-79 win at Illinois on Monday during ESPN's Big Ten/ACC Challenge, it looks like Miami (5-3) took some valuable lessons from that loss.

Point guard Chris Lykes led the Hurricanes with 27 points, two assists, and four steals, but it might have been a defensive play late in the game that was his most impressive moment.

With four fouls and Miami clinging to a 80-79 lead, Lykes took a charge on Illinois guard Ayo Dosunmu with 2.7 seconds remaining in the game to take the ball away from the Illinoi (6-2).

Lykes received the in-bounds pass on the next possession and was immediately fouled and made one free throw to make the final score 81-79.

After scoring 55 and 58 points in their two recent losses to Florida and UConn, Miami was much improved on offense at Illinois.

The Hurricanes entered the Illinois shooting 44 percent from the field and 37 percent from behind the arc on the season. Against the Illini, Miami made 59 percent of their shots from the field and made 55 percent of their three-point attempts.

D.J. Vasiljevic made six three-points on his way to 20 points while Kameron McGusty had 13 points and Sam Waardenburg finished with 12 points and eight rebounds.

Illinois was led by center Kofi Cockburn's 23 points on 8-of-8 shooting from the field.

The first half couldn't have gone better for the Hurricanes.

Miami went on a 17-2 run early in the first half to take an early 23-7 lead over Illinois with 12:16 left in the first half.

UM held a 45-18 lead with 4:33 remaining in

the first half.

The Hurricanes converted 20-of-30 shots from the field in the opening half while knocking down 6-of-12 three point attempts and turning the ball over just four times.

At halftime, Miami was led by Lykes' 18 points and two assists. Waardenburg scored ten points in the opening half while Vasiljevic and McGusty each had nine points.

Those four starters accounted for 92 percent of Miami's scoring in the first half.

Miami also did a solid job defensively in the first half, forcing Illinois to turn the ball over ten times and convert 44 percent of their shots from the field.

Cockburn led the Illini with 11 points and two rebounds.

UM held a 50-31 lead at halftime.

Vasiljevic hit back-to-back deep threes with 16 minutes remaining in the second half to push Miami's lead to 62-40 as the Hurricanes continued to keep the Illini at a safe distance.

A quick 10-2 spurt by Illinois gave the Illini some momentum with 13 minutes remaining in the second half, but another Vasiljevic three pointer gave UM a 67-40 cushion.

Lykes picked up his fourth foul of the game with 12:30 remaining in the second half. He had 22 points at the time of the foul.

He returned to the floor with 7:40 remaining in the game as he had to navigate foul trouble.

With Lykes on the bench Miami's offense lost its rhythm, Illinois went on a 16-2 run that cut Miami's lead to 71-66 with 6:11 remaining in the game.

The Hurricanes went four minutes without scoring a basket when McGusty scored on a layup while being fouled to give UM a 73-66 lead.

A deep three by Lykes with 4:09 remaining in the first half pushed UM's lead to 78-69. On the next possession, Lykes hit a heat check step-back deep two pointer to give UM a 80-71 lead.

With 2:26 remaining in the game, Illinois' Ayo Dosunmu made two free throws and then made a quick steal and lay-up to help cut the

score to 80-77.

The game ended with Lykes taking the charge and hitting a free throw.

MBB Downs Illinois, 81-79, in Big Ten/ACC Challenge

Alex Schwartz
HurricaneSports.com
Dec. 2, 2019

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. – Behind a scintillating first-half shooting performance, the University of Miami men's basketball team picked up an 81-79 victory Monday night at Illinois.

Junior guard Chris Lykes (career-high-tying 28) and senior guard Dejan Vasiljevic (20) both reached the 20-point mark, as Miami (5-3, 0-1 ACC) led by as many as 27 points at the State Farm Center.

The triumph was Miami's third straight on the road in Big Ten/ACC Challenge competition and gave head coach Jim Larrañaga 650 total wins in his stellar career.

"Winning on the road is very difficult, but getting out in front and playing as well as we did in the first half really gave us a chance," Larrañaga said. "I have got a lot of respect for the job Illinois did, and their players in making a great comeback, but we were able to keep our poise down the stretch and win the game."

After missing their first two shots, the Hurricanes fully controlled the remainder of the first half. Miami connected on 18 of its next 21 attempts from the floor, hitting 10 in a row and making 6-of-8 shots from 3-point range, to take a commanding 27-point edge, 45-18, with 4:33 on the clock.

The stretch included a 9-0 run and an 11-0 run sandwiched around an Illinois basket, good for a 20-2 burst in just 5:52 of play. A late surge by Illinois (6-2, 0-0 B1G) made it a 19-point margin, 50-31, at the intermission.

Lykes scored 18 points on 7-of-9 shooting in the half, tying his season high for a full game and setting a new career high for points before the break. Redshirt junior forward Sam Waardenburg also set a new season high in the first half alone, notching 10 points on 4-of-5 shooting.

Overall, Miami shot 20-of-30 (66.7 percent) in the first half, including 6-of-12 (50.0 percent) from beyond the arc. The Hurricanes also scored 17 points off Illinois' 10 turnovers, while the Fighting Illini had four points on Miami's four turnovers.

"I think our players were very focused; we had a great week of practice," Larrañaga said. "I thought Chris Lykes, DJ Vasiljevic and Kameron McGusty, our starting back court, were very sharp in their decision-making, whether to shoot or pass, and they were very, very aggressive. At the same time, we were also very aggressive on the defensive end of the floor, limiting them to one shot."

Late in the second half, Illinois used a 12-0 run in just 2:50 to pull within five points, 71-66, with 5:52 remaining. After Miami pulled back in front by nine, 80-71, with 3:17 left, the Fighting Illini scored eight points in a row to make it 80-79 with 46 seconds to play.

Lykes, however, drew a charge with 2.7 seconds left on Illinois' next possession and then connected on the first of two free throw with 1.8 ticks left and the Illini missed a half-court heave, sealing the Miami win.

Along with tying his career high in points, Lykes set a new career high in made field goals, finishing 11-of-17 after starting 9-of-11. The Mitchellville, Md., native

also logged a career- and game-best four steals.

Vasiljevic's 20-point outing featured a career-high-tying six made 3-pointers on just nine attempts in a game-leading 37 minutes. McGusty, a redshirt junior guard, scored 13 points, while Waardenburg finished with 12 points and a co-game-high eight rebounds, the former two shy of his career high.

Redshirt senior forward Keith Stone also made his Miami debut in the victory, playing for the first time in 317 days after rehabbing from a right knee injury he suffered while playing for Florida at Georgia on Jan. 19. The Deerfield Beach, Fla., native recorded two points and three rebounds in 15 minutes.

Freshman center Kofi Cockburn paced Illinois with 23 points, finishing 8-of-8 from the floor and 7-of-8 at the line. Junior guard Trent Frazier notched 14 points, while sophomore guard Ayo Dosunmu totaled 12 and senior guard Andres Feliz had 11.

Miami, which led for over 38 minutes of action, finished shooting 32-of-54 (59.3 percent) from the floor and 10-of-18 (55.6 percent) from beyond the arc. The field goal percentage mark was Miami's best since shooting 60.0 percent (30-of-50) versus Middle Tennessee State on Dec. 25, 2017, in Honolulu.

In addition, the Hurricanes shot over 50.0 percent in both halves for the first time since Dec. 29, 2018, when they did so against Campbell.

With the win, Larrañaga became just the 18th active coach to reach 650 career victories, including the 10th at the Division I level.

"This is really about a team accomplishment, not just this year's team, but all of the years that I have coached," Larrañaga said. "[I have had] the opportunity and the privilege to coach a lot of terrific players who have helped us win a lot of games.

After 11 days without a game, the Hurricanes will return to action Dec. 14, when they host Alabama A&M at 2 p.m. at the Watsco Center, live on ACC Network.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2019-20 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

- The Hurricanes are now 3-1 all-time against Illinois, including 1-0 on the road and 3-0 in Larrañaga's tenure.

- Miami improved to 7-6 in Big Ten/ACC Challenge action, including 3-4 on the road, 6-3 under Coach L and 5-1 in the past six years.

- Larrañaga, who entered the game with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 650-434 in 36 years as a head coach, including 180-100 in nine seasons at Miami.

- Larrañaga is the 64th NCAA coach all-time to record 650 victories in a career, including the 39th with Division I experience, the 38th with at least 10 years at a Division I school.

- With the victory, Larrañaga passed Cliff Ellis for sole possession of the No. 20 spot on the all-time wins list by an ACC coach while in the league (180).

- After going 0-10 in true road games during the 2018-19 season, the Hurricanes are 2-0 in such contests this year.

- The Hurricanes have opened December with a victory in 15 of the past 17 seasons, including 10 of the last 11.

- For the eighth time in as many games this season, Miami used a starting lineup of Lykes, McGusty, Miller, Vasiljevic, Waardenburg and redshirt junior center Rodney Miller, Jr.

- The last time two Hurricanes scored 20-plus points in a game was March 12, 2019, in the ACC Tournament in Charlotte, N.C., when Vasiljevic had 21 and Anthony Lawrence II had 20.

- Lykes' 18 points in the first half were one shy of his most in any half, just behind the 19 he scored against Bethune-Cookman (Nov. 17, 2018) and Wake Forest (Jan. 12, 2019) last season.

- The Hurricanes' 20 made field goals in the first half tied for the ninth-most in a session since joining the ACC in 2004-05 and tied for the fifth-most in the first half.

- Miami reached 50 points in a half for the second time this season, as well as tallied 50 before the break for the first time since Nov. 13, 2018, against Stephen F. Austin.

- The last time Miami scored 50 points in a half against power conference opponent was Feb. 7, 2018, when it notched 52 versus Wake Forest.

- The Hurricanes' 19-point edge at the half was their largest since leading La Salle by 31 points, 49-18, on Nov. 22, 2018, in Fullerton, Calif., as well as its largest versus a power conference team since holding a 24-point advantage, 59-35, over Mississippi State on Nov. 19, 2015, in San Juan, P.R.

- The last time Miami shot 60-plus percent in a half was Nov. 25, 2018, versus Seton Hall, also in Fullerton, when it posted an equal 66.7 percent mark (16-of-24).

- Illinois shot 17-of-28 (60.7 percent) in the second half, becoming the first team to shoot 60-plus percent in a half against the Hurricanes since Feb. 9, 2019, when eighth-ranked North Carolina went 16-of-25 (64.0 percent) in the second stanza.

- Over its last 180 minutes of action—the past four full games and the first half of the prior one—Miami is shooting 41-of-84 (48.8 percent) from 3-point range.

- In his 72nd appearance as a Hurricane, Lykes made his 50th start, surpassed 250 free-throw attempts, logged his 50th double-figure scoring output and totaled his 11th 20-point showing.

- McGusty posted his 34th double-figure point total and eclipsed 250 made field goals in his career.

- Vasiljevic registered his 48th double-digit point total and eighth 20-point performance as a collegian.

- Vasiljevic tied Malcolm Grant for fifth place on Miami's all-time made 3-pointers list with 223 and passed Grant for sole possession of fifth place on the attempts list with 580.

- Waardenburg notched his eighth-career double-digit point total and tied his career high in made field goals (four).

- Freshman guard Isaiah Wong surpassed 100 minutes played in his young career.

- As announced prior to the game, redshirt sophomore forward Deng Gak will miss the remainder of the season with a right knee injury sustained in practice.

University of Miami basketball is back after two-week layoff. Here's what to expect

Michelle Kaufmann
Miami Herald
Dec. 13, 2019

It has been two weeks since the University of Miami men's and women's basketball teams played a game, and both coaches used the layoff to urge their teams to step things up before the conference season heats up in January.

UM men's coach Jim Larranaga gathered his players into a circle before Friday's practice and shouted: "Finals are over! It's time to concentrate on basketball!" He then reminded them of the message of the day: "Nobody gets into the paint!"

The Hurricanes (5-3) are on their home court for the first time in 27 days Saturday for a 2 p.m. game against Alabama A&M (2-5). Miami is coming off a big 81-79 road win Dec. 2 over Illinois in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge. Illinois went on to beat No. 5 Michigan and lost by just one to No. 4 Maryland. The Canes led by 27 in the first half of that game after going 18 of 21 during a 14-minute stretch. They hung on at the end thanks to Chris Lykes, who led the team with 28 points, and DJ Vasiljevic, who had 20.

UM's three losses have come against tough teams — state rival Florida; Louisville, which reached No. 1; and Connecticut. Saturday, they will face an Alabama A&M team that starts four freshmen and likes to drive to the basket. Larranaga challenged his team to play suffocating defense.

They will get help from University of Florida grad transfer Keith Stone, who is 6-9, 250 pounds, and returned to the lineup at Illinois after recovering from knee surgery. "He's another big guy in the front court, really experienced, comes from a good conference, really energetic, always talking," Vasiljevic said of Stone. "He wants to defend and be out there. He doesn't care if he scores, he sets screens to get guards open and defensively he rebounds."

Miami Hurricanes' Jim Larrañaga adjusts philosophy to shooting data

By DAVID FURONES
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL
DEC 13, 2019

Miami Hurricanes men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga generally likes to see his team's assist numbers high.

It's a sign that the offense is flowing, the ball is moving and that one player's action is leading to a good look and comfortable shot for another.

Miami's average of 11.5 assists per game ranks 290th of 353 Division I teams, but that's not nearly as concerning as one might imagine for Larrañaga and his staff. They have recently discovered that their top scorers are actually more efficient when shooting off the dribble than in catch-and-shoot scenarios.

"We have found that we're one of the better teams in shooting off the bounce, so we're not going to take that away from our guys," said Larrañaga on Friday ahead of UM's return to action Saturday against Alabama A&M in a 2 p.m. tip at Watsco Center. The team had 11 days between games.

"You normally get assists because the rule is you got to shoot it as soon as you catch it — there can be no dribbles or no dribble moves. What we're finding is someone like [senior guard] DJ Vasiljevic — he's an outstanding catch-and-shoot guy, but he's also very good at shot faking, taking a dribble or two and then making the shot. And that's what we appear to be doing a lot of this year — where [guards] Kam McGusty, Chris Lykes and DJ Vasiljevic are being very successful off the bounce."

Following the Hurricanes' most-recent 81-79 win at Illinois on Dec. 2, they ranked No. 1 in the Atlantic Coast Conference and fifth nationally in points per possession on dribble jump shots (1.11), according to data provided by the team to the South Florida Sun Sentinel. That's a tenth of a point per possession better than they average on catch-and-shoot jumpers (1.01), which is sixth in the ACC.

Vasiljevic gets 1.65 points per possession shooting off the dribble to 1.29 when on a catch and shoot. Those same numbers for McGusty and Lykes: 1.13 to 0.75 and 1.09 to 0.91, respectively.

"It just shows you that Coach L likes to adjust to the players that he has," said Lykes, who leads the team with 14.8 points per game after pouring in 28 against Illinois. "He knows that he has guys that can score off the bounce, so he's kind of changed up a few things that's going to allow us to do that in a more efficient way."

When Lykes, the 5-foot-7 junior point guard, shoots off the dribble, he's usually working harder for that look, virtually always guarded by a taller, longer defender. Time and time again against Illinois, he delivered on tough fadeaway shots. It's something he has developed through his youth, always growing up smaller than his opponent.

"Since I've been playing basketball, I've always been undersized," Lykes said. "I guess that's practice all the time because it just feels natural to me, just trying to beat my guy off the dribble and make a play."

Larrañaga said the discovery to allow players to shoot off the dribble more was made earlier this season actually because of an original emphasis on improving the team's catch-and-shoot offense in the spring. Larrañaga saw how strong Virginia and Virginia Tech were in that area last season, while UM ranked 10th in the ACC, and wanted to catch up.

"We worked all spring, all summer, all fall on catch and shoot," Larrañaga said. "After the first six games, we did the research, we were still 10th in the league in catch and shoot, but we were No. 1 in the league in making shots off the bounce. So, Chris Lykes and Kam McGusty and DJ are really good at that. We're not going to take that away from them. In fact, we're going to emphasize it. You're probably going to see it more and more."

While the Hurricanes' offense has been efficient, Larrañaga wants to see the team improve in its defense and rebounding.

"Until you can defend and rebound, it's very hard to defeat the caliber of opponent we'll be playing from now on," he said.

One addition that should help is the recent return of redshirt senior power forward and Florida transfer Keith Stone from rehab for a torn ACL.

"All the areas that we need help in, he can provide," Larrañaga said.

Miami basketball head coach Jim Larranaga out versus Alabama A&M

Alan Rubenstein
CanesWarning
Dec. 14, 2019

Miami basketball head coach Jim Larranaga is expected to return to Hurricanes for Tuesday's game against Temple at the Barclay's Center in Brooklyn after missing Saturday's game at home against Alabama A&M. Longtime Larranaga assistant head coach Chris Caputo is the head coach for Saturday's game.

The official release from the Miami Hoops twitter account stated that Larranaga would be out on Saturday and replaced by Caputo. Canes Hoops mentioned they expect Larranaga "back on the bench shortly." The 70-year-old Larranaga also missed the Hurricanes 72-70 loss on February 10, 2018, at Boston College due to an illness.

The game gives Caputo another chance to run the Hurricanes for a game. Caputo was a finalist for the Buffalo job last spring and is a likely future college basketball head coach. Caputo has been on Larranaga's staff for the last 18 years, 13 as an assistant. The New York native attended Archbishop Molloy H.S. where Larranaga went to.

Miami will also be without forward Deng Gak who was declared out for the season two weeks ago with a tom ACL for the second straight season. Miami is 5-3 and coming off an exhilarating 81-79 victory at Illinois on December 2. The Hurricanes led 45-18 in the first half and had to survive late for the key road victory.

Graduate transfer forward Keith Stone made his Miami basketball debut against Illinois. Stone scored three points, had two rebounds, one assist and one steal against the Fighting Illini. Stone's addition to the Miami roster after recovering from his own ACL tear with Florida last season was essential for Miami with the loss of Gak.

Hurricanes back in action after 11 days off, host Alabama A&M

Chris Stock
Inside The U
Dec. 14, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Jim Larranaga brought the team together before Friday's practice and had a clear message to them.

"Nobody gets in the paint," Larranaga exclaimed. "Tomorrow, hold down the paint, block them out, rebound, and go."

The Hurricanes will look to take their points of emphasis from practices into the game on Saturday (2:00 p.m., ACC Network) against Alabama A&M at the Watsco Center in their first game since an 81-79 win at Illinois on Dec. 2.

"Protecting the paint, they're a dribble-drive team that wants to penetrate and try and get their own buckets," senior shooting guard Dejan Vasiljevic said. "Elbows and blocks are the biggest emphasis and loading up the paint so they see bodies and hesitate in going against us."

The Hurricanes (5-3) came up with a much-needed win against Illinois, leading by as many as 27 in the first half, after losing its previous two games by a total of 45 points.

"I think it was a pretty big win especially going there and getting a dub," said junior point guard Chris Lykes, who scored a season-high 28 points. "I really liked how we played in the first half and if you've watched Illinois the last couple of games, they won one against Michigan and they should have won against Maryland. They're not a bad team, I think they came out a little slow against us."

Miami improved to 2-0 on the road this season, a year after going 0-10.

"Last year we didn't win a single road game and now we're 2-0, which is a lot of confidence for us," Vasiljevic said. "To beat Illinois at Illinois is big for us. It gives confidence for the freshmen because none of them have played in an environment like that before with 15,000 people at the stadium. For the freshman to get that experience under their belt and get the win (is valuable)."

The 11 days off in between games have given the team time to regroup, focus on exams, recover, and work on areas of improvement.

"It's nice to get a little bit of a break and the guys are not totally on break because they've got final exams and they worked really hard to do a good job in the classroom," Larranaga said. "But we've had good practices. We practiced (Thursday), practiced (Friday), and

a game (Saturday) at 2 o'clock and hopefully we'll be ready."

Getting through exams can be tough.

"It's been a little up and down because guys have had final exams, mentally it's tiring," Vasiljevic said. "We've done a pretty good job. We've been concentrating on ourselves, getting back on defense, getting the offense going the way it is. These last two days we've been on Alabama A&M."

The Hurricanes will get their second look at Keith Stone in action. Stone made his season debut against Illinois and had two points, three rebounds, one assist, and one steal in 14 minutes off the bench. Stone enters the mix as Deng Gak exits as Gak was ruled out for the season with a knee injury.

Vasiljevic is 21 points away from 1,000 points in his career. He is looking to become the 40th player in school history to reach that accomplishment and just the fourth to have done so solely playing for Larranaga.

"My girlfriend actually told me not to get 1,000 tomorrow, get it at Brooklyn because the whole family is coming out for it. I'm going to try and get it, but I'm not really focused on that. I'd rather get the win, but if I'm lucky enough to hit 7 for 7 from 3 and it'll be over with. We'll see how it goes. If it comes to me, it comes, but if not I'm not going to force anything. I'm going to get it eventually, it just depends when."

Jim Larranaga sidelined by back spasms, missed Hurricanes' 88-74 win over Alabama A&M

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Dec. 14, 2019

University of Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga was forced to miss the Hurricanes' 88-74 victory over Alabama A&M on Saturday afternoon after suffering back spasms following the morning shootaround.

Larranaga watched the game on T.V. from home, while associate head coach Chris Caputo took charge.

"He was great at the shootaround and then he called me at noon saying, 'You may have to do the radio,' and then he called me again at 12:45 and said he couldn't make it," Caputo said. "It's a difficult thing because you get these spasms and what you really need is rest; and it's hard to rest in the middle of the season. He was on the road at Illinois, came home and went recruiting, and was running around recruiting last weekend."

Miami was coming off a big road win at Illinois Dec. 2 in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge and eager to play at home for the first time in 27 days. With final exams out of the way, the Canes had spirited practices in the days leading up to Saturday's game. Coaches stressed defense, and challenged players to keep the Bulldogs from driving to the basket.

Alabama A&M, which starts four freshmen, presented a bigger challenge than the Hurricanes might have expected. Entering the game, the Bulldogs were 2-5 and their five losses had been by an average of 29 points.

It was a different story on Saturday. With 12 minutes to go, the Hurricanes led by just five, 57-52. But a 10-0 run late in the game, capped by a three-pointer by Kam McGusty, widened the gap to 15 points and the Hurricanes came away with the win.

McGusty led all scorers with 21 points, DJ Vasiljevic had 17 (including five three pointers), Chris Lykes added 13 and Sam Waardenberg 11 with nine rebound.

"We allowed DJ to hit some deep threes, that's his specialty; he's one of the best in the nation," said Bulldogs coach Dylan Howard. "Then, McGusty took over the game, lowered his head, got downhill and we fouled or gave up the straight-line drive. That was definitely the difference the last three minutes."

The Bulldogs kept things close early and shot 57.7 percent in the first half, but the Hurricanes led 44-35 at the break.

"Credit to them for the confidence they played with," Caputo said of the Bulldogs. "They played with a real gusto about them. Some of that has to do with us, but give them credit. We were able to outscore them, but didn't defend them well enough at any point in the game."

The visitors came out tough after intermission and closed the gap to 51-46 over the next five minutes. A three-point play by UM guard Chris Lykes gave Miami a 10-point cushion, and they hung on for the win.

The Hurricanes are back on the road Sunday. They fly to New York, are going to see the play "Hamilton" Sunday night, and Tuesday night they face Temple in Brooklyn as part of the Air Force Reserve Basketball Hall of Fame Invitational. Larranaga has been playing songs from "Hamilton" at every team meeting to get the players ready.

"It will be great to be in New York, we've been trying to educate the guys about Alexander Hamilton, should be a really cool experience for them, which they probably won't appreciate until they get there," Caputo said. "We love New York, have a lot of alums there, some of us are from there, so it should be great."

Kameron McGusty's 21 points leads Hurricanes to 88-74 win

Chris Stock
Inside The U
Dec. 14, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- The Miami Hurricanes struggled to put much distance between them and Alabama A&M until late in the game.

Upset-minded Alabama A&M cut the deficit to five before Miami finished the game on a 13-4 run as Kameron McGusty scored 21 points, seven during the run, to lead the Miami Hurricanes in a 88-74 win over Alabama A&M on Saturday.

"I don't think we panicked at all," McGusty said. "These are the types of situations we work on in practice so we've been worked on that the last week-and-a-half. I think we were well-prepared and ready for that last two, three-minute stretch."

Dejan Vasiljevic added 17 points, Chris Lykes had 13, Harlond Beverly scored 12, and Sam Waardenburg chipped in 11 giving the Hurricanes (6-3) five players in double figures.

Head coach Jim Larranaga missed the game due to back spasms. Associate head coach Chris Caputo handled the head coaching duties.

"He was great today at the shootaround and then he called me saying, 'Hey you may have to do the radio' around noon and then called me again at 12:45 and said, 'I don't think I can make it, I'm going to try,'" Caputo said. "Obviously it's a difficult thing because you get these spasms and really what you need is probably rest and it's hard to rest in the middle of the season. He was on the road at Illinois, came home, went recruiting this past weekend, and was at practice as his normal self. It's a difficult thing. Hopefully a little bit of rest will take care of it."

The Hurricanes, who were 26 ½-point favorites, had their lead cut to 75-70 with 3:50 left in the game.

McGusty helped keep the Hurricanes ahead with a pair of free throws and then converted a layup after a block by Waardenburg pushing Miami's lead to 79-70.

"One key block got us out in transition," Caputo said.

Vasiljevic sidestepped a defender and drilled a 3 for an 82-70 advantage with 2:35 left.

McGusty also hit a 3 in the closing minutes giving him his second 20-point game of the

season. He was 9 of 15 from the floor.

"All game coaches were preaching get to the paint and kicking it out to open people so it was good to see the ball moving and that's what happens when you move the ball," McGusty said. "It's always good to have your teammates trust you to take those big shots."

Vasiljevic capped the scoring with a late 3, putting him four points shy of 1,000 for his career.

Alabama A&M (2-6) entered the game as one of the worst offensive teams in the country, ranking 350th (out of 353) in offensive efficiency and 325th in effective field goal percentage.

Although there has been a point of emphasis for Miami to improve its defensive output, the Hurricanes allowed the Bulldogs to shoot 51.7 percent (31 of 60) from the field, with an effective field goal percent of 57.5, much higher than their season percent of 42.9 percent entering the game.

"It's just no secret, it's a struggle for us," Caputo said. "Our size across the board is a little bit of a problem and we try to do as best we can and we're trying, but today we just didn't get enough stops throughout the game to get any sort of comfortable lead."

Alabama A&M also outscored Miami in the paint 40-38.

"Poor," Caputo said.

The Bulldogs led 16-13 before buckets by freshmen Isaiah Wong and Harlond Beverly to put Miami ahead and the Hurricanes never trailed the rest of the way.

Miami's lead grew to 11 points late in the first half and took a 44-35 lead into the break.

The Hurricanes' next game is Tuesday against Temple (7-2) in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Lykes late free throws lifts Miami over Temple

Associated Press
Dec. 18, 2019

NEW YORK -- This was not survive and advance.

This was just survive.

And when it was over, Miami coach Jim Larranaga could appreciate what he and his team went through.

"Just a heck of a college basketball game," Larranaga said after Chris Lykes made two free throws in the final four seconds to lead Miami to a 78-77 win over Temple on Tuesday night in the third game of the inaugural Air Force Reserve Basketball Hall of Fame Invitational.

Lykes led Miami (7-3) with 17 points. Keith Stone scored 13 points, Kameron McGusty added 12 and 10 rebounds, and Dejan Vasiljevic and Rodney Miller Jr. each had 11 points.

Vasiljevic entered the game needing four points to break the 1,000-point barrier at Miami.

"DJ has been with us for four years. I can tell you from the day he arrived he's one of smartest, hardest working, best shooters, great leader, great competition I've been around," Larranaga said of Vasiljevic. "He is the consummate teammate."

Whereas Miami could revel in a hard-fought win, Temple coach Aaron McKie was left to wonder what could have been.

"It was a game that was right there," said the Owls' first year coach. "I think we're taking the right steps. This is one that's going to sting, it's going to sting for awhile."

Quinton Rose led Temple (7-3) with 14 points. Alani Moore II contributed 12, and Monty Scott had 10.

The game was tight from the opening tip, as neither squad was able to create any separation. Miami's biggest lead was nine, while Temple largest advantage was six.

Trailing 71-66, Temple cut the deficit to two on a Moore 3-pointer. On the ensuing possession, a McGusty layup allowed Miami to extend the lead to four. Only to have Temple rip the advantage away due to two made free throws by Rose, and 3-pointer by J.P. Moorman II. Miami regained the lead following back-to-back Miller layups, but a DeVondre Perry 3 gave Temple 77-76 lead to set the

stage for Lykes.

Following Lykes' two made free throws, Temple had one last chance but Rose missed a desperation 3.

"We subbed," Larranaga said. "(We) took Rodney Miller out and put Harlond Beverly, a freshman, in believing Chris would make the free throws, we'd be up one, and we'd have to get matched up with Quinton Rose. Harlond did that and did a great job of keeping him from his right hand. That allowed us to force a deep 3 (and) he missed it. Great job by both Chris making the free throws but also his teammate's stop."

BIG PICTURE:

Both Temple and Miami could benefit from what transpired at Barclays Center on Tuesday once conference play tips off as the AAC and ACC programs collaborated on what was essentially a 40-minute exhibition of possession-by-possession basketball.

Easy baskets were a rarity as the Owls and Hurricanes were cognizant of both limiting fast break opportunities and getting back on defense. Which is par for the course for Temple, which entered the game ranked 27th in the NCAA in scoring defense with 60.1 points allowed per game, 39th nationally in 3-point field-goal percentage defense, and fifth in nation with a .351 field goal-percentage defense.

Whereas Temple is strong across the board defensively, Miami is somewhat of a mixed bag. The Hurricanes had limited opponents to .328 shooting from 3, but allowed opponents to connect on .465 of their shots from the field.

UP NEXT

MIAMI: Hosts Coppin State on Saturday.

TEMPLE: Hosts Rider on Saturday.

Miami basketball wins huge non-conference game versus Temple

Alan Rubenstein
CanesWarning
Dec. 18, 2019

After winning by two at Illinois two weeks ago, the Miami basketball team picked up another big non-conference victory with a 78-77 win against Temple at the Barclay's Center in Brooklyn on Tuesday night. The Hurricanes led throughout the first half before Temple went on a 17-4 run straddling the first and second half.

The win was huge for Miami as they improve to 7-3 on the season. The Hurricanes host Coppin State on Saturday before travelling to Clemson on New Years Eve to resume ACC Play. Miami needed big plays in the final minute to pull out the victory. Chris Lykes' two free throws with 4.4 seconds remaining put Miami ahead.

The Hurricanes did an outstanding job on the ensuing Temple possession. Owls guard Quinton Rose was forced to take a 30-foot shot on the buzzer that was off and Miami escaped with the one point victory. Lykes led five Hurricanes in double figures with 17. Keith Stone had his best game for Miami with 13 points and four rebounds.

Kam McGusty had 12 and Dejan Vasiljevic and Rodney Miller contributed 11. McGusty finished with a double-double adding 10 rebounds. Miller had nine rebounds and Vasiljevic eight. Big plays in the final few minutes were the difference for Miami. Miller had a putback basket and free throw to keep Miami in the game.

Four Temple players finished in double figures led by Alani Moore with 18 and Rose with 14. Miami did a great job guarding the three-point line in the second half. Temple was 6-12 from beyond the arc in the opening 20 minutes and 7-20 in the second half.

The Owls made it interesting with a pair of free three-point field goals in the final two minutes of the game, but the Hurricanes stayed poised and were able to answer. The win should be a big one for Miami come March. The Hurricanes entered Tuesday night's game an uninspiring 86th in the NCAA's new net ratings.

Temple is 50th in the net ratings so that should help the Hurricanes move up. Miami's win over Illinois could also loom large when the Hurricanes are jockeying for an NCAA Tournament berth. The Fighting Illini are 32nd in the Net Ratings.

Persistence Pays Off

Christy Cabrera Chirinos
HurricaneSports.com
Dec. 19, 2019

CORAL GABLES – There were times, early in his career, where Dejan Vasiljevic couldn't help but wonder if he'd made the right decision, traveling so far from home, to become a Hurricane.

Though Vasiljevic was a sharpshooting freshman with plenty of international experience, playing time was hard to come by during the first weeks of his first year on campus, with veteran guards Davon Reed and Ja'Quan Newton, along with former Jordan Brand All-American Bruce Brown Jr., on the roster.

These days, both Vasiljevic and the Hurricanes are glad the guard persevered.

Three years after navigating those "second thoughts," Vasiljevic became the 40th player in program history to score 1,000 points at Miami, the milestone coming Tuesday when he had 11 points in the Hurricanes' 78-77 win over Temple in the Air Force Reserve Basketball Hall of Fame Invitational at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

And as he reflected on his personal milestone, Vasiljevic couldn't help but be grateful not only that he stayed at Miami, but that some of the veterans on that first team he was a part of in Coral Gables helped give him the strength to power through.

"I think it all comes down to staying the course, especially when you have ups and downs along the way. Mentally, you have to stay positive," Vasiljevic said. "My freshman year, I didn't play a lot at the start. I started having second thoughts. But we had great leaders like Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy who led the way and taught us. Then as you start playing more, you build confidence and by sophomore year, I was a captain. I took a big role in that and played behind Lonnie Walker, who's in the NBA now. I played alongside Bruce Brown, one of my best friends.

"Junior year, I played a lot of minutes because we only had seven guys. So, yeah, there have been ups and downs, but this journey has meant a lot."

It's a journey Vasiljevic knows he likely wouldn't have taken without a little bit of faith, both on his part and Miami's.

Hurricanes head coach Jim Larrañaga never saw Vasiljevic – who was born in Canada but raised in Australia – play in person during the recruiting process.

But, he liked what he saw on film. And after chatting with a coaching colleague whose team had faced Vasiljevic in Australia, Larrañaga opted to push to bring the Australian Institute of Sport alum stateside to Miami.

It's a move that has clearly paid dividends for both the Hurricanes and their standout guard.

Vasiljevic entered Tuesday's game against Temple already ranked fourth all-time at Miami in 3-pointers made (228), fifth in attempts (586) and seventh in percentage (.389).

But it's not just his ability to score that has impressed teammates and coaches.

"He's probably one of the three or four most mature players I've ever been around. He's very responsible, he's very bright and he's very, very focused in every situation, whether it's on the court, in practice, in the classroom and when we travel," Larrañaga said. "He's someone you know is going to be successful at whatever career he chooses, whether he continues to play basketball or goes into the business world or becomes a coach. He's just very, very dedicated and committed to being as good as he can be."

Added fellow guard Chris Lykes, "DJ's a leader on and off the court. This is my third year and just to watch him grow as a leader, to see how seriously he takes things, it just trickles down to everyone on the team and has a domino effect on everybody else."

His time at Miami has also give Vasiljevic a new appreciation for the game he's played most of his life. After hurting his foot in the Hurricanes' NCAA Tournament opener against Loyola Chicago in 2018, Vasiljevic was sidelined for six months.

Unable to practice or work out as he typically did, his conditioning suffered. He credits Brown, his coaches, teammates, family and girlfriend Gemma St. Louis – a pre-med student at Miami – for helping him stay positive and get back in to playing shape.

He returned from his injury to play in all 32 of Miami's games last season, making 25 starts in the process. He averaged 11.8 points as a junior and finished sixth in the ACC in 3-point field goals made, connecting on at least one shot from beyond the arc in 33 straight games dating back to his sophomore year.

Now, as he makes his way through his final season as a Hurricane, Vasiljevic has a special milestone on his resume and a drive to make sure his last year at Miami includes one

more NCAA Tournament run.

"We're a young team, but we have a lot of talent. We've got to lock in defensively and watch a lot of film, because offensively, we're gifted," Vasiljevic said. "I think if we play games and get ready for the ACC, get ready to play against the best, we'll have that motivation to make the Tournament and we know to get there, we have to win those ACC games."

McGusty's career-high 28 leads Miami past Coppin St. 91-60

Associated Press
Dec. 21, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- The dress rehearsals are over.

Miami junior guard Kameron McGusty scored 22 of his career-high 28 points in the second half to lead the Miami Hurricanes to a wire-to-wire 91-60 victory over Coppin State Saturday afternoon at the Watsco Center.

The Hurricanes (8-3) have won four consecutive games against non-conference foes, and next begin a 19-game run in the tough ACC.

"We won four in a row but the challenge in the ACC is team we're going to play now are really a whole lot more talented," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said. "They got really good players and they're more familiar with us; we're more familiar with them. The challenges are greater. We open the season on the road against Clemson where it's very tough to play and then we come back home to play Duke, who's top 5 in the country and we're already 0-1, having lost to the No. 1 team in the country Louisville back then."

Miami's 91 points is a season high and its 18 3-pointers is a program record. The 31-point victory is Miami's largest since defeating La Salle 85-49 on Nov. 22, 2018.

"For 35 minutes it was our best offensive and defensive game," Larranaga said. "The last five wasn't indicative the way the team played. We took 38 3s which is kind of ridiculous to me, but we made 18 so we got to be pretty happy about that. We defended so well for such a long period of time, giving up only 45 points in the first 35 minutes. Love to see that kind of execution every game."

DJ Vasiljevic, who entered with the highest 3-point field goal percentage in the ACC, only converted 3-of-11, but finished with 21 points for Miami. Vasiljevic and Sam Waardenburg combined to score 19 points on a game-opening 19-3 lead and Coppin State never recovered. The closest the Eagles (4-9) would come was 21-13 as they dropped their third straight.

The Hurricanes received a rare offensive boost from Waardenburg, who surpassed his season points average in the first half with 8 points on 3-of-3 shooting from the field, making two from 3-point range. Waardenburg finished with his first double-double, notching career highs with 15 points and 11 rebounds.

"Last two days I missed some free throws and wasn't happy with it, so I shot 700 free throws yesterday and it helped me with my shot, holding my follow through," Waardenburg

said. "My teammates are always telling me to shoot the ball, that it makes their job easier, so I had that mindset."

Giir Ring led Coppin State with 13 points, but it wasn't nearly enough to prevent the Eagles from falling to 2-4 during an eight-game road trip. Koby Thomas posted a double-double with 12 points and 10 boards. It didn't help Coppin State to be without leading scorer Kamar McKnight due to a hip flexor.

"That's why they play in the ACC," Coppin State coach Juan Dixon said. "We're looking to get to that level. We held them to 34 points in the first half, but we couldn't make a layup. It's about us, playing in our conference, improving and getting to the NCAA Tournament."

Leading 34-20 at halftime, McGusty caught fire, draining three consecutive 3-pointers and scoring 14 of Miami's points during a 22-6 run to begin the second half. McGusty made 9-of-11 from the field, including 5-of-7 3-pointers.

"It goes back to the team chemistry we have," said McGusty, a transfer from Oklahoma who scored 11 points in 2:02. "I'm just trying to give it my all and make that off year, this transfer year, worth it."

From there, Chris Lykes poured in three 3-pointers and notched 11 of his 16 points during an 11-5 run and a 78-42 lead.

Miami shot 47% from 3-point range (18-of-38) to Coppin State's 23% (7-of-30). Coppin State is 0-8 when outshot from 3-point territory.

Miami jumped out to a 9-0 lead as Coppin State missed its first nine shots and 14 of its first 15 attempts. The Eagles finally scored 5:27 into the game on Andrew Robinson's 3-pointer.

Sparked by the 3-point marksmanship of Vasiljevic and Waardenburg, Miami reeled off another 10-0 run and led 19-3 midway through the first half.

Led by Dejuan Clayton, the Eagles went on a mini 7-0 run to slice Miami's advantage to 21-13. That would be the closest the Eagles would come as McGusty scored six during Miami's 12-0 spurt to pull away 33-14 for Miami largest lead before ending the half up 34-20.

BIG PICTURE

Miami: The Hurricanes hope to carry their non-conference momentum into ACC play against a young Clemson Tigers squad that lacks size and 3-point accuracy. However, the return of point guard Clyde Trapp and front-court scoring of forward Aamir Simms helped

the Tigers (6-5) snap a month-long, four-game slide with a blowout of Jacksonville. The Hurricanes have started the same five players in all 11 games this season. They've developed confidence and chemistry on both sides of the ball which could give its ACC foes difficulty.

Coppin State: Despite the lopsided loss Coppin State is in the midst of a turnaround season mostly due to its emphasis on defensive rebounding and a man-to-man defense that funnels opposing dribbles to the baseline and sidelines which has pressured opponents like Miami into 17 turnovers. After St. Mary's, Coppin State dives into the wide-open MEAC which a chance to surprise. They need to get leading scorer Kamar McKnight back from his hip injury.

LETDOWN: Danger Mr. Robinson: Coppin State's Andrew Robinson came in averaging 12 points but finished with seven points on 1-of-12 from the field, including 1-of-6 free throws and was a team-worst minus-30 when on the court. His twin brother Aaron Robinson didn't fare much better, clanging all six shot attempts, including 0-for-5 from 3-point range in 22 minutes.

STAT OF THE NIGHT: Four Hurricanes scored 15 points or more and the 91 points is the most scored since potting 96 points against Stephen F. Austin on Nov. 13, 2018. Miami is 3-0 against Coppin State, including a 115-76 win on Feb. 28, 1987, its largest output since the program was reinstated in 1985.

UP NEXT: The Hurricanes have the next nine days off before they hit the road against Clemson on New Year's Eve for the first of 19 games against ACC opponents.

Coppin State will play its sixth consecutive road game against non-conference foe, Mount St. Mary's on Dec. 27. Mount St. Mary's opened the season 0-9.

McGusty Named Co-ACC Player of the Week

Miami Athletics
Dec. 23, 2019

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Kameron McGusty of the University of Miami men's basketball is the Co-ACC Player of the Week, alongside NC State's Markell Johnson, as announced Monday afternoon by the league office.

A redshirt junior guard, McGusty averaged 20.0 points, 7.5 rebounds, 2.5 steals and 1.0 assist per game across the Hurricanes' two wins last week. He shot 58.3 percent from the floor, 45.3 percent on 3-pointers and 77.8 percent at the line.

In Miami's 78-77 triumph over Temple at the Barclays Center Tuesday in Brooklyn, N.Y., McGusty recorded his second-career double-double, tallying 12 points and a career-high-tying 10 rebounds.

Saturday at the Watsco Center, McGusty turned in a career outing to lead Miami (8-3, 0-1 ACC) past Coppin State, 91-60. He logged new highs in points (28) and made 3-pointers (five), while tying his top mark in made field goals (nine) and setting a season high in steals (three).

The Katy, Texas, native is the 10th Hurricane—13th total honor—to claim ACC Player of the Week recognition and the first since Tonye Jekiri on Nov. 23, 2015.

McGusty and the Hurricanes are back in action Dec. 31 at 4 p.m., as they square off with Clemson, live on ACC Network, at Littlejohn Coliseum in Clemson, S.C.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2019-20 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

Lykes leads Miami to 73-68 overtime win at Clemson

Associated Press
Dec. 31, 2019

CLEMSON, S.C. – DJ Vasiljevic wouldn't let an off night shake his confidence, not with the game in the balance for Miami.

Vasiljevic hit a tie-breaking 3-pointer with 59 seconds to go in overtime as the Hurricanes rallied from 10-points down to win its fifth straight with a 73-68 victory over Clemson on Tuesday.

Chris Lykes had 27 points, 18 of those after halftime, for Miami (9-3, 1-1 Atlantic Coast Conference).

Vasiljevic, who came in shooting 51% from the floor this season, was just 3 of 10 against the Tigers – and made just one of his four long-range attempts – when he let fly with the game-changing shot.

"They were playing me pretty tight," Vasiljevic said. "I practice shots in practice and on my own. I had confidence in myself and just wanted to get out of here with a win."

Miami, 0-11 last year in true road games, already has its third in as many chances this year.

Vasiljevic understands it's early in league play. He believes, though, the Hurricanes have the makeup to surprise many this season.

"I think we're on the right track," he said. "A lot of guys are locked in as we said before the game, it's ACC time, we've got to go out there and compete."

The Hurricanes had to come back from trailing 55-45 with nine minutes left. They still trailed 68-66 on Johnny Newman's inside bucket with 1:56 to play in the extra session.

But Lykes hit two foul shots and, after a Clemson turnover, Vasiljevic drained the long-range bucket to put Miami ahead to stay.

The Tigers (6-7) missed three 3-pointers down the stretch after Vasiljevic's go-ahead basket to start ACC play 0-3 for the second

straight season.

"We're not making enough smart plays basketball-wise," Clemson coach Brad Brownell said. "It hurt us."

Vasiljevic hit a pair of clinching foul shots with 1.7 seconds to go.

Lykes ended a point shy of his career high and made several critical baskets.

His driving, one-handed layup around Aamir Simms – Lykes at 5-foot-7 is 13 inches shorter than Simms – tied things at 62 with 49.1 seconds left that led to overtime.

The Hurricanes trailed 55-45 after Simms' inside bucket with 8:55 to play.

Miami came out firing – and hitting – after that. Kameron McGusty got things going with bucket and Lykes followed with a 3-pointer and another jumper.

Moments later, Lykes hit another long-range shot to tie the game at 57 and set up the dramatic ending stretch.

Vasiljevic and McGusty both had 15 points for Miami.

Clemson has struggled to score this season and hasn't reached 70 points in its last eight games. But the Tigers came out hot, making seven of their first 14 shots to lead the Hurricanes 19-11.

That's when Miami got going behind Vasiljevic, who had a three-point play and a long 3-pointer to start a 9-0 run that got his team the lead.

Vasiljevic and Chris Lykes both made baskets in the final two minutes to send the game to the half tied at 26.

Simms led the Tigers with 21 points.

BIG PICTURE

Miami: The Hurricanes showed plenty of guts in coming back on Clemson. Lykes is a dynamic force who should continue to push Miami in the ACC.

Clemson: It's hard to see the Tigers even reaching their preseason spot of 11th in the ACC unless they find ways to score more consistently. Clemson missed six of eight shots in overtime.

CHANGE OF FORTUNE

Miami was just 4-3 after losing two of three games at the Charleston Classic in November. It has not lost since and Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga knows the reason – forward Keith Stone. The senior returned against Illinois on Dec. 2 and Miami has been a different, better group, Larranaga said.

"Once we got him, then our rotations were a little bit better," the coach said. "Having three seniors to work (in the middle) has made a significant difference defensively."

TRAPP MUSIC

Clemson junior Clyde Trapp Jr. started for the first time this season since returning from an ACL injury suffered last summer. Trapp finished with a season-high 13 points and five rebounds. Trapp's presence should bring stability to the backcourt after freshman Al-Amir Dawes was pressed into service at the point.

UP NEXT

Miami returns home to play No. 2 Duke on Saturday.

Clemson closes a five-game home stand when it faces North Carolina State on Saturday.

Miami basketball wins fifth straight with big victory at Clemson

Alan Rubenstein
CanesWarning
Dec. 31, 2019

On the heels of last month's subpar showing at the Charleston Classic, the University of Miami has strung together four consecutive wins entering its formidable stretch of 19-straight ACC contests that get underway next Tuesday, Dec. 31 in Clemson, South Carolina.

Sitting at 8-3, head coach Jim Larranaga's young squad hasn't necessarily exceeded expectations, but they haven't disappointed either. Losses to Louisville, Florida and UConn are not back breakers, however, wins over Illinois, Temple and UCF aren't exactly resume builders.

As expected, Miami's season will live or die based on its performance over the next two-and-a-half months. Dating back to 2011 — the year the NCAA Tournament expanded to 68 participants — the ACC has averaged 6.3 qualifiers per year, with no fewer than four making the field. The ACC's high-water mark was nine teams in both 2017 and 2018. They sent seven in 2016 and 2019, six made it in 2014 and 2015, five went in 2012 and only four reached the tourney in 2011 and 2013.

During last year's tournament, the final two ACC teams to earn a nod were each 10-8 in conference with 20 total wins. Only once since 2011 has an ACC team earned a bid while failing to finish .500 in the conference: Syracuse in 2018.

In their defense, the 2018 Orangemen won 20 regular season games before receiving one of the last four bids and eventually advancing to the Sweet 16. Two years earlier in 2016, Syracuse would ride the bubble to a tournament berth despite a 9-9 conference mark and 19 regular season wins. They ultimately silenced any doubters by reaching the Final Four, losing to the eventual runner-up, North Carolina.

Only one other team has reached the tournament with a 9-9 conference record and less than 20 total wins: Wake Forest, who went 9-9 with 19 wins in 2017.

When you couple that precedent with Miami's lack of marquee non-conference wins, it tells me they need, at minimum, 19 victories and nine conference wins to even earn bubble consideration. Furthermore, 10 regular season conference wins only brings Miami to 18 dubs overall, resulting in a must-win situation in the ACC Tournament opener.

Very rarely does 10 ACC wins fail to qualify for the tournament. The most notable exception was the 2013 Virginia Cavaliers.

In 2013, Virginia was denied a berth despite an 11-7 conference record and going 21-11 overall during a year the ACC only garnered four selections to the field of 68. (Apparently Virginia's wins over No. 19 N.C. State and No. 3 Duke weren't enough to expunge early season stumbles to George Mason, Delaware and Old Dominion. In addition, losses to conference cellar dwellers like Wake Forest, Clemson, Georgia Tech and Boston College didn't help its bracketology case either.)

The 2013 season also serves as a reminder that Miami should feel very uneasy as a bubble team. That 2013 Canes squad won the ACC regular season title with a 15-3 record, then won the ACC Tournament Championship with three double-digit victories and still didn't receive a No. 1 seed. Since then, no ACC regular season champ has failed to earn a top seed. Considering the history, are any Miami fans comfortable placing the team's fate in someone else's hands?

So where does Miami manufacture another 11-12 wins vs ACC competition? With the November 5 loss to Louisville dropping the Hurricanes to 0-1 right out of the gates, where do the 10 regular season conference victories come from?

Below is Miami's ACC schedule where we will select each of the "very winnable" games. These are wins that Miami desperately needs. Yes, it's forgivable to drop one, maybe two, of those contests, but they will need to be offset among the 50-50 games. Those "either way" matchups are also listed below as a "toss up."

If the Canes drop too many winnable games, victories must come from the "upset" category. And just how much success can a youthful Miami squad expect to find when attempting to punch above its weight?

@Clemson - VERY WINNABLE Miami needs the W to avoid a potential 0-4 ACC start

Duke - UPSET

@Louisville - UPSET See what I mean about the importance of Clemson?

Pitt - VERY WINNABLE If Miami is 2-3 after this game, I'll be thrilled

@NCSU - TOSS UP

FSU - TOSS UP The first crack at FSU is at home and a series split would be huge

@Duke - UPSET

@UNC - TOSS UP If Anthony is still out, this is an excellent opportunity to steal one

Virginia Tech - VERY WINNABLE

@Pitt - TOSS UP

NCSU - VERY WINNABLE

@FSU - UPSET

Boston College - VERY WINNABLE

Wake - VERY WINNABLE Two at home before a road trip, UM must hold serve

@Virginia Tech - TOSS UP

@ND - VERY WINNABLE Need two of these three on the road

@Georgia Tech - VERY WINNABLE The last of 3-straight road games will be telling

Virginia - UPSET Not the same Virginia team but they've still owned Miami of late

Syracuse - VERY WINNABLE SU is beatable and you must secure the Senior Day W

If Miami wins eight-of-nine among the "very winnable" and two-of-five among the "toss ups," that puts them in great shape at 18-10 and 10-8 entering the ACC Tournament (I'm not counting any wins among the "upsets"). At 10-8, they would likely be among the top-seven in a conference that has sent at least seven teams to the tourney in each of the last four years. If the Canes earn a No. 6 or 7-seed, one win is very possible vs a lower seeded play-in opponent. Unfortunately, if they want to avoid any Selection Sunday tension, that much-needed 20th win must come against a top-three seed, who would also enter on a double-bye.

So, from the looks of it, Miami might need one of those upset wins after all — during the regular season or the ACC Tournament. But since arriving in Coral Gables, Coach Larranaga is sporting an extremely respectable 11-13 combined record vs Duke and UNC to go with his longstanding reputation of finding a way to steal one from the big boys.

Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team hosts No. 2 Duke with win streak on the line

David Furones
Sun Sentinel
Jan. 3, 2020

The first time the Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team hosted a top-five opponent in the Atlantic Coast Conference this season, it trailed by as many as 32 points in an 87-74 loss to Louisville in the opener.

UM has grown significantly since that Nov. 5 defeat, and riding a five-game winning streak, the Hurricanes are better prepared to face No. 2 Duke now than they were two months ago.

Miami (9-3, 1-1 ACC), fresh off its first conference win at Clemson on Dec. 31, hosts the Blue Devils (12-1, 2-0) in an 8 p.m. tip on Saturday at Watsco Center.

UM coach Jim Larrañaga is pleased to make it through the December slate 5-0 but understands it gets much more difficult with Duke up next and a rematch at Louisville on Tuesday.

"I've seen a lot of teams that I've seen, and they're the best in so many different categories. They're a tremendous transition team. I think this is one of coach [Mike Krzyzewski's] — he's had so many great teams — but this is definitely one of his best defensive teams since I've been in the league."

Larrañaga lauded how the Blue Devils can pressure an opponent, force turnovers and get out on the fast break, get second chances off offensive rebounds. They're deep with a rotation of 10 players.

Duke is led by freshman center Vernon Carey Jr., who played his high school ball at University School and is the son of the former Hurricanes and Dolphins offensive lineman by the same name. Carey is averaging 17.9 points and nine rebounds.

"He's so big, so strong, so athletic," Larrañaga said. "Has great instincts on the court — at both ends. He blocks shots. He gets defensive rebounds. He runs the floor extremely well. He can dunk the ball in traffic or shoot a nice little jump hook. He's also shooting like 57 percent from 3, so he's got the full package. He's a handful for us, and we know that and our guys know it. We'll see how we do."

Said redshirt junior forward Sam Waardenburg, who along with center Rodney Miller will take on the task of controlling Carey: "He's a strong, skilled guy for his age. He's really young, but he's got a good skill set, especially his left hand around the post. That's some-

thing we've been scouting, and we're going to do a lot to keep him away from that."

A big reason the Hurricanes have won five straight is the production they've received from their starting backcourt. They are the only team with three guards averaging more than 15 points per game in Chris Lykes (15.9), Kameron McGusty (15.2) and DJ Vasiljevic (15.1).

Miami has done it with a two-point victory at Illinois, a one-point win over Temple on a neutral site and last Tuesday's overtime win at Clemson to accompany double-digit victories at home against Alabama A&M and Coppin State.

"It's not exactly like we're crushing anybody, but it's great to win close games," Larrañaga said. "I think that gives you confidence. Now, the question is, how well can we play against some of the best teams in the country? We've already played Louisville at home. We're going to have to go on the road there."

The addition of redshirt senior forward Keith Stone has been instrumental. The win streak coincides with his Miami debut, back from a torn ACL suffered while playing with Florida last year.

"Having him sub for both Sam and Rodney has made a huge difference," said Larrañaga. "It gives them quality rest, and we have a veteran out there, helping us both defensively and rebounding and scoring the ball."

Larrañaga said Stone didn't practice on Thursday, along with Waardenburg and freshman guard Harlond Beverly. Stone and Waardenburg were back at Friday's practice, which had ESPN's Jay Bilas on hand watching, while Beverly, injured in the Clemson win, was limited and doing work on the side.

According to UM, "a few hundred" tickets remain for Saturday night's matchup with additional available tickets extending into a portion of the student section as the university is still on winter break with students not on campus for class.

University of Miami to face No. 2 Duke at home Saturday. Here's what you need to know

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
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Most students at the University of Miami remain on holiday break until Jan. 13, but the men's basketball team has been toiling in the gym, preparing for two huge tests during the next four days.

They play No. 2 Duke at home on Saturday at 8 p.m. (ESPN) and then hit the road for a Tuesday night game against seventh-ranked Louisville (ESPN2).

"I was very, very pleased that in the month of December we won all our games... it was a good way to end 2019; but if you look at our January schedule, I don't think there's a team in the country that compares with the level of difficulty we're going to face starting Saturday night against Duke," said UM coach Jim Larranaga.

Duke is 12-1 and features a stacked roster that includes sophomore point guard Tre Jones and freshmen Cassius Stanley, Matthew Hurt, and Vernon Carey Jr., a 6-10 and 270-pound South Florida native whose father played football for the University of Miami and the Miami Dolphins.

"Duke right now is probably the best team I've seen and they're the best in so many different categories," Larranaga said. "They're a tremendous transition team. Coach K [Mike Krzyzewski] has had so many great teams, but this is definitely one of his best defensive teams since I've been in the league.

"They put so much pressure on you. They're at their best when they steal the ball from you and score before your defense can get set. They're a tremendous offensive rebounding team. And they're fast and deep. It's going to be a real challenge for us."

Asked what impresses him most about Duke, UM guard DJ Vasiljevic replied: "With how much effort and desire they play the game. They play with a lot of heart. I think Tre Jones leads that, the emotion he plays with. We're looking forward to the challenge. We're all excited, ESPN, prime time, 8 o'clock. We'll be ready to play."

Miami is 5-5 against Duke since Larranaga took over, but he said that has little bearing on Saturday's game.

"In years past, the way we matched up with certain teams in our league, we were able to execute a game plan, and when you do, you have a chance," he said. "Looking at this year's Duke team, they're so good defen-

sively and rebounding and we are not a great rebounding team. We have struggled even against far weaker opponents. We have to have a great ball-handling game, and great rebounding game."

The UM coaching staff is particularly aware of Carey's strengths, as they recruited him heavily at Davie University School and the Canes were on his final five list before he chose Duke.

"We obviously recruited Vern very hard and have tremendous respect for him and his family," Larranaga said. "We watched him play from the time he was in eighth grade. He's so big, so strong, so athletic. Has great instincts at both ends of the court. He blocks shots, gets defensive rebounds, runs the floor extremely well. He can dunk the ball in traffic or shoot a nice little jump hook. He's shooting 57 percent from three, so he's got the full package. He's a handful for us. We know that and our guys know it. We'll see how we do."

Louisville is 11-2, including an 87-74 win over the Hurricanes in Coral Gables on Nov. 5. In that game, Cardinals All-American forward Jordan Nwora scorched UM for 23 points and grabbed 12 rebounds. Nwora and Carey are both early candidates for National Player of the Year.

Daunting as those opponents are, the back-to-back high-profile games come at a good time for the Hurricanes, who are 9-3 and 1-1 in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Miami is on a five-game win streak and coming off a confidence-building 73-68 overtime win at Clemson. Guard Chris Lykes led the Canes with 27 points on 10-of-16 shooting against the Tigers. Senior Vasiljevic and Kam McGusty scored 15 points apiece. The Canes trailed by 10 with nine minutes to go, but rallied and showed guts in the clutch moments.

Duke and Louisville will certainly present tougher challenges than Coppin State and Clemson, but UM is on the right track since beating Illinois on the road in the Big Ten-ACC Challenge.

Not coincidentally, UM redshirt senior Keith Stone, a University of Florida graduate transfer, returned from injury that game. Stone, 6-8 and 245 pounds, has made a significant difference in the paint. He had nine rebounds in 27 minutes against Clemson and has been averaging 18 minutes per game.

Larranaga said he has been encouraged by the leadership of his veteran players and the play of his guards. UM is the only team in the nation with three guards averaging 15 points.

"Illinois we won by one, Temple we won by one, Clemson we won in overtime, so it's not exactly like we're crushing anybody," Larranaga said. "But it's great to win close games. I do think that gives you confidence. Now, the question is, how well can we play against some of the best teams in the country?"

Tickets are still available for Saturday's game at www.hurricanesports.com