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Larranaga's use of analytics gives Miami secret weapon

USA TODAY

Nicole Auerbach

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Jim Larranaga is a storyteller.

He gets comfortable on the couch in his office, leaning back into the memories, and lets the words roll off his tongue.

He talks about George Mason's magical NCAA Final Four run in 2006, and how the flood of media attention mirrors what his seventh-ranked University of Miami team is receiving now.

He talks about the rousing speech Chris Bosh gave the Hurricanes the summer before Larranaga's first season, and the influence the Miami Heat stars have had on his program.

He even talks about how copy-and-pasting his own Wikipedia page helped land him the job at Miami in 2011.

Despite the plethora of tales, perfectly timed and delivered with smiles and dramatic pauses, cataloging key moments of his career, Larranaga is missing one vital story.

He doesn't remember how and when and why he was introduced to the world of advanced statistics.

He turns to his long-time assistant Chris Caputo in the hallway and asks about the first time they found kenpom.com, a website devoted to college basketball analytics. Caputo can't remember, either. Maybe five years ago? Definitely after their staff discovered Synergy Sports, video-scouting software that compiles intricately detailed data on every team from every game situation imaginable.

Larranaga, now 63, was one of the earliest adopters of that technology, too. But even if he can't remember what necessarily sparked his interest, he knows it stirred something within him.

Back in high school, Larranaga had wanted to win a free-throw shooting award, a prize completely based off percentages — "I've always been fascinated by numbers," he said — and he shot 88% his senior season and won the award by a fraction of a point.

"If I'm going to be good, I'm going to judge myself against other players who are really, really good," Larranaga said. He carried that into coaching. As an assistant at Virginia, he charted the performances of various lineups to figure out the most effective group of five. Compare, compare, compare. Then go with what works. Video might show him that now. Or a sheet of numbers from kenpom.com.

The use of such tools has propelled Miami to unprecedented success in the Atlantic Coast

Conference this season. The Hurricanes' 13-0 start in league play was the best of any team since 1998-99, and a win Saturday at No. 3 Duke would clinch the ACC regular-season title in this, Larranaga's second year with the team.

"The thing with Coach is, as long as he's been doing this, he's never stopped learning," Caputo said. "You're looking, searching for things that will give you a bit of an edge. I think it was just word of mouth — there's no great story."

"Looking at a team on a sheet, it's a concise way of understanding. ... A lot of times, you ask someone how they did on a test. They say, 'Good.' Well, what does that mean? A 'C'? That's pretty good, right? Not if everybody in the class got an 'A'. Or I got a 'C', but everybody failed the test. You try to see the things you value ... and then see where that ranks within your league and nationally. That tells you what your team is like."

The Miami players hear about advanced statistics more than they see the numbers themselves. They aren't given statistical printouts; they don't get bogged down in the details. Their coaches tell them the important ones. This team is 50th in tempo, that team is 300th. This one is in the top 10 in offensive rebounding, that one turns the ball over on just 14% of possessions.

"They understand rank very well," assistant coach Eric Konkol said. So the coaches toss the key stats in with normal prep work, like talking about opponents' tendencies or watching video. Together, it provides a full picture of what the Canes will be up against. Miami scouts its opponents, but it also self-scouts, tracking where it stacks up against the nation's best to motivate itself.

Said senior Julian Gamble: "They give us those types of statistics to let us know where we are and where we need to improve. You want to be the best, and numbers don't lie. If you say you're not No. 1 in the country in something you want to be, you know you have something to improve on."

Larranaga and his staff emphasize points per possession; it's a good way to stress defense, something that players can rely on even when shots aren't falling on a given night. On Tuesday, prior to the Virginia Tech game, Gamble recited a sentence that would please his coaches: "We're 16-2 when we hold teams under one point per possession." Make that 17-2 after the win over the Hokies.

Miami is ranked sixth in the country in defensive efficiency, 39th in offensive efficiency and 26th in turnover rate — all significant improvements from two seasons ago.

This lingo, while new to the Hurricanes, is far from foreign from those at George Mason, where Larranaga spent 14 seasons before coming to Miami in April 2011.

"He was innovative," George Mason athletics director Tom O'Connor said. "He was focused on (advanced statistics), but that didn't override the fact that he still had to go out there and teach offense and defense. It's good to have all the statistics, and it can definitely be a major plus. I think he saw that early on. He's always been ahead of the curve if he sees something that can help his program be successful."

During the Final Four run of 2006, before he relied on advanced statistics, Larranaga's attention to detail and search for any advantage manifested itself in scouting and game preparation. He also brought in a sports psychologist to talk to his team before the season.

"He adjusted well to every team," said Will Thomas, a starter on the 2006 team. Thomas added that the points of emphasis were the same then as they are now: overall defensive toughness, rebounding and defending the 3-point line. Those same principles now show up in columns on kenpom.com.

"There are still coaches who don't use email or coaches that don't really like video spliced up because they like to get a feel for the how the whole game is played," Konkol said. "There are certainly positives in every way you do it. It just comes down to being comfortable with your style. We're very comfortable here at Miami using the stats."

The Canes have been as high as No. 2 in the USA TODAY Sports Coaches Poll, a landmark reached a week ago, before their Feb. 23 loss to Wake Forest. They are competing for a No. 1 or 2 seed in the NCAA tournament, a remarkable feat for a group of players who never played in the event. They're a veteran group (average age of the starting five? 22.6 years old) — yet are led by a sophomore point guard in Shane Larkin, a Naismith Player of the Year finalist and the son of Baseball Hall of Famer Barry Larkin.

Perhaps, some day soon — or some day far off — Larranaga will have another story to tell. The story of this team and how these players bought into his world of numbers. How they taught LeBron James and Dwyane Wade a fancy dunk that one time. And maybe, just maybe, how they brought the Miami basketball program to prominence.

Hurricanes, Heat share unique colleges-pro bond in Miami

USA TODAY

Nicole Auerbach

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Behind University of Miami assistant coach Chris Caputo's desk in his office, a photo of the Miami Heat's big three is tacked up against the wall. In the lobby of the Miami men's basketball office, a copy of ESPN the Magazine's music issue, featuring LeBron James on the cover.

Those are just some of the more subtle reminders of the superstars who live next door.

There are the other photos, the ones of James, Dwyane Wade and Miami alum James Jones sitting courtside when Miami played North Carolina in early February. There are the stories of James and Wade copy-catting dunk moves from the Hurricanes, and of Chris Bosh's call-to-arms speech two summers ago.

Coming off a loss in the NBA Finals and heading into the uncertainty of a lockout, Bosh was in an unusual mental state when he joined Hurricanes players for pickup games.

"I didn't know if I was going to play basketball again," Bosh said Tuesday night. "I just kept thinking, 'What if I had done this? What if I had done that?' I just told them to work harder so they wouldn't have any regrets."

Bosh lectured the players, telling them winning — and the chance to play in the NBA — doesn't come easily. They had to be more competitive, work harder off the court.

Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga has called it the best five-minute speech he's ever heard and has not been shy about praising Bosh for igniting the fire in his players. "The message was clear: You've got to work very hard," Larranaga said.

"He gives me way more credit than I deserve," Bosh said, laughing. "He's the coach. He motivates those guys daily. Those guys do their job daily. They deserve the credit."

The ties between the pro and college programs go deeper than one brief speech that kickstarted a program revival. Heat players work out at the Hurricanes' facilities in the summer. Larranaga has worked Wade's fantasy camp. Both coaching staffs get along well, invite one another to their games and see the benefit of a mutual partnership.

Larranaga hopes the glamorous ties will help recruiting; Heat coach Eric Spoelstra hopes it helps encourage more and more kids in Miami to get into the sport of basketball.

"I'd love to see this town become a basketball town," Spoelstra said this week. "I've probably gotten to know Coach Larranaga better than any of the previous coaches. I've been over there at their facilities, talking shop with them. They've been over here. I've gotten to know his entire staff. I think it's great."

Maturity, intensity are hallmarks of Larkin athletes

MLB.com
Doug Miller
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Barry Larkin remembers all too well the day his son, Shane, told him he no longer wanted to play baseball.

"That was an interesting one, for sure," the Hall of Fame shortstop says with a laugh, since it's OK to laugh about it now.

Shane Larkin, the kid who gave up the game that his father played with such passion, is a budding star in basketball, and his team, the Miami Hurricanes, is one of the biggest success stories of this college season.

For Shane, the transition from hardball to hardwood was a quick and decisive one. Although he had lingered around the batting cages and outfields of the big leagues during his father's storied 19-year career with the Reds and had received hitting tutelage from such luminaries of the craft as Pete Rose, that wasn't good enough for his Little League coach, who decided Shane's swing needed to be changed.

So Shane decided that his primary athletic pursuit needed to be changed, and here he is -- the 19-year-old freshman starting point guard and serious candidate for Atlantic Coast Conference Player of the Year on a team that's 23-4 and ranked No. 5 in the nation going into Saturday's huge game at Duke.

"Everybody said, 'Play baseball, play baseball, because you're not going to make it in basketball,'" Shane says of his upbringing. "That motivated me."

Shane plays as though he doesn't need much motivation. Entering Saturday he's averaging 13.4 points, 4.3 assists, 3.9 rebounds and 2.1 steals per game. But more than the numbers, says his coach, Jim Larranaga, are the things that don't show up on stats sheets.

"The things you need to excel at the point guard position are speed, quickness and the skills to make plays, plus the ability to anticipate what's going to happen on the court," says Larranaga, who recruited Shane since 10th grade. "There's so much of the mental side of the game.

"If you possess those mental skills, you're ahead of anybody on the court. And Shane's ability to anticipate plays and make decisions is far beyond his years."

Shane doesn't hesitate to admit that this maturity in the heat of intense competition is something he couldn't help but inherit from his father and other members of his family. His uncle, Byron, for example, was a two-time MCC Player of the Year at Xavier and remains that prestigious basketball school's all-time leading scorer.

And when Shane was lucky enough to attend his father's Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Cooperstown, N.Y., in the summer of 2012, he could finally feel the weight of such a career accomplishment.

"That really showed me how successful and just how good he actually was," Shane says. "I mean, I knew all this, but I wasn't born yet when he was in the World Series [in 1990]. I was 2 when he was MVP [in 1995]. I was too young to really understand.

"The Hall of Fame brought everything to a new perspective. Seeing him around his peers but also the real great players of the game's history ... that was special."

Shane's growth in basketball and in life has been a special thing for his parents to witness, too.

Barry says that he doesn't tell Shane what to do on the court.

"He's just a father," Shane says.

Barry's more than happy to let Larranaga handle the hoops, and the coach, who became famous for taking unheralded George Mason all the way to the Final Four in 2006, has done plenty of that.

On Feb. 13, for example, the Hurricanes were going for their 12th consecutive victory in a tight road game against Florida State, and Larranaga benched Larkin for more than two minutes very early in the first half. The coach sauntered over and the two had a discussion about Larkin's defensive work -- or lack thereof -- against the Seminoles' best shooter, Michael Snaer.

"I was guarding the other team's best player," Shane says, "and wasn't doing a very good job of it.

"Coach sat me down and asked me, 'Do you understand why you're sitting down? You're supposed to be guarding an All-American, and you're guarding him like he's the 10th man on a high school roster.'"

Shane agreed, and snapped out of the funk. He scored 13 points in the final eight minutes

of the game to finish with a game-high 22 in 36 minutes and added four assists and a steal in Miami's 74-68 win. Snaer had nine points on 3-of-9 shooting.

"The thing I love about Shane is, he's all about winning," Larranaga says. "He's going to help his teammates, help them play well. He'll make a pass, a shot, a free throw, get a defensive stop. He's all about winning the game.

"And his athleticism just sets him apart. If he's guarding you and you think you've beaten him, it turns out sometimes that he's let you do that so he can get behind you and steal your dribble. I don't encourage that, but if he can plan it right to the last second, I've got to let him do it. I can't hold him back. He's just got more capability than other players.

"Another guy does that? Bad play. Not smart at all. But we give Shane that freedom because he knows exactly what he's doing, and he proves it."

Hmm. It sounds an awful lot like the on-field leadership and in-game presence that became the Hall-mark of a certain Cincinnati shortstop with the same six letters stitched onto the back of his jersey.

"Point guard is supposed to be the extension of the head coach on the floor, and shortstop is the extension of a manager on the field," Shane says. "Watching him be a leader my whole life, with everybody calling him 'Captain,' it definitely sunk in.

"It wasn't a direct goal of his to instill leadership qualities in me, but it happened."

And it continues. Barry and Lisa, Shane's mom, attend as many 'Canes games as they can. The whole clan hopes the schedule will include a full six-game championship run in the upcoming NCAA Tournament.

"He's going through it," Barry says. "It's a process. I'm enjoying watching him go through it.

"And it's exciting. I can't tell you how many people around Coral Gables say things like, 'Thank you for letting your son come to Miami,' or stuff like, 'I was in school in the '70s here, and we didn't even have a basketball team for a while,' things like that.

"People are truly appreciative of what is going on there. It's very rewarding."

Larranaga finds he's still fashionable in Miami

Washington Post

Mark Giannotto

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The University of Miami basketball team's rise in Coach Jim Larranaga's second season has been acknowledged in the polls and remarked upon with amazement by national commentators. But to those who know Larranaga best, it also has had an air of familiarity.

Longwood Coach Mike Gillian, a member of Larranaga's first staff at George Mason, has watched the Hurricanes' success from the Farmville, Va., campus and has seen echoes of what first put Larranaga on the national stage seven years ago.

"Go look at the game against U-Conn," Gillian said, referencing George Mason's victory over the Huskies in the regional final of the 2006 NCAA tournament. "What they ran on offense, they did it over and over again in the second half, and especially in overtime. If you watch Miami right now, primarily on offense is what they did in that game at the Verizon Center."

"But the guys that succeed at different places, for extended periods of time, there's a reason why they did that. If they could, they would bottle it up and sell that."

Larranaga, 63, is ditching the Cinderella role this time around. The fifth-ranked Hurricanes (23-4 overall, 14-1 ACC) are in line to earn a No. 1 seed in next month's tournament, especially if they beat No. 3 Duke for the second time this season in a nationally televised rematch Saturday.

His approach, though, hasn't changed much from his 14 seasons at George Mason, right down to the plays he used to lead an unheralded group from the Washington area to the Final Four.

"This is the way we've done it, and we're gonna continue to do it a certain way," Larranaga said. "But I wondered if this would work at the highest level."

Challenging transition

The transition to Coral Gables, Fla., has been anything but smooth. Four months after leaving Fairfax, Larranaga found himself embroiled in an NCAA investigation he and his staff had nothing to do with. Before his second season began, Larranaga watched the athletic director who hired him, Shawn Eichorst, jump ship and leave for Nebraska.

He also discovered a budget that, aside from recruiting expenses, was actually smaller than the one he managed at George Mason.

The off-court turmoil has hurt recruiting, Larranaga acknowledged, and it forced several players to sit out games last season, when Miami finished with the most conference wins in school history (nine) but fell just short of earning an at-large berth to the NCAA tournament.

"A lot of coaches would've let that destroy their attitude," said Bob Rotella, a sports psychologist who works with Miami and one of Larranaga's longtime confidantes.

Rotella remembers home games last season when the Hurricanes attracted no more than 1,500 fans. Each time, Larranaga would assure him, "Well, it's not gonna be that way long."

To manufacture excitement at Miami, where

even the school's high-profile football team can struggle to draw crowds amid a plethora of pro sports and entertainment options, Larranaga took a familiar "door-to-door" approach.

He sold the program whenever asked, whether it meant dinners with Miami's wealthiest donors, speeches to the Greek system or helping out at Dwyane Wade's fantasy basketball camp. He had the team spend nights "dorm storming," handing out pizza and chicken wings to students. He started a youth clinic similar to the one he had in Fairfax. He laid awake in bed texting recruits until 1:30 in the morning. He has yet to turn down an interview request.

The BankUnited Center, meantime, has been sold out for four of the past six home games and students have begun lining up outside on "Larranaga's Lawn" to get inside the building. Wade and fellow Miami Heat star LeBron James even sat courtside for a game earlier this month.

"If you go two miles east of here, homes are 10, 15 million dollars, and he's very comfortable in those settings. Yet he's very comfortable amongst every-day folk," said Miami assistant Chris Caputo, who also worked under Larranaga for nine years at George Mason. "It was like hand-to-hand combat and a lot of it was similar [to George Mason], just in terms of building a love affair between the community and the basketball program."

"He can relate to anybody"

Larranaga loves numbers. He looks up the efficiency-based ratings at KenPom.com on his cellphone every day. He considers it more accurate than any of the national polls that have fallen in love with the Hurricanes this season, a way to determine exactly what he should be working on in practice.

It's also how Larranaga introduced himself to Miami basketball in April 2011. In a small room of players who knew little about him other than his role in George Mason's Final Four run, Larranaga went about persuading them his way was the right way.

"Where did we finish in terms of defending three-pointers?" he asked. The players all thought they were around No. 100 in the country. "No," Larranaga responded. "We finished in the 200s. We were in the bottom third" in the country.

He asked them how they were with turnovers. "Pretty good," the Hurricanes said. "No," Larranaga responded. "We're ranked around 218."

He then explained how all the best teams in the country hold opponents under one point per possession ("Hopefully around .92, he said.), informing them that the team would go from playing predominantly zone defense to almost exclusively man-to-man.

"At first, when you meet him you're like, 'Uhh, I don't know if it's gonna work out,'" forward Kenny Kadji said last week, when reminded of that first encounter. "I didn't know how he would lead us with the age difference, but he's such an energized guy. He can relate to anybody."

"He pretty much brought us back down to earth and he showed us, or told us, about being good. We had no idea."

Larranaga inherited a veteran team that features six seniors this season and signed point guard Shane Larkin, the son of baseball Hall of

Famer Barry Larkin, just before last season began. The Orlando native is now an ACC player of the year candidate as a sophomore.

But as Rotella pointed out, Larranaga made a conscious decision to "believe in these kids" rather than start over, a concept Rotella thinks was ingrained in him after George Mason's Final Four run. Even Larranaga concedes that earlier in his career, "I coached every turnover, every pass, every shot, evaluated every referee's call or no call and tried to correct every mistake. Now I just clap when they make a mistake. You can talk about it the next day."

"He has a lot of confidence in us," sixth-year senior Julian Gamble said. "Probably more confidence than we have in ourselves sometimes."

Parallel successes

Not one to just give away his secrets, Larranaga insists Gillian must have meant something different, because Miami isn't having success just because of one play. Perhaps what Gillian's really referring to is "when we find something that works, we ride it," Larranaga said.

But Virginia Tech Coach James Johnson and High Point Coach Scott Cherry, both assistants under Larranaga in 2006, agreed separately that the Hurricanes are running the same offensive sets the Patriots rode to the Final Four.

Even Larranaga can't fight some of the parallels, such as how both teams suffered embarrassing early-season defeats that proved to be catalysts the rest of the year: Miami lost to Florida Gulf Coast in its season opener, while in November 2005, George Mason lost to Creighton by 20.

"It's a similar team he has now," Cherry said. "He allows them to be who they are within their skill set that fits into his philosophy and his system. He's the best at that."

Just this week, Larranaga canceled all of his players' interviews after Miami's 14-game winning streak ended in a double-digit loss at Wake Forest on Saturday. The Hurricanes rebounded with a 76-58 victory over Virginia Tech on Wednesday night.

This, it seems, is the main difference between George Mason's improbable Final Four trip and the one Miami hopes to embark on. The Patriots didn't attract national attention until Selection Sunday, when they drew the ire of national pundits by receiving an unexpected at-large bid. Larranaga's Hurricanes, none of whom has played in the NCAA tournament, have been dealing with the glare of the spotlight since Jan. 23, when their fans rushed the court after a 90-63 blowout of then-No. 1 Duke.

So don't expect him to savor it all just yet.

"We haven't even made the NCAA tournament. We've got a lot of things that we hope to accomplish, this year and in the future," Larranaga said. "We've already accomplished a lot in a short period of time, but hopefully there's a lot more years in front of you."

Shane Larkin is a hit with Miami

ESPN.com
Tom Friend
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Every winter, the kid would count the days 'til spring training. Not only would he get to spend time with his dad, Reds shortstop Barry Larkin, but every Cincinnati player would be rolling out the Red carpet for him. Tony Perez would throw him slurves in the cages. Eric Davis would hit him fungoes. Deion Sanders would call him "Sugar Shane." The clubhouse was just as much his as theirs. All the bubblegum he could chew; all the gumbo he could chow. It was the next-best thing to Christmas.

The drive from his home in Orlando to Sarasota was 130 miles or so, and he'd throw everything he'd need into his dad's truck: headphones, video games and one other item that, every spring, would confound all of his father's teammates.

A basketball.

Shane Larkin was dribbling his basketball in the Cincinnati Reds' dugout.

Pete Rose's kid, Petey, played one year in the majors. Perez's kid, Eduardo, played 13. Ken Griffey Sr.'s kid is going to the Hall of Fame. Barry Larkin's kid is going ... to the NCAA basketball tournament.

How and why Shane Larkin took this detour is beyond his father, who chuckles and says he still thinks his son could hit 30 home runs and steal 30 bags in the big leagues. But the bottom line is Shane Larkin is probably the best point guard in the ACC -- and the University of Miami has an inflexible youth baseball coach to thank for it.

Sometimes, the tiniest insult will stay with a kid forever. In the case of Shane Larkin, a tiny insult is embedded in his soul. His father thinks Shane could have been the next Mike Cameron; instead, the kid will be in Cameron Indoor Stadium this Saturday with a conference title on the line.

Back when Shane was 5 or 6, he was, no doubt, going to be a baseball player. Perez and Pete Rose made him their pet project. Perez, a Hall of Famer, would facetiously tell Barry, "You don't know anything about hitting -- I'm not letting you near the kid." And Perez would take it from there. He'd throw Shane batting practice and teach him how to lift his leg as a pitch was coming, then get his foot down lightly before contact. It was advanced for a 6-year-old, but the kid had a quick mind and quick hands. Rose, even though he was banned from baseball, was tight with Barry, and would add his two cents. "Don't alligator arm your swing," Rose would tell Shane. "Extend your arms."

But more than anything, the kid liked to roam the outfield. At spring training, pre-basketball, he'd beg center fielder Davis, or coaches like Tommy Helms, to blast fungoes at him, and he'd run down most of those fly balls -- at the ridiculous age of 5.

"I remember scouts telling me, 'Oh my goodness, your son is going to be an unbelievable baseball player,'" Barry says. "He had a very strong arm, he could hit, he was fast as heck. At 5 or 6 years old, he's scaling the outfield wall. We're talking about him going and trying to jump and kick off the wall and then scale the wall to try to catch the ball."

"Gene Bennett was the guy who drafted me. He told me, 'I'm drafting your son also. He might be a higher pick than you.'"

Finally, at the age of 7, Shane was eligible to play in a coach-pitch baseball league. Barry hated to miss it, but he kept his family in Orlando during the Reds season "so they wouldn't grow up the daughter and son of a baseball player." He says he wanted each of them to be their own person. Which, curiously, is exactly how it all played out.

Early in that coach-pitch season, Shane went to the plate to bat. All he could think about was Perez and his mini-leg-kick. Perez, as a player, also used to roll his wrists when he'd load to hit, and Shane picked that up, as well. The kid was going to tear up this coach-pitch league -- until his own coach tore up the kid.

In one of his early at-bats, Shane did his perfect Perez imitation, wiggling his wrists and deploying the leg kick. Right then, his coach yelled, "Stop."

"He told me that whoever taught me how to hit didn't know what he was speaking about," Shane says.

Tony Perez? Pete Rose?

"He repositioned me," Shane says. "He told me, like, to keep my feet shoulder-width apart and just hold the bat still and just trying to hit it and follow through when he threw it. It wasn't comfortable to me, because I was so used to doing it the way that Tony Perez and Pete Rose taught me how to hit."

The kid was embarrassed. He was the son of a 12-time All-Star, a former NL MVP, a future Hall of Famer. And all of a sudden, he couldn't hit the ball 25 feet. He felt the coach had insulted not only him, but his father and his father's friends. Baseball was over. At the age of 7, Shane had made the decision all by himself. In his mind, it was final.

"I get a call, and my wife tells me that Shane wants to talk to me," Barry remembers. "And when he talks to me, he's hysterically crying. He's like, 'I hate baseball, baseball's for losers, the game is no good.' I'm like, 'Yo, yo, calm down.' He's like, 'I hate baseball, I hate baseball, I hate baseball.'"

Barry's first urge was to chase down this peewee coach, but he was in Cincinnati or L.A. or Pittsburgh or some other random National League city. He figured it would just pass.

Still hasn't.

The kid was too good of an athlete to sit still, and when Barry returned to Orlando for the winter, Shane filled him in on a basketball game he was about to play.

"What are you going to do out there?" Barry asked him.

"Dominate," Shane said.

He was pint-sized, with long, curly hair, but he was also a blur to his opponents. He could handle the ball and shoot it, and it all became bittersweet to Barry. He himself had played hoops in high school and was recruited to play college ball by a Maryland assistant named Ron Bradley -- before deciding to play baseball at Michigan.

Barry's younger brother, Byron, would go on to become the leading career scorer in Xavier history. So basketball was very much in the family. Still, it struck a nerve with Barry that his son was so viscerally against baseball, a game he so badly wanted to share with his son.

"I knew he wanted me to play baseball," Shane says. "Wanted me to follow in his footsteps. My telling him, 'I don't want to play the sport you play.' ... I knew it would hurt him, and it hurt me more."

The truth was, Shane still enjoyed the game, still counted the days to spring training. He'd still shag fly balls, still take BP, still sit with the Reds players spitting sunflower seeds. But he always had that basketball under his arm. Barry, Perez, et al would constantly quiz him about coming back to baseball, because he was a natural -- but they'd always get a blank stare back.

"Every single spring training, or every single year, I'd ask him, 'Are you ready to play baseball?'" Barry says. "He's like, 'I'll go to spring training. But I'm not gonna play in Little League.'"

All of the other mystified Reds stopped asking. But not Barry. He'd ask every spring, like clockwork, hoping, wishing for a change of heart. And before you knew it, Shane Larkin was a high school junior-to-be, playing year-round AAU basketball, being compared not to his father ... but to Chris Paul.

In 2009, Shane was playing in an AAU tournament in Orlando in front of various mid-major coaches. Shane's team turned the ball over, and he was the only player back on defense as three opponents came racing down the court.

The player leading the 3-on-1 fast break had been throwing no-look passes much of the night, and Shane had picked up on it. So when this player eyeballed the player on his left, Shane faked like he was going left and then jumped like a cat to the right. He stole the pass.

Jim Larranaga, at that time the coach at George Mason University -- who three years prior had taken the school to the Final Four -- was drooling at the play. And when Shane, a 5-foot-11 point guard, started draining jump shots and piling up assists, it was a done deal: Larranaga was offering him a scholarship.

More schools would jump into the recruiting fray later, but Larranaga had given Shane his first college offer, something Shane would never forget. Around that time, Shane had watched Clemson knock off North Carolina on TV, and marveled at the sight of the Clemson fans who stormed the floor. He decided right then that he wanted to win a huge college game someday and have his team's fans rush the court. He thought perhaps it could happen someday at George Mason.

Every time Shane would bring up a new college, Barry would ask if they also have a reputable baseball team. He was a broken record. But he supported Shane's basketball pursuits, as well, and when George Mason invited Shane to Midnight Madness in 2010, Barry and his wife, Lisa, joined him on the trip.

By that point, DePaul's Oliver Purnell was recruiting Shane, as well. In fact, as fate would have it, Ron Bradley -- the same coach who had recruited Barry to Maryland -- was Purnell's associate head coach and had particularly zeroed in on Shane. The kid had options, and had four other visits set up to big-name schools. Larranaga knew this and put the pressure on Shane to commit to George Mason during Midnight Madness. He told Shane on his visit that they were interested in two point guards -- Shane and Corey Edwards from New York -- and they would take whoever committed first.

Shane wasn't ready yet, and neither was Barry. And on their way to the airport, the family received a phone call from one of Larranaga's assistants: Edwards had accepted the offer.

Larranaga and his wife, Liz, felt awful. Jim and Liz Larranaga had gone out to dinner with the Larkins while they were in town, and Liz and Lisa Larkin became instant friends. In the days that followed, Liz sent Lisa an email saying, "Coach loves your son. He really, really wanted to coach him. We wish you the best of luck, and we're sad we're not going to get the chance to spend the next four years together." There was no agenda; it was just a genuine note.

But it's crazy how things come back around sometimes. After enrolling at DePaul in the summer of 2011, Shane Larkin didn't even make it to basketball season. He declined to be specific, other than saying he needed to transfer to a school closer to home, that there were family issues in Florida he needed to attend to. Eighteen-year-

olds deserve the right to change their minds, and conveniently, good ol' Jim Larranaga had resurfaced in Florida, himself, as the new coach of the Miami Hurricanes.

After Shane decided to leave DePaul, his AAU coach reached out to Larranaga. Miami's new coach needed a smooth point guard, and the point guard needed a smooth coach. Larranaga says it took "less than a second" for him to offer Larkin a scholarship.

"I had already told my coaches, 'Listen, this kid is good enough to play anywhere in the country,'" Larranaga says. "I don't care if it's Carolina, Duke, UCLA, Indiana, Michigan State, Kentucky. This kid is going to be a great college player."

Barry was all for it, too.

Miami had one of the best baseball programs in the country, and he knew the coach.

Now the whole country could see the shortstop inside the point guard. Maybe the kid learned it watching his dad patrol the Reds' infield, but Shane -- even as a freshman in 2011-12 -- quickly showed he was always thinking two plays ahead.

The best example was a game against North Carolina State that season. The Hurricanes trailed by a point with less than 10 seconds to play, and the Wolfpack were inbounding the ball in their own backcourt. During the timeout, Larranaga told his team to press, trap, and if nothing else, foul. Shane's job was to deny his man the ball, but, inexplicably, he let his man get wide open. Larranaga was beside himself, until he saw that Shane was baiting the player inbounding the ball to throw it his way.

"Just as the passer released the ball," Larranaga says, "Shane accelerated, jumped, and like Superman, dove for the ball, caught it in midair while he was four feet off the ground, threw it around the back to Durand Scott."

He might as well have been turning a double play, considering he was parallel to the ground and was able to fluidly flip the ball to a teammate. Unfortunately for Miami, Scott missed the potential game-winning shot. But that was the first sign that Shane had the Barry Larkin gene.

This season, Larkin has led Miami's charge to the top of the ACC standings. He scores when the Hurricanes need points, stays calm when the Hurricanes get reckless, defends when the Hurricanes need stops. His teammates still compare him to Chris Paul, because he's a hybrid -- a scoring/passing point guard.

He averages 13 points, four assists and four rebounds, and is the clear choreographer of a team that won its first 13 conference games and can clinch its first ACC regular-season title with a win Saturday at Duke. Feeding Reggie Johnson with a no-look pass that resulted in the game-winning bucket versus Virginia was a memorable moment for Shane this season. Holding Virginia Tech's Erick Green to 16 points on Wednesday night was another. But his most wondrous scene of all was when Miami's fans stormed the court after the Hurricanes defeated Duke by 27 points in January -- that's the whole reason he wanted to play college basketball in the first place. And this wasn't lost on Barry, who watched it all happen with a grin on his face and a Miami visor on his head.

The two of them have been to local restaurants after games this season, and it has been Shane who's received the applause and the autograph requests.

"As awkward as it sounds," Shane says, "I'm not Shane Larkin, Barry Larkin's son, anymore. It's Barry Larkin, the father of Shane Larkin."

Barry says, "I love it. It's his time. I'm Dad." But that doesn't mean he hasn't called Miami's baseball coach, Jim Morris, asking if he'll consider looking at his kid. Barry will never give up. He still asks "Sugar Shane" if he wants to play catch. He still tells him it's not too late to scale a big league wall. He still tells him Tony Perez is available for lessons.

And Shane Larkin -- who is his own man -- always has the same answer:

"No, I'm good, Dad. I'm good."

A Gamble worth Taking

Herman Thomas
Feb. 28, 2013

We all have heard about Miami Hurricane basketball player, Julian Gamble's transformation this season. The 6'10" 250 pound forward-center grew up in Durham, NC, starred at Southern Durham High School, and joined the Hurricanes' in 2007, redshirting his true freshman season.

Gamble played slightly over 90 games over the next three years, primarily as a reserve, and none in the NCAA tournament. Then the unexpected occurred, Gamble tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left leg during the summer of 2011 prior to his senior season and fifth year at the University. Months later, the NCAA granted a clock extension allowing Gamble his sixth year.

Although athletes are aware of the dangers involving sports many are unprepared in the event of a severe injury. Gamble like many high school athletes come to their respective college and universities, with high expectations from the school, also from themselves. These student-athletes are recruited based mainly on potential and the players also choose the schools on the potential that this is the platform to get them to the next level in sports and in life.

Gamble is not one of the Canes' go to players on the offensive end of the floor; but what makes him so valuable to the fifth-ranked Hurricanes' success this season is his play on the defensive end. Gamble is averaging 6.5 points 5 rebounds per game on 54 percent shooting this season for the Hurricanes' (23-4, 14-1). They struggled early in the season but went on a 14-game winning streak including 13 of those in Atlantic Coast Conference play.

"Coach Larranaga stressed to us the importance of being consistent when we were struggling early," Gamble said.

The Hurricanes' had their 14- game winning streak snapped losing on the road 80-65 to Wake Forest on February 23, but with Gamble as the team's emotional leader, it is highly unlikely that this will break their spirits. It certainly didn't on Wednesday night as the Canes' defeated Virginia Tech at home 76-58.

"Even when you are being hunted you can still be the hunter. We are still hungry for more wins. The more we win the hungrier we are to get more," Gamble said.

It is that positive attitude that has helped Gamble overcome past adversity. Right after receiving the news of his torn ACL, the day it happened he tweeted "when something like this happens I don't ask God why, I ask why not?" Gamble further stated, "Because he will never give me more than I can handle. And I knew it was something I could handle and overcome."

During the rehabilitation process, Gamble drew inspiration from faith gained through a tough stretch he went through due to the loss of his father Julius, who died of kidney failure in September 2009, six days before his scheduled kidney transplant surgery date. The positive words his father had for him kept sticking with him during this process. "This kept me going," Gamble said.

One of the biggest challenges during the rehabilitation process was dealing with the pain, Gamble stated. "On a day to day basis you're going to have a level of pain to fight through to get through the rehab process, the longevity of the process like being out for six months and continually having to rehab every day and sometimes not seeing the results as fast as you want is difficult but you have to stay consistent," Gamble said.

Gamble has a tattoo going down the left side of leg that he has had three surgeries performed on spelling "perseverance." This word

sticks with him the most. "Being consistent in my effort no matter what the adversity is has really helped me throughout this process," Gamble said.

One word he would use to describe his mother Sarah Gamble, amazing! "She has been through her adversities as well and always comes out on top, always has a positive attitude. She is my rock, my everything!" Gamble said.

Words of wisdom to athletes who are recovering from serious sports related injuries. "Keep a positive mindset, mental toughness will get you through," Gamble said.

Also words of wisdom to college freshmen in reference to time management. "You're a lot more independent in college than in high school, be proactive don't wait until the last minute to do things. Don't find yourself just living for the moment but prepare for the future." Gamble said.

Head Coach Larry Larranaga and the Hurricane basketball coaching staff are doing a great job preparing Gamble for the next level in professional basketball. Also by obtaining his degree last May in sports administration with a minor in business administration, Gamble gave himself options and is well ahead of the athlete's looking at college sports as a platform to the pros with nothing to fall back on.

The University of Miami and Julian Gamble chose each other based on potential and trust and it has paid big dividends. So it definitely appears that this was truly a "Gamble" worth taking for both.

McKinney-Jones Aiming for ACC Title

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Feb. 28, 2013

To win an ACC regular season title would mean a lot to the Miami Hurricanes basketball program and its players.

It would especially mean a lot to Trey McKinney-Jones, who transferred to Miami in 2010 after two years at UMKC.

McKinney-Jones and the fifth-ranked Hurricanes will have a chance to clinch an ACC title on Saturday with a win at No. 3 Duke. Miami clinched a share of the title Thursday with Duke's loss to Virginia.

"It would mean a lot," McKinney-Jones said. "The long-term goal at the beginning of the season was to first win the regular season ACC championship and to do it there, to win it at all, would mean the world to me especially from where I came from being at a mid-major school.

"You kind of don't think something like this is possible I guess you would say like making the tournament, playing for—one of our long-term goals is winning a national championship so being at UMKC I never really saw that as something that is possible. But now that I'm here and having a chance to clinch the ACC it really means a lot to me."

Miami improved to 23-4 overall, 14-1 in the ACC following their 76-58 win on Wednesday over Virginia Tech, but the team didn't do much celebrating.

"For me it was all about Saturday," McKinney-Jones said.

If Miami were to win Saturday's game, which starts at 6 p.m., McKinney-Jones said it would be bigger than the previous meeting between the two schools on Jan. 23 when UM won 90-63 as Duke was ranked No. 1.

"With the importance of this next game and having a chance to clinch the ACC, I would have to say this game is bigger with just the feeling it would give me and I'm pretty sure the rest of my teammates," he said.

There has been a lot made of Miami's decision to slap the floor on defense in that game with a big lead late in the game. Former football great Warren Sapp was sitting courtside and told Shane Larkin to do it the next time back on defense. Larkin obliged and told the rest of the team.

"We just told each other we were going to do it," McKinney-Jones said. "It wasn't intended to be a slap in the face to Duke or anything. We were just trying to make Warren Sapp proud I guess, an alum. That's all it was about."

Cameron Indoor Stadium is one of the toughest places to play, but Miami won there last year—78-74 in overtime.

"It's just crazy," McKinney-Jones.

McKinney-Jones, a senior from Milwaukee, is averaging 9.0 points and 3.4 rebounds and has started 25 of 27 games.

Basketball Buzz: 2/28

Inside the U
Christopher Stock
Feb. 28, 2013

The fifth-ranked Miami Hurricanes beat Virginia Tech Wednesday and are now preparing to travel to No. 3 Duke on Saturday night.

Miami (23-4, 14-1) can clinch the ACC regular season title outright with a win over Duke (24-3, 11-3) in Durham.

"I think this is the biggest game of the year," senior Kenny Kadji said. "We can win the ACC there, the whole thing about slapping the floor, and I think whoever wins that game is going to get the No. 1 ranking too for next week. It's going to be a great game. We know they're going to be ready. They have been talking about it since they lost here. It's going to be fun."

There has been plenty of attention surrounding the game between two top five teams with significant importance in the league standings, but coach Jim Larranaga is trying to downplay the game.

"I think quite frankly the media makes it out to be the be all and end all," Larranaga said. "When we talk, we talk about every game of being of equal importance. You can't relax and be so up for one game and not up for the next."

The Hurricanes beat then No. 1-ranked Duke 90-63 on Jan. 23 in what is considered by many as the biggest win in school history. Durand Scott scored 25 points, Kenny Kadji added 22, and Shane Larkin had 18 points and 10 rebounds.

"People have been looking forward to this game on Saturday since we played them last," Larranaga said. "But for us, we've had to take it one game at a time."

News & Notes

- PF Kenny Kadji scored 20 points against Virginia Tech, the most since putting up 22 against Duke on Jan. 23, a span of 10 games. It was a positive sign for Kadji, who had his lowest-scoring four-game stretch of the season (32 points) prior to Wednesday game.

- SG Trey McKinney-Jones has back-to-back 11-point games after six consecutive games of scoring six points or less as he's been dealing with a foot injury.

- Duke plays at Virginia (19-8, 9-5) tonight on ESPN. Duke is 8-1 since dropping the game to Miami. "I think they've clearly made the adjustment now without Ryan Kelly," Larranaga said. "I think back then they were still going through a transition, but Mason Plumlee and Seth Curry are playing at an extreme high level, (Rasheed) Sulaimon is coming off a great game...and Quinn (Cook) is playing very well as well. They are hitting on all cylinders right now."

- Larranaga's first trip to Cameron Indoor Stadium was in 1971 when he was coaching the freshman team at Davidson. "I think we were undefeated or maybe one loss and we lost by maybe 30 or 40 points and I remember thinking, 'Wow, this is one heck of a place to play college basketball. The fans are up and rocking even before the game begins even for the freshman game.' The place was nuts."

- Miami won at Duke 78-74 in overtime last year as Reggie Johnson led the way with 27 points. "Having won there last year gives you a sense of understanding that you can win and you have to play, very, very well," Larranaga said.

- Miami 2014 commit SG Adonys Henriquez says that he believes top prospects will want to play at UM because of the "freestyle offense" the team plays. Isaac Copeland (Raleigh, N.C.), Craig Victor (New Orleans, La.)

and D'Angelo Russell (Montverde, Fla.) are among the prospects Henriquez has been talking to about joining him at Miami.

- UM 2014 recruit Grayson Allen, who holds an offer from Miami, Florida, and Florida State among others, says he has a "good" relationship with Larranaga. Allen has been impressed watching UM this season: "It's been great. It's been interesting to watch them be undefeated in the ACC for so long. They just lost, but they had a good run and they have a really good team."

Standing Behind The Name

SLAM Magazine
Eduardo Maisonet III
Feb. 27, 2013

The key word here is perfect.

"I worked on everything during the offseason to get ready for this year. I feel my skillset was already strong last year but now I'm just trying to be perfect. The team has stayed here in Coral Gables for the summer session over the last two years and it's really beginning to show on the court." — Shane Larkin

What expectation could be placed on the shoulders of sophomore point guard Shane Larkin other than perfect? Well, if we're talking about what it would take to make the Miami Hurricanes a National Championship contender in basketball, then absolutely. If we're talking about living up to the expectations of wearing the name, "Larkin" on your back and living up to a family legacy that few families on this Earth can compare to, then absolutely.

But if it's the expectation of pushing your fellow teammate to be perfect, just as teammates like Erik Swoope and Garrius Adams push their floor general push Larkin to be perfect, then it speaks more to a perfect climate that's been fostered for a Hurricanes team that's held its place among the college basketball elite.

After spending enough time talking to Larkin and hearing him effuse praise on his teammates and head coach, all while speaking in a humble and relaxed tone, it's easy to understand how Miami can be so calm and clear-headed when dealing with tense situations on the basketball court. Has Larkin been here before? Been in these tense, pressure-filled situations and we just didn't know it?

Was he with his pops Barry, the 12-time All-Star with the Cincinnati Reds, when the game was tight in the bottom of the ninth? Or what

about his uncle Byron, Xavier's all-time leading scorer, when the game was late in the second half? Or maybe he was with his other uncle Mike, a standout linebacker for Notre Dame, deep in the trenches fighting for that in the fourth quarter? Wait, don't let me forget the other uncle Steve, who also had a cup of coffee in the majors as well. So yes, Larkin probably picked up a thing or three from the elder statesmen in his family.

"The entire family has been really supportive of me and my game. Ever since high school they've always been on me to get better. Someone in the family would always give me little clues here and there to work on, to push me, to keep my eyes on. My dad is a Hall of Famer, my Uncle is the all-time leading scorer in Xavier history. I want their success and working on what I need to do has been an awesome experience, because I know I'm getting better." — Larkin

Getting better has been an understatement for Larkin, who coming of an impressive freshman campaign where he earned All-ACC Freshman honors, there were some who wondered what Larkin's role would be on this Miami team. Would he be a scorer? What about handling the point guard duties? What about defensively?

Right now, any role he takes he's been excelling, and he's making the people around him even better. If he penetrates into the lane, he can find the open man with the best in college basketball. If there's a ball screen and the defender goes under it, Larkin's hitting the three-pointer (42 percent this season) with consistency. He's wreaking havoc on the defensive end, averaging over 2 steals a game, and he's always running the break with a finish or a dish.

That's what's scary about Larkin in 2013—he's still developing and he's brimming with confidence. That blowout win over Duke earlier in the season wasn't a fluke, it was a culmina-

tion of events that led to that climax. The 13 straight wins in the ACC wasn't a coincidence (I mean, this is the ACC right?). Miami's got a battle-tested head coach in Jim Larranaga, they've got a veteran-laden squad with six seniors on the roster, and they've got a play-maker who doesn't seem afraid of the moment.

No, Larkin wants the moment, he wants that moment to be perfect.

Kadji: Biggest Game of the Year

Inside the U
Luis Estrada
Feb. 28, 2013

Coming off a thorough defeat of Virginia Tech on Wednesday night, Kenny Kadji and the rest of the Hurricanes basketball team turned their attention quickly to their game against Duke on Saturday evening at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

With the way Miami defeated Duke in their first meeting and with the hype quickly building as ESPN runs dramatic commercials previewing the rematch, Kadji acknowledged the importance of the game and all the factors leading into it.

"I think it's the biggest game of the year," Kadji said. "We can win the ACC there, the whole thing about slapping the floor (in their last meeting), and I think whoever wins that game is going to get the No. 1 ranking too."

Duke students have been camping out for days leading up to this top 5 matchup, creating an atmosphere reminiscent of the classic Duke-North Carolina rivalry games.

"It's going to be the best game of the year, in my opinion. You know they're ready, a coach like Coach K (Mike Krzyzewski) who is in my opinion the best coach in the world, he's going to have them ready," Kadji said. "The whole program, like the whole school is going to be ready, so to me it's the best game of the year."

Duke's students are known for their trash talking and in-game rituals, but Miami's experience in beating them at Cameron last year should certainly serve this veteran team well when it comes to dealing with the elements.

"I remember I couldn't hear anything it was so loud, you were taking the ball out of bounds and they were like almost touching you. It was insane," Kadji said of his memories of

last year's game. "It was a great feeling playing there. It's so small and there's so many students that you can literally hear what they say and everything that goes on outside the court."

One of the big effects of the Hurricanes outstanding season has been the build-up of support on their own campus. Kadji and the rest of the team are constantly being sought out by students all over school.

"There's so much stuff I can't even tell you. Every single time you go to class, I mean, Facebook messages, Twitter, I mean it's a pretty big game for everybody here."

And now Miami gets the feeling of being the hunted, a position they have never been in this late in a season, but a position Duke is all too familiar with.

"It's very strange, we were talking about that the first day Coach L got here and he was like 'Who are the best teams in the ACC?' and we said Duke and North Carolina, and now being in the place where they have to chase us, and they're behind us, it's kind of weird," Kadji said.

Weird or not, Miami travels to Durham with a very clear objective.

Win Saturday, and the Hurricanes will be ACC regular season champions for the first time in program history.

Canes Expect Insane Atmosphere at Duke on Saturday

CaneSport.com
Staff
Feb. 28, 2013

For many basketball teams, winning at Duke is a program-defining moment.

UM pulled that off last season.

Then the Canes blew out the Blue Devils at the BankUnited Center this season, 90-63.

The next step?

Beating Duke twice in one season - Miami plays in Durham on Saturday. The game will be televised on ESPN beginning at 6 p.m.

"I think it's the biggest game of the year - we can win the ACC there, the whole thing about slapping the floor (in the blowout victory, which some Duke fans took as mocking them)," Kenny Kadji said. "I think whoever wins that game will get the No. 1 ranking for the next week. We know they're going to be ready. They've been talking about it since they lost here. It's going to be fun."

For the record, the floor slap was instigated at the urging of former cane great Warren Sapp, who had floor seats for that game.

Coach Jim Larranaga looked ahead to Saturday's game, saying "they've clearly made the adjustment now without Ryan Kelly. Mason Plumlee and Seth Curry are both playing at an extremely high level. (Rasheed) Sulaimon is coming off a great game. And Quinn (Cook) is playing very well. They're hitting on all cylinders right now. ... I expect Saturday will be a great game."

It's not out of the realm of possibilities that Kelly could return for this game, and Larranaga said, "Having a player of his caliber helps. He and Plumlee are a great one-two punch. ... Losing him certainly is a big loss. Getting him back would be a big shot in the arm for them."

Trey McKinney Jones said today that his memory of the earlier win over Duke was that "They play hard on both ends." He added that "It would mean a lot (to win the ACC). One of our long-term goals at the beginning of the season was to first win the ACC Championship. To do it there, do it at all would mean the world to me."

How badly do Cane players think Duke wants to win this game?

"Pretty bad ... they're going to be ready," Kadji said. "Any time we beat a team like we did, they're always going to be ready for the next game."

* A noteworthy quote courtesy of Kadji: "Coach K (Mike Krzyzewski) is the best coach in the world - to me it's the biggest game of the year. They're going to be ready to play."

* McKinney Jones said "this game is bigger" than the first matchup with Duke because of what's on the line at this late-season juncture.

* McKinney Jones said Duke fans are "insane" in their amount of passion and expressed surprise that the students would camp out all week for a basketball game.

"That's crazy," McKinney Jones said. "They show up before we even get there to warm up."

* Larranaga says he's told his players that every game is "of equal importance."

"You can't be so up for one game that you can't get up for the next," he said. "Every game is hugely important."

* What does it do for the team knowing they've already won at Duke?

"I think that's important," Larranaga said. "Having won there last year gives you a sense

of understanding that you can win. You have to play very, very well."

Hurricanes eye successful March run

FOX Sports Florida
Charlie McCarthy
Feb. 27, 2013

The calendar officially flips to March on Friday. Nobody needs to tell the Miami Hurricanes what that means.

The Hurricanes understand the next four weeks will determine if they forever will be known as a nice regular-season story for 2012-13, or if they'll go in the books as something truly special.

Miami ended its February slate with a 76-58 rout of Virginia Tech on Wednesday night at the BankUnited Center. The fifth-ranked Hurricanes (23-4, 14-1) cruised after building a 19-point halftime lead.

Both teams looked sloppy most of the first half, and Miami certainly benefited from facing the Atlantic Coast Conference's last-place Hokies (12-16, 3-12).

Bottom line: The Hurricanes took care of business following a 15-point loss at Wake Forest on Saturday and after entering the game as heavy favorites.

"It was an important game. A lot of people were going to see how we were going to react to the game at Wake Forest and how we would respond to a loss like that," said sophomore guard Shane Larkin, who scored a game-high 22 points. "I think we came out and imposed our will early."

Not exactly. Miami clung to a 15-14 lead more than 12 minutes into the game. The Hurricanes then worked on going inside for some layups or fouls and resulting free throws — plus a Trey McKinney Jones 3-pointer — to build a 29-16 cushion 4:14 before halftime.

Virginia Tech failed to get closer than 16 points in the second half and trailed by as many as 25 points.

Such games for Miami figure to be non-existent going forward, with the possible exception of Wednesday's home game against Georgia Tech. After all, surprising Cinderellas and low seeds in league championships and the NCAA Tournament have given March Madness its name.

"We've been wanting this," said senior forward Kenny Kadji, who had 20 points. "Everybody wanted to go to the tournament, and we've been waiting for the postseason. So nobody is surprised March is here. If anything, there's more excitement."

That certainly will be the case Saturday at Duke, where the Cameron Crazies will want revenge for a 27-point loss at Miami on Jan. 23. The Hurricanes hold a 2.5-game lead over the second-place Blue Devils, and a victory would give UM its first basketball conference title, regular-season or tournament.

"It's just another game on the schedule," said a smiling Larkin, drawing laughter from Kadji, McKinney Jones and the entire media room.

McKinney Jones was a bit more honest.

"If we can go into Duke, one of the traditional powerhouses in college basketball and one of the best teams in the ACC every single year, and clinch," the senior guard said, "that would be an amazing experience and add another special moment to an already special season."

This March could be truly special for the Hurricanes, who figure to earn a high seed in the NCAA Tournament following the ACC tournament.

Miami coach Jim Larranaga knows the March microscope can be both a help and a hindrance for a team.

"It's kind of easier to keep the players' attention at times, but then it's very easy to be dis-

tracted by all the periphery," Larranaga said. "The whole thing is managing your thoughts. Where is your mindset right now?"

"You're not going to play your best every night. Some nights, like tonight, we were able to get ahead and get a comfortable lead. And then sometimes you relax, thinking the game is over, and that's not a good mindset. You gotta keep playing hard."

March on.

Miami's Surprise Season, Meticulously Planned

New York Times
Scott Cacciola
Feb. 26, 2013

Jim Larranaga always has a plan. He plans by the day, week, month and year. If anyone wonders how he stays so organized, Larranaga walks behind his desk here at BankUnited Center and opens two large cabinets, which house more than two decades' worth of Franklin Covey daily planners: thick, three-ring monstrosities the size of dictionaries.

Larranaga, the men's basketball coach at Miami, keeps track of everything in those binders. His goals. His team's statistics. His thoughts and observations. He also jots down what he expects to happen, and that includes the Hurricanes' remarkable rise this season. Larranaga was so confident in his team that he showed up at a board of trustees meeting last October and delivered a message.

"I told them this could be the best year in school history," he said this week.

It was a low bar. Long known for the success — and various suspected extracurriculars — of its football program, Miami has an unexceptional basketball past, with six trips to the N.C.A.A. tournament and a lone appearance in the Round of 16 back in 2000. Yet in just his second season, Larranaga, 63, has built the team into an improbable contender, much as he did at George Mason, which he coached to the Final Four in 2006.

The Hurricanes (22-4, 13-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) are ranked No. 5 entering Wednesday's game against Virginia Tech, and their home games regularly sell out. Fans stormed the court Jan. 23 after a 27-point victory over Duke, then ranked No. 1. The Heat stars LeBron James and Dwyane Wade have made courtside cameos. And students, who line up for tickets on a patch of real estate known as Larranaga's Lawn, wear T-shirts that feature Larranaga's face on the front along with the slogan "40 Minutes of L" — a play on the slightly more profane catchphrase of the high-octane teams at Arkansas in the 1990s.

"I thought it was hilarious," the assistant Michael Huger said, adding: "People think because of Coach's age, he can't do this, he can't do that. Can't? That's not even in his vocabulary. He's healthy, he moves well, he communicates well, and his mind is sharp as a tack."

Miami had won 14 straight games before last Saturday's loss at Wake Forest, a breakdown that was still fresh on Larranaga's mind this week. On Monday, he kept a box score in his pocket and cited what his team did wrong:

"Everything." Larranaga wants Miami to limit opponents to 40 percent shooting over all and 30 percent from beyond the 3-point line. Wake Forest shot 54.2 percent over all, 58.3 percent from long range.

In coping this week, Larranaga said he was relying on one of his favorite books, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," by Stephen R. Covey. Citing the need for rest — part of Habit No. 7 — Larranaga did not have his players practice on Sunday and barred them from speaking with reporters until after Wednesday's game. "The thing we can't afford to do is allow our priorities to change," Larranaga said.

There are times when Larranaga, who grew up in the Bronx, would seem right at home at a TED conference, exchanging innovative management ideas. Part coach and part management guru, he has always been fascinated by numbers and strategy, dating to his college days at Providence, where he started as a math major before switching to economics. (Economics, he said, was more practical.) As a basketball coach, he believes in the data-crunching wizardry of Ken Pomeroy, whose semi-eponymous basketball statistics Web site, KenPom.com, has been an invaluable resource for Larranaga for years.

Of particular interest are his team's offensive and defensive efficiency ratings, which are based on points per possession. According to Pomeroy, the Hurricanes rank 6th in defensive efficiency and 39th in offensive efficiency. Defense, Larranaga said, is the foundation. Scoring points? "That keeps your players happy," he said.

On defense, he wants to limit his opponents to 12 points per position. In other words, if the starting point guard scores 9 points and his backup hits a 3-pointer, the limit has been reached. That also means opponents should average no more than 60 points a game. This season, opponents are averaging 59.2 points and 38.4 percent shooting. Larranaga's players get a dose of his man-to-man principles every day.

"Sometimes, it's reiterating things over and over," said the assistant Chris Caputo, who worked for Larranaga at George Mason. "You need to get the message across, and I think we've given a very, very honest defensive effort the whole season — other than the Wake Forest game."

Larranaga preaches offensive balance. The goal is for each position on the floor to produce 15 points, for a total of 75. Miami is scoring 68.7 points a game, and the senior guard Durand Scott averages a team-high 13.3. Four others average at least 9 points. The Hurri-

canes operate with a collective sense of purpose that makes them extremely difficult to defend.

Larranaga also cited the positive influence of Shane Larkin, his pass-first point guard. Larkin, a sophomore and the son of the Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin, averages 13.1 points and 4.3 assists.

"He was the missing piece of the puzzle," Larranaga said. "If we need more passing, he can get the ball moving. If we need more scoring, he can score. If the big guys haven't touched the ball in a while, he knows to get it to them."

Huger, the assistant, recalled interviewing with Larranaga for a coaching position at George Mason in 2007. There were 11 other candidates, and toward the end of a rigorous set of interviews, Larranaga invited Huger and his wife, Tonya, to meet at his office. Tonya Huger was struck by a long row of management books on Larranaga's desk, and she recognized one in particular, "Good to Great," by the business consultant Jim Collins.

"You remember that quote where he writes, 'Get the right people on the bus, then figure out where to go?' " she asked Larranaga. "Well, Michael is the right guy to have on your bus. Now you need to decide where you're going to go."

Her husband got the job.

In Larranaga's case, that message not only means hiring the right coaches and recruiting the right players. It also means that he must be flexible and willing to play to their strengths.

At George Mason, Larranaga coached players who were skilled at shooting off the catch, so his offense featured more down screens, with players popping out to take passes along the perimeter. At Miami, his top players are much more comfortable shooting off the dribble. As a result, Larranaga has incorporated more pick-and-rolls into his offensive sets.

There are differences on defense, too. With a smaller lineup at George Mason, Larranaga could full-court press and fluster opponents by double-teaming guards in the backcourt. Larranaga has more size but less quickness at Miami, so he puts a premium on protecting the lane.

"We're always adapting," Huger said. "From one year to the next, we never keep the same plays."

The only constants are Larranaga's baseline goals. Those never change. They go into the planner, and Larranaga hopes — no, believes — his players will make it happen.

Barry Larkin's son thriving at Miami

Atlanta Journal Constitution

Carroll Rogers

Feb. 26, 2013

Growing up the son of a Hall of Fame short-stop meant that when Shane Larkin was playing baseball at age 7, his father, Barry, was liable to attract a line of autograph-seekers around the ballpark.

Shane Larkin might get a hit, steal second base, third base and even home, but his father was getting the most attention, unless it was from coaches asking the little Larkin to go easy on the opponent with all the steals.

That's part of why Barry Larkin, a native of Cincinnati, in the prime of his 19-year career with the Reds, decided to move his wife and three children to Orlando, Fla.

"I didn't want them to grow up as the son or daughters of" Larkin said. "I wanted them to have their own identity and do their own thing."

Little did he know how far Shane would take it. He quit baseball later that same year and grew up loving basketball and football. Now Larkin is a sophomore point guard for No. 5 Miami and might be the Hurricanes' most valuable player.

He was the missing piece that coach Jim Larranaga had looked for, just like basketball has been the "own thing" that Larkin always knew he would find.

"I was a hyper kid," Larkin said. "I didn't really like the slow-paced game of baseball when I was younger. You had to wait for somebody to hit the ball to you. Sometimes you'd go up to hit, and the pitcher would throw terrible pitches, and you couldn't hit the ball. So you couldn't run and steal bases or anything."

Larkin used to race his two sisters to the car in the parking lot, just to be first, even if it scared his mom to death. When the four of them went to Reds games over the summers or on weekends during the school year, he'd play Pokemon on his Game Boy until he heard "now batting Barry Larkin."

In basketball and football, he could dictate pace, even if it meant running to the end of the court before anybody on either team — or the ball — made it there.

"Barry finally had to tell him, 'Shane, you can run down there as fast as you want to, but you might as well take your time,'" Lisa Larkin said. Shane still loved going to spring training with his father, shagging flies and taking turns in the cage. He got hitting tips from Tony Perez and Pete Rose. Deion Sanders gave him his

nickname "SugaShane" which is now simply "Sug."

But when it came time for fall ball with his team in Orlando, Larkin got discouraged by a coach who didn't like his leg kick and told him he was trying to be too fancy. Larkin was 7 and taught to respect his coaches. He wasn't going to talk back. He tried it the coaches' way, and it didn't feel right.

That's what he told his dad on the phone through tears, explaining why he didn't want to play baseball anymore.

"He actually thought it was just going to be for the rest of that season," Shane said. "But it actually turned into the rest of my life."

Barry Larkin was admittedly crushed. He still half-jokingly calls that decision "a death blow."

"It was a shame that it wasn't just about going out and having fun," Barry said.

What Shane found though, that even living in Orlando and sticking with football and basketball, he couldn't escape his father's legacy.

If he scored four touchdowns in a Pop Warner game, he heard rumblings it was because his father had bribed the opposing coach.

"Until I was about 10 or 11 it really affected my play, and I didn't want to be a superstar," said Larkin, whose mother said he didn't like have friends over to their house either, for fear of being seen as a showoff. "I just wanted to be in the background and just be an OK player."

Larkin said a conversation with his father changed that, and he began to use the criticisms as motivation. Before every game, his father encouraged him to embrace his talent by saying: "What are you going to do tonight?" Shane would say "dominate."

Having a world-class athlete for a father had other advantages, too.

After watching his father study video of his swing, Shane wanted to tape his basketball games, so they started filming him at ages 6-8 when he played at the YMCA. They watched together after every game, with his father, who played basketball in high school, too, talking strategy.

His father, who coached him in AAU, taught Shane the advantages not only of having a first quick step but stopping quickly. He helped him work on it with elastic resistance bands.

The Larkins have a full-sized basketball court in their backyard, where Shane would shoot while his dad took his offseason swings in a makeshift batting cage. After his father finished, they would shoot together or play 1 on-1, at least until Shane was 14 and his dad

couldn't beat him anymore.

"I couldn't even back him down anymore because he put those little bony elbows in my back," Barry Larkin said.

At the end, Larkin would throw the ball down-court and count down "5 ... 4 ... 3," as Shane sprinted to retrieve it and shoot before his father yelled "ennhhhh" for a buzzer sound. They'd do it until Shane made the shot.

"That's the one advantage that Shane has over a lot of guys is he grew up in an environment where he saw how competitive people were," Larranaga said. "He is very humble. He's very hungry, and he's got an incredible set of skills that he uses — not just athletic skills, but mental skills. He has the ability to anticipate things far better than most players."

Larkin is Miami's second-leading scorer with 13.1 points and leads the Hurricanes in assists (4.3), steals (2.1) and minutes (36.1).

He played a key role in Miami's 33-point win over then-No. 1 Duke on ESPN. Dad sat court-side as Larkin had 18 points, 10 rebounds, five assists and a steal.

"It's just cool that we're able to be there and go through this year," said Barry Larkin, who keeps a busy schedule between broadcasting for ESPN and this spring's job managing Brazil in the World Baseball Classic. "It's an exceptional year to go through with him."

Larkin still gets pangs when asked if he thinks Shane could have made it as a baseball player. "Even now whenever he plays around with baseball, he's got natural movement that's just like amazing," Barry Larkin said. "... Tony Perez used to tell me 'If I had his swing, I might be pretty good.'"

Shane is pretty good making his own way, too. His dad loves it when Shane texts that somebody recognized him at the grocery store or a gas station. Larkin has been known to snap a photo of Shane signing an autograph.

Larkin hung back as his son walked into the local sports grill in Miami after the Duke game, while restaurant patrons stood and clapped. In the background, Barry Larkin leaned to his wife, Lisa, and said, "This is awesome."

Miami dumps interviews for film study after Wake loss

Sun Sentinel
Michael Casagrande
Feb. 26, 2013

Just about 16 years ago, the phone rang in Jim Larranaga's office.

On the other end was an expert on biorhythms — not the first guy most coaches would entertain. But some solid advice was delivered. It continues to pay off today as his Miami basketball team comes through the most grueling part of its ACC schedule.

Playing three road games in 11 days caught up with the Hurricanes on Saturday in Winston-Salem, N.C. They didn't have the same pep in the step and the 80-65 loss to Wake Forest delivered a message to Larranaga.

It's time to dial it back.

So nearly all the media interviews were slashed as the No. 5 Hurricanes (23-4, 13-1 ACC) enter the final two weeks of the regular season. It starts at 7 p.m. with a visit from Virginia Tech (12-15, 3-11 ACC) and the nation's leading scorer. Erick Green averages 25.1 points and scored 30 in a 73-64 UM win Jan. 30.

That, of course, is followed by a Saturday trip to No. 3 Duke. The strategy dates back to his talks with the biorhythms expert, who explained the importance of pacing the young athletes as they grind through school and basketball.

"Mentally, you're challenged," Larranaga said. "You've got your mind going in so many different places, so that when we start going over a scouting report, you're not quite as focused as you were when you didn't have all these other responsibilities."

Larranaga, who's been on a marathon media blitz himself, described a player who went from class to an interview to a test and then

back to an interview. It reached overload status.

And it all came to a head against a Wake Forest team which entered with an 11-14 record.

Hurricanes guard Shane Larkin, one of 30 members of the Naismith Award watch list announced Monday, said UM may have overlooked Wake Forest. Larranaga said it was more a matter of his team being "not as focused as we had been," and the 15-point loss proved it.

So, instead of all the interviews, players got some individual film work in on Monday. Larkin, who is suddenly the focus of opponents' scouting reports, got extra time with assistant coach Eric Konkol to look at different options of attack. Sixth-year senior Julian Gamble also got some private film work in and came away from the workout feeling positive.

"Guys kinda seemed re-energized," said Gamble, the only UM player available for interviews since the Wake Forest game. "We're coming off a loss for the first time since Christmas, so to focus in and really get back to the basics that got us here is what's going to continue to have success."

And, in the spirit of biorhythms, practices are shorter to give players more time to recover for when it counts. Early season workouts ran as long as three hours. Now Larranaga said the physical side of practice can be as brief as 30 minutes, but the focus is designed for stability.

It's one of those issues you face with a team built for a run at a national title.

Neal Heller, father of Justin, has become super fan

Palm Beach Post
Jorge Milian
Feb. 26, 2013

University of Miami junior guard Justin Heller didn't play in last week's 54-50 victory against Virginia.

But Neal Heller, Justin's father, got into the game right away.

Despite owning a courtside seat at the BankUnited Center, the 52-year-old Heller spent the evening on his feet, exhorting the Hurricanes to play defense, pumping up the fans by waving his arms as if conducting the Boston Pops and, mostly, barking at the referees.

The verbal assault began a couple of minutes after tip-off when the three game officials appeared to miss a Virginia foul on UM point guard Shane Larkin. Referee Doug Sirmons, who had the misfortune of being the closest official to Heller, was made to pay for the non-call during this next few trips up the court.

Senior center Reggie Johnson calls Heller "the Spike Lee of UM basketball." Lee, the noted movie director and ref baiter, sits courtside at Madison Square Garden for New York Knicks' games.

"He stays on the referee nonstop," Johnson said of Heller. "He says things to the ref and I say, 'Man, I'm glad he's not a player because he'd be put out right now.'"

But don't get the wrong impression. Heller, a Boca Raton resident and a 1982 UM graduate, is not some R-rated loudmouth who annoys his own side as much as he does referees and opponents.

Heller doesn't curse, won't get in anybody's face and has never been asked to leave a game. UM's players love Heller — each one stops by pre-game to give him a high-five — and he's become a favorite among students. Most of his Twitter followers are UM students and one has begun showing up to basketball games carrying a Fathead — a cut out of an over-sized face used to distract opposing free-throw shooters — with Heller's mug.

"He loves it," said Justin Heller, a graduate of

West Boca Raton High School. "The guys mess with me about it. They say, 'You're dad is more famous than you.'"

With his dad on-board as the team's super fan and the fifth-ranked Hurricanes (22-4, 13-1 ACC) enjoying a magical season heading into tonight's home game against Virginia Tech (12-15, 3-11), Justin said he's having the time of his life.

But it wasn't always that way. Growing up, Justin didn't welcome his dad's exuberance at games. The gyms Justin played in were small and his dad's booming, New York-accented voice could be heard from end to end.

"Throughout middle school and high school, I didn't really like it," said Justin, a finance major. "I'd be like, 'C'mon dad.'"

That began to change after Justin successfully walked on at UM as a freshman and his teammates started to realize the crazy guy sitting across the court was Heller's dad. Because Heller's histrionics are often caught on camera, he's become a form of comedic relief during team film sessions.

"I think his teammates appreciated it and it allowed Justin to appreciate it," said Heller, who owns four beauty schools throughout the state. "I think he saw it from a different perspective and said, 'You know what? He is just supporting my teammates so, who cares?'"

Said sixth-year senior Julian Gamble of Neal Heller: "He's unconditionally there for us."

Not so much the referees, many of whom are well aware of Heller's presence.

"I never curse and I don't say anything personal, but I will dispute calls," asserts Heller. One of those disputed calls earned Heller a 30-second stare down from referee Jamie Luckie during a game two years ago. Heller figured his days heckling the veteran official were over until Luckie walked over to him before UM's game against North Carolina on Feb. 9.

"Can you be nice to me today?" Luckie pleaded.

"Now I'm going to feel bad if I yell at him," said Heller.

The truth is, Heller hasn't had much to com-

plain about this season. Before last Saturday's loss to Wake Forest, UM had won 14 consecutive games and risen to a No. 2 ranking. He also got to experience the thrill of watching Justin — the Hurricanes' human victory cigar in blowouts — score his first career points when he sunk a jumper against Charlotte on Dec. 14.

"It was one of the most special moments I've ever had," said Heller, who is divorced from Justin's mother.

There have been quite a few moments like that for UM and Heller this season. Recently, Neal received his first autograph request and he also was profiled on local television.

So is Justin getting upstaged by his dad?

"That's the last thing I want," said Neal Heller.

"We're very close and we've been close forever. These are going to be memories we share the rest of our lives."

John Salmons Stops By UM

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Feb. 26, 2013

John Salmons has always been proud of being a Miami Hurricane.

There's just been a little something extra this season in being a former player as the Hurricanes have been one of the nation's hottest stories climbing to No. 2 in the polls last week.

"It definitely means a lot," Salmons said of Miami's success. "It's the first time that I've actually been able to brag since I've been out of school. It's been fun. I've been bragging like crazy."

Salmons, who played at Miami 1998-2002, stopped by UM on Monday to meet with the coaching staff and a few of the players, and saw the facilities as his Sacramento Kings team was in town to play the Miami Heat on Tuesday.

It wasn't the first time Salmons had met UM head coach Jim Larranaga as Larranaga recruited Salmons out of Pennsylvania back in the late 1990s when Larranaga was at George Mason.

"He seems like a really good guy," said Salmons on Larranaga. "The whole coaching staff seems cool. There's a lot of excitement around there so that's good. It just brings back memories of when I was there and we were doing well getting ready for the tournament. Hopefully they can keep it up. They have a tough one coming up (at Duke). If they continue playing the way they've been playing, they can pull out another win."

Salmons has been keeping a close eye on the Hurricanes, which are currently ranked fifth and lead the ACC with a 13-1 mark.

"They are doing great," he said. "I watch them whenever I get the chance. They are playing

great basketball, they are playing confident, and hopefully they can keep it up."

While at UM, Salmons helped lead Miami to a Big East Championship in 2000 and a Sweet 16 appearance. He was the first player in school history to surpass 1,000 points, 600 rebounds, 400 assists, and 150 steals.

"I just remember how confidence we were, almost cocky--that's probably how we lost in the Sweet 16 to Tulsa," Salmons said. "It was a fun time just being in school, winning, competing with the football team for some notoriety. It was cool, it was fun."

Salmons averaged 13.1 points a game during his senior season at Miami in 2001-02 and guided the Canes to an 86-39 record during his four years, which was the most wins over a four-year period in school history.

Salmons is in his 10th season in the NBA after being drafted in the first round, 26th overall, by San Antonio. Despite being a late first-round pick, Salmons ranks second among his draft class in games played (771) and eighth in total points (7,633). He has also played with the Sixers, Bulls, and Bucks

"Number one is God, I'm blessed to be in the league this long," said Salmons on what has been the key to his success. "I haven't had any major injuries. I've been able to have some good stretches in my career. I think I've tried to be as professional as I can, trying to learn from older guys, and just having an opportunity to show and prove what I can do."

He is in his second stint with the Kings and has provided leadership for a young team as the team's oldest player.

"He's been a great glue guy for me to be able to play at all times, always professional, ready to go and play, and doesn't complain" Kings coach Keith Smart said. "For me as you have veteran players that are still productive and

he is one of those guys. And also just being a true pro all the way through. That's been great for me and as you build a team, those are they kinds of guys you like to have on your ball club."

Salmons is averaging 9.0 points, 3.0 assists, and 2.6 rebounds for the Kings, who are 19-38, but Salmons sees improvement.

"It's definitely a young team," Salmons said. "I see steady growth. I'm just trying to teach them how to be a pro, how to survive in this league, and just try to play the right way."

Salmons and the Kings will be looking to end a five-game losing streak Tuesday against Miami, which has won 11 straight.

Basketball Buzz: 2/26

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Feb. 26, 2013

For the first time since Christmas, the fifth-ranked Miami Hurricanes are looking to bounce back after a loss.

Miami (22-4, 13-1) had their 14-game winning streak halted by Wake Forest on Saturday as the Demon Deacons won 80-65. Following the game, Shane Larkin said that he thought the team overlooked Wake Forest.

"I don't know if overlooked is the right word," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "I wouldn't use that. The way I saw it was that Wake Forest was well-rested and well-prepared. They had a lot of time just to get ready for us. I think our players, quite honestly, were busy doing a lot of things prior to practices and may not have been as focused as we have been. We're reaching that stage in academics, there's mid-term exams.

"I know we had a player who went from class to an interview back to take a test and back for an interview so what ends up happening there is mentally you're challenged. You have your mind going different places so when you're going over a scouting report maybe you're not quite as focused as you were when you didn't have all of these other responsibilities. I would say that we were not as focused as we needed to be, but some of that has to do with Wake Forest being very good that day."

The loss dropped Miami from No. 2 to No. 5 in the AP Poll. Indiana, Gonzaga, Duke, and Michigan are ahead of UM.

The Hurricanes will look to get back on track Wednesday at home against last-place Virginia Tech (12-15, 3-11) led by the nation's leading scorer in senior guard Erick Green at 25.2 a game.

"It's not about record," Larranaga said. "It's about match-ups and how good a guy plays on a particular day. We've already seen that we held Erick Green to 30, the guy's capable of getting 40, and we would prefer that he doesn't get in the 20s. But he's averaging 26 points a game in league and shooting almost 50 percent from the field and he's getting everybody's best shot. It's very, very challenging.

News & Notes

- The team had an off-day on Sunday as players received treatment and practiced Monday and Tuesday. Practices, typical for most teams, have been shorter as the season has gone on with practices ranging from 30-90 minutes compared to 2-3 hour practices at the beginning of the year. "(Monday's practice) was very good," Larranaga said. "(I was looking for) a lot of effort and execution on both ends of the court and we got it. We had another good practice (Tuesday)."

- Former Hurricane John Salmons, currently with the Sacramento Kings, stopped by UM on Monday as the Kings are in town to play the Miami Heat. Salmons met with the coaching staff and saw the facilities.

- Larranaga has decided to pull back on some of the media responsibilities for his players following Saturday's loss. Initially players were going to be made off-limits, but then Julian Gamble was allowed to meet with the media on Tuesday. It is unknown at this time if players will be allowed to speak to the media on Thursday as initially planned for their upcoming game against Duke.

- PG Shane Larkin is one of three ACC players (Duke's Mason Plumlee and Seth Curry are the other two) to be included in the recent list of 30 for the Naismith Men's College Player of the Year award. "That puts him in a very select group of guys," Larranaga said. "It's certainly well-deserved. I'm sure the other 29 guys are very well-deserved."

- SG Durand Scott broke out of his mini-offensive slump with 17 points against Wake Forest after scoring just nine points on 3-of-14 shooting in his previous two games against Virginia and Clemson. Scott is shooting a career-high 46.4 percent from the floor.

- PG Shane Larkin has been receiving more attention from opposing teams than at the beginning of the year as he's been a focal point for Miami's success. More double-teams have been happening forcing the sophomore to give up the ball earlier in the possession. Larkin is averaging 10.3 points on 40.7 percent shooting (11 of 27) in his last three games. Larkin spent time with assistant coach Eric Konkol on Monday reviewing film to find ways to combat recent moves by the opponents. "It's more about educating him about what his options now become," Larranaga said. Konkol also

met with other players individually to assess their situations.

- C Julian Gamble believes teams have been focusing on preventing Miami to get on a roll behind the 3-point line ever since making 15 against North Carolina. "They're really trying to stop us from shooting 3s," Gamble said. "Ever since the North Carolina game we haven't had that type of production from the 3-point line as we have had previously in the year. That comes from teams really trying to scout us. At the same time there's a lot of different things we can do and try to do strategically within the game and the way we run our offense to try to get our inside game a little bit more and that will help our outside game out definitely."

- If one were to predict how the All-ACC teams were going to shake out, look for Shane Larkin to be named to the first team with Durand Scott and Kenny Kadji as second-team selections. Larkin remains in the running to be the conference's player of the year along with Plumlee, Curry, and Green.

- Points per possession on defense is something the coaching staff pays close attention to. Currently, UM is 16-2 when holding teams to under a point per possession.

- The Wake Forest fans rushed the court after the win, which was a new experience for Miami, which has not been in a situation as a favorite that has been upset. "It's not a good feeling and I don't think it's different than losing any other game," Gamble said. "They played an absolute great game and they deserve to celebrate that victory. ... Just seeing them storm the court is something we've experienced doing that to someone else. I know it's a fun experience and a good way to celebrate a good win." Gamble was not a fan of the "over-rated" chant at the end of the game. "For the team that wins the game, that's kind of an insult in way to them. The team you played isn't over-rated, you just beat a very good team. I want to give all of the credit to Wake Forest. It's about us at the end of the day, but they deserve all of the credit for that win. I don't want it to seem that people were thinking that we were over-rated and they just beat an average team that was rated higher than they should have been. They beat a very good team."

Gamble making most of 6th year

AP
Feb. 22, 2013

Three blocked shots. Less than four seconds.

The highlight moment of Julian Gamble's career at Miami had nothing to do with offense, which seems fitting for him. After all, the sixth-year senior has scored four points or less in 75 of his 118 career appearances with the Hurricanes.

Instead, it came in the form of one brilliant defensive sequence on Tuesday, where he simply victimized Virginia's Akil Mitchell on a play that has been replayed countless times in the last few days. Mitchell shot, Gamble blocked. Mitchell rebounded and shot again, Gamble blocked. One more time, Mitchell rebounded, head-faked and then shot -- and, yep, Gamble swatted that one away as well.

Gamble hardly, if ever, has a play called for him on the offensive end of the floor. Still, he's become invaluable to the second-ranked Hurricanes, a key part of a team that many believe is good enough to win a national championship.

"You can see the impact he's had, the difference between our team last season and this season," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said.

And to think he should have been gone long ago.

Gamble came to the Hurricanes in 2007, redshirting his true freshman season. He played 93 games over the next three years, almost all as a reserve, and none in the NCAA tournament.

Before what would have been his senior season and fifth year at the school, Gamble tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left leg. Months later, the NCAA said he qualified for a sixth year -- and he's taken full advantage of the chance, working his way into the starting

lineup and helping the Hurricanes work their way up the national polls.

"This is what we love doing and we have a story to tell," Gamble said. "We have an opportunity to inspire people and let people know, especially from my point of view, that perseverance definitely pays off over adversity."

Gamble returns to his home state of North Carolina on Saturday, when the Hurricanes put their 14-game winning streak and perfect Atlantic Coast Conference record on the line against Wake Forest.

"Having an opportunity to go back to North Carolina and play in front of our families -- we've got a lot of guys from North Carolina -- it's a big game," Gamble said.

Gamble is averaging 6.8 points on 56 percent shooting for the Hurricanes (22-3, 13-0), who struggled a bit in the early going before simply catching fire once the calendar flipped to January.

His numbers are perfectly fine, in terms of what Miami wants to see from him on the offensive end of the floor. Ask the Hurricanes where he's most valuable, and they'll either say on the defensive end or off the court.

"Julian's an emotional leader out there," said Miami center Reggie Johnson, a longtime starter who now comes off the bench, primarily behind Gamble. "Julian just plays hard, blocks shots, runs the floor. To have Julian here, man, it's really special."

Gamble has one degree and will soon have his master's as well. He takes two classes now, both at night, and an independent-study course. That means his days are free to largely focus on basketball -- and he's taking advantage.

His footwork is better. His finishing skills are better. He's slimmer and quicker, and is

simply a wall at times around the rim for the Hurricanes. He got the word about the sixth year toward the end of last season, when his trainer told him that he had "good news and bad news -- the bad news is, you've still got rehab, and the good news is, they granted you a sixth year."

Without that, he'd be elsewhere.

Without him, Miami probably wouldn't be No. 2 in the nation, either.

"He worked so hard last summer," Larranaga said. "He lost 20 to 25 pounds. He got much stronger. By September he was running and jumping, and I just knew he was going to be a major factor."

Gamble epitomizes team's blue-collar style

Miami Herald
Walter Villa
Feb. 22, 2013

Three times in less than five seconds Tuesday night, Virginia's Akil Mitchell tried to shoot over Miami Hurricanes' center Julian Gamble.

All three times, Gamble used his left hand to reject Mitchell.

It was an impressive bit of defense by the 6-10, 250-pound Gamble, but because it happened in the first couple of minutes in the Canes' 54-50 win over Virginia, it wasn't even mentioned in most media reports.

Still, the sequence was a fitting metaphor for a player who doesn't give up easily and has come back from a serious knee injury to have a major impact on the nation's second-ranked team.

"Obviously, we didn't have Julian last year," Canes coach Jim Larranaga said, referring to the ACL injury sustained by Gamble in the summer of 2011. "You can see the impact he's had, the difference between our team last season and this season."

The Canes last season were 20-13 overall and 9-7 in the Atlantic Coast Conference, failing to make the NCAA Tournament. This season, the Canes, who visit Wake Forest at 1 p.m. Saturday, are 22-3 and 13-0 in the ACC.

Many experts predict the Canes will be not only be a lock to make the NCAA Tournament but a probable No. 1 seed if they stay on track.

Gamble said he thinks team first, even if fans have made a big deal of his blocks against the Cavaliers, sending the video to his Facebook page and Twitter.

"I think it personifies our team being relentless on the defensive end and not giving up layups," said Gamble, who is working on his

master's degree in liberal arts. "A lot of guys after the first block would maybe go for a pump fake and foul on the second or third [shot]. But I just stayed down and stayed disciplined."

That discipline has helped Gamble, 23, through a six-year college career in which he has been either injured or ineffective for most of his stay at Miami before this season.

In fact, his 19 starts this season are only five fewer than he had combined in his previous five years.

Gamble only became a starter this season after Reggie Johnson injured his thumb before the Canes' tournament in Hawaii. But Gamble's stellar play, which includes ranking fourth in the ACC with 2.0 blocks per game, has kept Johnson on the bench since.

Johnson said he'd prefer to start, but ...

"We're winning," he said, "and I'm very happy for Julian."

Gamble has made the most of his opportunity. His 50 total blocks are a career high, and his scoring (6.8) and rebounding averages (5.2) are far better than his previous bests of 4.0 and 3.5, respectively.

Gamble is shooting .557 from the field, focusing almost exclusively on put-backs, dunks and post moves. His only glaring weakness is a .463 percentage from the foul line.

He is also part of an impressive four-post-player rotation that includes Kenny Kadji, who is the best shooter of the quartet; Johnson, the top rebounder; and freshman Tonye Jekiri, who is getting valuable experience for the future.

Larranaga said Gamble has made amazing progress in his recovery from the ACL injury.

"At this time last year, Julian was limping," the coach said. "He couldn't run. He couldn't jump."

"But he worked so hard last summer. He lost 20 to 25 pounds. He got much stronger. By September, he was running and jumping, and I just knew he was going to be a major factor."

Who will make the All-ACC hoops team?

The Daily Progress

Jerry Ratcliffe

Feb. 22, 2013

With only 17 days remaining in the ACC's regular season, ballots will be arriving soon to members of the Atlantic Coast Sports Media Association (ACSM), who will dutifully select the league's all-conference basketball team.

Most years, it's not all that easy because of a plethora of quality players. Next year and the year after, it will become increasingly difficult with the additions of Syracuse, Pitt, Louisville and Notre Dame.

Naming this year's team will be difficult and it will be interesting to see how many of the players named to the conference's preseason team (picked by media members attending the ACC Operation Basketball event in October) will indeed make it to the real All-ACC squad.

In case you forgot, the preseason team was composed of N.C. State's C.J. Leslie, Florida State's Michael Snaer, Carolina's James Michael McAdoo, State's Lorenzo Brown, and Duke's Mason Plumlee. Leslie, by the way, was the preseason player of the year.

Certainly, Leslie will be in the conversation for player of the year honors. He ranks sixth in the ACC in scoring, eighth in rebounding and fourth in field goal percentage (we used statistics from only ACC games), among other categories. Largely, Leslie's Wolfpack has been disappointing unless something changes down the stretch, and that could impact how he is judged by voters.

Most of the chatter I've heard among media in terms of ACC Player of the Year is centered around whether Virginia Tech's Erick Green can capture enough voters to take the award from the likes of Leslie, Plumlee, Seth Curry, Miami's Shane Larkin and possibly others.

Plumlee, one of the most improved players in the country, is fourth in scoring, second in rebounding and No. 1 in field goal percentage. While Larkin is fourth in assists and tops in steals, he's not even in the top 15 in scoring, but Miami's success could vault him into the picture.

Green, who is trying to become the first ACC player since 1956-57 to lead the nation in scoring (Grady Wallace of South Carolina with 31 ppg), obviously leads the league in scoring, is fifth in assists and seventh in field goal percentage. However, will playing for possibly the worst team in the league kill Green's chances at winning the player of the year award?

Probably, and here's why.

Only once in ACC history has the league's player of the year come from a team with a losing record in conference play. That was the great Len Bias of Maryland in 1986, who had also won the award the season before and was clearly destined for greatness prior to his tragic, untimely death.

Bias' Terps were but 6-8 in a very talented ACC that season, but were 19-14 overall and ended up seeded fifth in the NCAA Tournament.

But Bias is the only one to have ever accomplished such a feat. Maryland's Walt Williams couldn't pull it off in 1992 despite averaging 26.8 points per game, nor Georgia Tech's Kenny Anderson the year before after averaging 25.9 ppg.

The Jackets' Matt Harpring couldn't do it in '98, nor could Florida State's Al Thornton in '07, or Bobby Sura in '94, or Lorenzo Charles of N.C. State in '84. They all played for teams that had losing records in ACC play, although some played on teams with overall winning records.

Green, who is averaging 25.3 ppg (and slightly higher in league play only), is playing for a Hokies squad that has been woeful: 2-10 in the ACC, 11-14 overall, and riding an eight-game losing streak heading into last night's game against Duke.

It will be interesting to see how the league voting goes for All-ACC. Will two Duke players make it? Two Hurricanes? One Wolfpacker? Any Tar Heels? Then, there's Green. And, Wahoo Nation is pushing hard for a "Joey Buckets" vote.

You figure at least one Miami player will get the nod, whether it's Larkin or perhaps teammate Kenny Kadji. Some are leaning toward

Plumlee and Curry. There's Green and State's Leslie. Carolina fans are hollering for consideration for McAdoo, Reggie Bullock or P.J. Hairston, who has come on strong of late.

Virginia fans point to Harris as a legitimate candidate. He's clearly one of the most improved players in the country if not the most underrated. Harris is fourth in overall scoring and No. 2 in scoring in ACC games only. He's also the only player in the conference to rank in the top 10 in 3-point field goal percentage (No. 1), field goal percentage (fourth), and free throw percentage (eighth), along with scoring.

Just to throw in a little more confusion, there are star players from other teams such as C.J. Harris, Travis McKie, Ryan Anderson, Devin Booker, Richard Howell and Lorenzo Brown, who is regarded as the best guard in the league. There's also BC freshman guard Olivier Hanlan, who is in the top five in scoring and eighth in field goal percentage.

Voters will be asked to name a first, second, and third team, an all-rookie team, and an all-defensive team, along with Player of the Year, Rookie of the Year and Coach of the Year, which will likely be a Jim Larranaga landslide. Just like my Heisman Trophy vote and my Wooden Award vote, I will twist myself into mental knots trying to figure out who to pick and send it in at the last possible minute.

Larranaga credits Chris Bosh for Miami's dream season

USA Today
Chris Chase
Feb. 22, 2013

Miami is ranked No. 2 in the country, hasn't lost a game since Christmas Day and is 13-0 in the ACC, three games clear of second-place Duke. According to Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga, the man who may be most responsible for Miami's sensational season is a current NBA star who played at a rival ACC school one decade ago.

Larranaga recently told a story about how Miami Heat star, and former Georgia Tech player, Chris Bosh helped motivate the team prior to Larranaga's first season in Coral Gables. The coach reminisced about a summer day in 2011 when Bosh played pick-up with the 'Canes. After the game, Larranaga asked the All-Star for his assessment. Bosh said Miami's players weren't running the floor or working hard.

The story continued:

"I asked [Bosh] if he would mind sharing that with the team. This was right after [the Heat] had lost in the world championship to Dallas. One day with the whole team in the weight room lifting, I asked him to say a few words. He started out with an emotional message. It was the best five-minute talk I've ever heard. He talked about how disappointed he was that he didn't play better in Game 6 and how disappointed he was that they didn't win the world championship and he didn't want to live with that kind of regret and that he was killing himself during that offseason so that the Miami Heat could win the world championship.

"He said, 'You guys don't work hard enough. You don't deserve the success you'd like to have. You can't compete at the highest level of college basketball with the effort that you're giving.' It was just music to my ears because that was the message we were trying to deliver. Coming from Chris Bosh, it meant a whole lot to the team."

Miami finished that season 9-7 in the ACC. Now, they're the first team since Duke's Final Four squad in 1999 to start the ACC season 13-0. Yeah, I'd say that's one good five-minute talk.

By telling the story, Larranaga is being modest and salesman-like at the same time. Associating a Miami Heat star with the Miami Hurricanes program is great for recruiting. And though Bosh's motivational speech surely helped matters, Larranaga himself is the architect of Miami's rise. As the excerpt above demonstrates, he gives pretty good speeches himself.

SG Adams Preparing for Next Season

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 22, 2013

After an injury-riddled junior season, Garrius Adams had offseason knee surgery in September prior to the 2012-13 campaign.

Unfortunately for Adams, he was informed in the preseason by the coaching staff that he would be redshirted as he recovered from the injury.

"At first it came as a shock," Adams said. "Then you understand it's for the better to get healthier and help the team in the long run."

With five seniors graduating, Adams, a 6-foot-6 guard, would step in next season as someone expected to have a large role on the team.

"His conditioning has improved dramatically and we're starting to work with him individually," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "Coach (Eric) Konkol had him out working on his ball handling because chances are next year he'll be in Durand Scott's role. I say that in the way Durand has so many aspects of his game. He's such a multi-facet player."

"If you watched (Scott) the other day his defense on Joe Harris was incredible. His effort at the defensive end was awesome. He's also our best guy at just attacking, getting into the open court and making all kinds of different lay-ups. He's our best perimeter rebounder and Garrius Adams needs to be that guy for us next year."

Last season as a junior, Adams averaged 4.5 points in 19 games as he dealt with injuries. The injuries affected his playing time and effectiveness after averaging 7.3 points and 3.7 rebounds as a sophomore starter.

"My whole junior season I battled injuries from the beginning of the summer until my last game," Adams said. "I never played a game injury-free at all. The next coming year will definitely be different. I feel great right now."

Adams has been the point guard on the second unit during practices while his most natural position is shooting guard. Lately, he

has been concentrating on a variety areas of his game such as spot-up shooting, creating for his teammates, and working on being a primary ball handler.

Garrius Adams averaged a career-high 7.3 points as a sophomore in 2010-11 making 24 starts.

"Now is the time to get ready for next year," Adams said. "I can't wait to start in the summer. I have to start now and that's what I have done. I have worked with the coaches ever since I started feeling better on a daily basis. I have been doing a lot of individual work with the assistant coaches just not waiting until the summer to get better, but starting now."

It's been challenging for Adams in practices going up against one of the best backcourts in the country in Shane Larkin and Durand Scott.

"Going up against the guards that we have is challenging every day especially because they're playing with some great confidence and I have to stop on them on defense or score on them on offense, it definitely helps me every day to practice against these guys to get better," Adams said.

Larranaga and players have raved about the work Adams is putting in as a scout team player.

"He's running the green team (the second unit) and he's playing great," Larranaga said last month. "He played point guard the other day as (Duke's) Quinn Cook. He was tough and we are had a hard time stopping him. In fact we didn't stop him. He scored on us like every time."

"He was (Virginia Tech's) Erick Green and he was cooking, he was (North Carolina's) P.J. Hairston, and Garrius really plays those roles well in practice," center Reggie Johnson said. "He's really vital to us helping prepare because most people don't have a guy like that in practice to really help them. Garrius reminds us of Erick Green, the leading scorer in the nation. He played that role well, scoring, getting to the rim, and getting off picks."

With Miami ranked No. 2 in the nation with a 22-3 record, 13-0 in the ACC and recording wins over perennial powers Michigan State,

Duke, and North Carolina (twice), it hasn't been easy to watch from the sidelines.

"There's definitely some times that I feel like that I'm redshirting and never had any part of the team's success, but coach lets me know that I am part of the team and I am part of the team's success," Adams said. "It makes me feel good that coach knows that."

Center Julian Gamble, who has known Adams for years as the two grew up together in North Carolina and played on the same AAU team. At one point, they lived down the street from one another. The two have maintained their relationship at UM and Gamble knows what Adams is going through as Gamble missed last season with a knee injury.

"I know how it feels, I know how bad he wants to be out there especially when you see your team doing great things like we are doing now," Gamble said. "Garrius is always in my ear. I talk to him all of the time. He's like an extension of the coaches and he tells me what they're saying on the sidelines. He's been invaluable to our team and he knows that and even when we're in practice he helps us improve every day."

Adams is still receiving treatments every day, but says he's been able to practice close to 100 percent for the last couple of months.

"I haven't had any soreness or pain so that's a smile on my face," Adams said.

When healthy, he has the chance to be a key player for next year's Hurricanes as they'll look to carry over their success.

"I don't think anybody knows how good Garrius is and how versatile he is," Gamble said.

Johnson heads home to face former favorite Wake Forest

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Feb. 22, 2013

Wake Forest literally is home to Reggie Johnson. Growing up five miles away from the Winston-Salem campus, the Miami senior center will be quite familiar with his surroundings when the 'Canes face Wake Forest at 1 p.m. Saturday. He will be playing his hometown finale in a Hurricane uniform while shooting for a school record 15th straight win.

Johnson won't have any issues adjusting to the environment.

"Every time I go home, I use their practice facility," he said. "I know the pass code and everything to get into the gym. I cheer for them and everything. I'm not gonna lie."

His mother, Erika Johnson, knows a little about the school as well. She's employed by Wake Forest, so there's quite a buzz in her work environment with her son and the No. 2 Hurricanes (22-3, 13-0 ACC) coming back once more.

Some of Johnson's fondest basketball memories were made on the Wake Forest campus. He remembers being a high school kid playing pickup games with former Demon Deacon stars now in the NBA. Chris Paul and Josh Howard were on the floor with him as a youngster.

They don't treat him any different now that he's the enemy. They're all Winston-Salem kids just seeking out the same goal. Howard, now with the Minnesota Timberwolves, still texts him every time comes through town to play the Heat.

Johnson still goes back and forth with former Wake Forest standout L.D. Williams over games won and lost. The most recent UM trip to Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum was a big one for Johnson. He scored a then-

career-high 25 points as a sophomore during a 74-73 win. Johnson's free throws with four seconds left snapped a 13-game road ACC losing streak.

"Every time we go there, he has a big game," senior forward and Durham native Julian Gamble said. "So that's what I'm expecting from him."

This whole story could have been totally different, however.

Johnson was recruited quite heavily by Wake Forest as a star at nearby Winston-Salem Prep. Then coach Skip Prosser died in 2007 and the Demon Deacons backed off.

"I was disappointed," Johnson said. "It was more than just basketball. Just definitely being there on campus with those guys and having a relationship with the players already. I wanted to stay at home, but once I met [former UM] coach [Frank] Haith, he made me feel like Miami was the place for me."

But his large family is still in Winston-Salem. They'll be out in force just like they were a few weeks back at NC State.

Johnson said his mom is hearing all about it at work.

"They're always messing with her," a smiling Johnson said.

The Demon Deacons' 11-14 record is not to be mistaken for weakness, Johnson recognizes. He compared them to Clemson as a team who plays much better at home than away and nearly ended UM's streak Sunday. Duke had a rough time in a 75-70 win at Wake while then-No. 14 NC State lost 86-84 on Jan. 22.

Williams sent message to Johnson via Twitter telling him how excited the campus was with a shot at slaying a No. 2 team.

Johnson isn't getting too worried with the margin of victories shrinking in the past three games. UM beat Florida State, Clemson and Virginia by a combined 12 points after a healthy stretch of 20-plus point wins.

"I think it's good for us," Johnson said. "You're not going to beat people in the tournament by 20 points. People are complaining that we're playing close games. But we're winning them. A couple years ago, last year, we used to lose those games."

Basketball Buzz: 2/21

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 21, 2013

The second-ranked Miami Hurricanes return to action Saturday at Wake Forest.

Miami (22-3, 13-0) will take on a Wake Forest (11-14, 4-9) team that is led by guard C.J. Harris and forward Travis McKie, who are both averaging over 14 points a game.

"Wake Forest is a team that plays in the open court very, very well," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said. "They're a good transition team, 59th in tempo, shoot the ball much better on their home court than on the road, they play better defense at home as well. They're a young team that has gained valuable experience all through the months of November, December, and January and now I think they're playing their best basketball. They've been in a lot of close games."

Miami Heat superstars LeBron James and Dwyane Wade did their best UM rendition with an off-the-backboard pass for a dunk as Wade delivered the pass to James against Atlanta. James and Wade were courtside for UM's game against North Carolina in which Shane Larkin and Kenny Kadji teamed up for the same play. Wade credited UM for the dunk during his post-game discussion with the media.

"A little inspiration by the Hurricanes I heard," Larranaga said with a smile. "Not that those guys need any inspiration on how to dunk the ball. Come on."

When Reggie Johnson was asked his thoughts on Wade giving credit to the Hurricanes, he was appreciative and then followed by getting into the Kobe Bryant-James debate.

"I would never ever have imagined that the second-greatest of all-time in LeBron James, not all-time, but the second-best player in the league right now to say that and then Dwyane Wade to say that, that's a remarkable," Johnson said.

Johnson, who believes Bryant is the best, razzed James about it during a pick-up game two summers ago at UM.

"I'd definitely tell LeBron that, I actually told LeBron that when LeBron came here when he just came to the Miami Heat and we kind of got into it jokingly," Johnson recalled. "He hit a jump shot, he said, 'Two-time MVP, you better ask about me.' Then I caught the ball on Udonis Haslem and (James) said, 'Take that U.D. he don't want it.' Then I scored on U.D. Then (James) said, 'Ok I see you big fella.' Then he said something, then I said, 'You ain't the best right now. It's Kobe.' He said, 'I'll take

that. Give me time and we'll see.' So I have told LeBron that to his face before."

Trey McKinney-Jones is battling through a foot injury

Johnson did say that he believes James could be better than Bryant in due time.

"Kobe, he's just special. He's top five greatest of all-time players. LeBron has a chance to be better than those guys, I do think that, but I still think Kobe is better right now."

The whole 'Who's better?' question is a common debate with the team on road trips.

"It's one of the best forms of entertainment on team travel," Larranaga said. "Just bring up, who's better, Kobe or LeBron; or who is better, Kobe or Michael Jordan; or who is better, Kobe, LeBron, or Michael Jordan."

Last year the team had a dinner in Boston and Larranaga invited Celtics coach Doc Rivers to the dinner. The popular debate was going on at another table, but before Rivers left, the team asked him who he thought was better and Rivers responded, "Michael. Fifty percent field goal percentage for his career."

News & Notes

- SG Rion Brown scored 10 points against Virginia to help the Hurricanes outscore the Cavaliers 20-8. Brown is averaging 10 points in his last five games including three games scoring in double figures. He had just two games in double figures in his first 20 games. "It's funny these past two seasons Rion's gotten off to a slow start as a junior and a sophomore, but he's played his best basketball in January, February, and March," Larranaga said. "He's just hitting his normal stride right now and we need it. ... If we're going to be as good as we're capable of, what makes us so good is that balance and depth."

- C Julian Gamble continues to be an impact player for Miami this season averaging 6.8 points and 5.2 rebounds in 20.9 minutes while leading the team with 50 blocks and shooting percent at 55.7 after missing last year due to a torn ACL. "Obviously we did not have him last year and you can see the impact he's had with the difference between our team last season and this season," Larranaga said.

- SG Trey McKinney-Jones (left foot) remains hobbled, but has been playing through the injury since the Boston College game on Feb. 5. "He needs fewer reps," Larranaga said. "I'd actually like to get him more reps, but right now with an injury the one thing you don't want to do is you aggravate it to the point where you can't play at all. So we have to reduce his number of reps and he has to be very patient with himself." McKinney-Jones has averaged just 5.0 points a game shooting

9 of 23 from the floor in his last five games while dealing with the injury as his scoring average has dipped to 9.2 points on the season.

- Managing the minutes hasn't been easy for a team that has had seven players start at various points in their careers. "That is never easy," Larranaga said. "What makes it work is the players attitudes. Every one of them would like to start and I know that. Every one of them knows they are capable of starting. In fact they've all started at one time or another. All of these guys know they are very capable of playing starters' minutes and producing as a starter would. But what helps us is that we've had a great attitude. Every guy has been focused on winning, every guy has been focused on helping the team be as best as it can be, and every guy has been willing to make sacrifices."

- C Reggie Johnson surpassed the 1,000-point mark in his career against Florida State and his 1,015 points ranks 34th on the all-time list. "I'm appreciative," Johnson said. "I really wasn't supposed to make it at this level a lot of people said coming out of high school. So for me to reach 1,000 points it shows my hard work I think. I got a lot better here. I did some things that some people never will do, never have done so it's special and I appreciate it."

- C Julian Gamble switched up his game shoes against Virginia going with a pair of black Air Jordan 28 with a blue colorway as opposed to his unique pair of orange and green Solex x Jordan Spizike shoe. He wanted to switch it up as the team is planning on unveiling black road jerseys at some point this season (Duke seems like a logical time). "I tried them (the Air Jordan 28s) on and they may be the most comfortable shoe I've worn to date and I know it was something different," Gamble said. "I kind of wanted to do something a little different and when it comes to shoes our team is probably one of the tops in the country so I have to try to keep up with these guys as well."

- SG Garrius Adams (knee) is redshirting this season, but has been excelling in practice as Larranaga hopes Adams can fill Durand Scott's role next season as a versatile player on both ends of the court. "Things are going great, I'm feeling better than ever," Adams said. "I've finally gotten time to get healthy and I'm feeling really good." Adams is still receiving treatments every day, but says he's been able to practice close to 100 percent for the last couple of months. "I haven't had any soreness or pain so that's a smile on my face," Adams said.

Eye of the Storm

Sports on Earth
Chuck Culpepper
Feb. 21, 2013

Let's try to stay calm here. Many of us have known Miami nights seeing fuzzy, funky things that may or may not have been real and certainly did not compute. Let's just sort back through the alleged events of the Tuesday night and surmise if we got a tainted cocktail or a bad mahi-mahi taco.

OK. Off the Metrorail at University, across a boulevard and a parking lot, there appeared in the 7:53 p.m. darkness a queue of University of Miami students. It stretched down the sidewalk to curve left into a parking lot. These students had lined up outside an arena with a clear intent to get the better seats to watch University of Miami basketball, purportedly the No. 2 team in the vast land.

"Huge" might even be an understatement," Miami student Michael Anthony said of this buzz.

Flag that right there. Remember that this program operates in the American capital of indifference, a city with an indifference just about galling enough to be appealing, a city that has turned its art-form indifference toward Miami basketball even during Miami's recent 28-season stretch of intermittent viability and five NCAA Tournament berths. Check that season-opening attendance this year, even with a promising team, and see the puny 3,160. Hear the testimony from one multi-year fan, Bo Healey: "I've been in the building when other than the ushers, concessionaires and security, there were under 100 people."

Read the history. What's your favorite barrenness in University of Miami basketball history? Could it be that with the great Rick Barry in the 1960s, Miami played in such a mishmash of venues -- including high schools and something called the Dinner Key Arena -- that Barry once told writer Phil Taylor that he'd go to the team bus uncertain of the location of the game? Would you prefer that in 1971, Miami averaged 1,166 fans per game when it would seem you might get that many who just got lost and wandered in unaware? What about 1983, when Miami became that bizarre outfit with a national football champion and a national basketball nonexistence?

Maybe you would choose 1985 when, under the guidance of athletic director Sam Jankovich, Miami started up again, beat The Citadel on a Friday night in November to go 1-0 and had a roster of such greenhorns that head coach Bill Foster said, "The first two times down the court, every player was in the wrong defense."

No, no, wait, it has to be this pearl from the Los Angeles Times in 1985:

"In 1971, the attendance at one game was announced as 75 ..."

Do you even realize what that means? That means that in the grand, lurid history of announced attendances, either Miami had one of the most upright attendance announcers ever, someone who refused to inflate it to 100 with the excuse that 25 people might have gone to the loo, or somebody with a penchant for fudging who had to inflate that thing to get to 75.

And while that has been 42 years, tradition matters; would Kentucky, North Carolina or Kansas ever have drawn 75? Kentucky in 1970 would have drawn 75 to watch Dan Issel brush his teeth.

(OK, 7,500.)

So you knew this Miami night already had its Miami doubts when they kept materializing along the sidewalks, people, arena-bound people in green and orange, people with the preposterously smooth faces of youth joining the student line. Over near the beach volleyball court, here came two, emerging from campus through the mist -- OK, it was perfectly clear and warm out --- juniors from Boston who said this Miami team had altered their college experience, lent it the unforeseen.

Even last year, Jennifer Torto said, "It would take you a minute to get in. No one would really be in the line. You could just show up and go in."

Now, Tom Hess said, "Every class, everyone is asking, 'Are you going to the game tonight?'"

Now, Torto said, "You know there's a game, when before you wouldn't know."

Now, there's a fan outside the 8,000-seat BankUnited Center -- Healey -- who can pull out his smartphone and show a photo of the ticket he bought in Las Vegas last May: Miami at 250-1 to win the NCAA title. He could win \$25,100, probably won't but just might.

Of course, they're still motley enough that the blur of a point guard, Shane Larkin, tweeted on Tuesday: "LOL dude just tried to offer me tickets to our game tonight." But the cold facts do say Miami has gone 22-3, gone a celestial 13-0 in the ACC, won 14 straight games, won the 45-43-type games, won the 90-63-type games, obliterated Duke, obliterated North Carolina, drawn LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and James Jones as spectators one night. It has a second-year coach, Jim Larranaga of the 2006 George Mason Final Four wonder, whom the players seem to call "Coach L."

Yes, they're a winning team with a Coach L.

So try to parse the latter part of the Miami evening, for many of us do know of those latter parts of those Miami evenings. Concentrate.

The security guard in the corner said he works there regularly now but worked only sporadically last year because they just didn't need that many security people. The arena

filled. The PA announced the fifth sellout in the building's 10-year history. The place boomed, especially when visiting Virginia had the ball on crucial possessions. Students hopped to hip-hop. Reiterating the human love of big people, fans chanted amiably for 6-foot-10, 292-pound Reggie Johnson. Consecutive blocked shots by Julian Gamble wrought a roar.

It felt sparer than some palaces of today, but it felt just right. It felt fresh. In a sport that can feel stale, it felt fresh.

Then the whole thing came down to a 50-50 tie and 14 seconds left and Larkin dribbling up the court, and that's when came one of those crazy late-night thoughts: In the whole of college basketball in 2013, there could not be anything any better than a tie with the seconds ticking and the thrilling Larkin, dribbling, near the University of Miami campus. In Miami. Around the perimeter. Chockablock with possibility.

Then he whipped that thing in to Johnson for a whiplash layup, and the place rocked, and the win ended, and some reporters chased university president Donna Shalala (formerly of the Clinton Administration) out for comment on the NCAA ruling on bygone regimes, especially football, that came through Tuesday night. In the breakneck tenor of Miami nights, she made a successful fastbreak and escaped.

So they talked, and Johnson said Larkin "makes the game easy," and Virginia head coach Tony Bennett said of Larkin, "Love him." The seasoned Coach L, 63, said it's "always important to build and it's easier to build on victories than it is on losses," and attributed the repeated close victories to age and players, especially seniors, who have "stayed hungry," Bennett said of this infectious team. "There's not a lot of answers because they spread you out and they can get you inside and that's what's hard about them ... A hard team to play against. Good spacing, Good physicality." And Coach L even said the hovering NCAA specter wasn't hovering: "My guess is if it was overshadowing what we were doing, this (media) room would not be packed to the ceiling."

And all the while these people were talking about college basketball in Miami.

At Miami, where once they drew 75, in the middle of indifferent Miami, where the enveloping champion Heat sometimes sells out playoff games, Gamble says he suddenly gets noticed and complimented and asked for photo poses "a lot." ESPN analyst Jay Williams says Wade was asking about the Hurricanes. Senior big man Kenny Kajdi says, "I feel like I'm dreaming. It's insane, around campus, in Miami, everybody's talking about you."

So in other words, it was another Miami night, all probably true, much certainly fuzzy.

Top 10 tidbits: Indiana, Jim Larranaga and more

NBC Sports

Vin Parise

Feb. 22, 2013

1. Victor Oladipo, Cody Zeller, Christian Watford, Jordan Hulls, Will Sheehey, ...etc. No more needs to be said. In this wild season of college hoops, it's taken us until the third week of February to finally settle on a team. Regardless of how the rankings bump around at the top for the home stretch, how do you bet against the Indiana Hoosiers right now in Atlanta?

2. Miami is ranked No. 2 in the country, hasn't lost a game since Christmas Day and is 13-0 in the ACC, three games clear of 2nd-place Duke. If you take into account rebuilding jobs, Tom Crean is the Coach of the last three years as a whole — but Jim Larranaga from Miami is this season's Coach of the Year.

3. UConn won a huge conference game vs. Cincinnati Thursday. And the most unique stat in a long time took place in that game. The Huskies scored 18 points in the 2nd half — and then scored 18 points in the five-minute overtime session.

4. How about Florida International? Richard Pitino took over an 8-21 disaster from Isaiah Thomas nearly a year ago and had a lot of work ahead of him. In the off-season he overhauled the roster, he changed the way his home court would look on game nights, but most importantly, he has people in Miami talking hoops. FIU won their 15th game Thursday night on Senior Night and are somehow in 3rd place in the Sun Belt.

5. Keep your eye of Fran McCaffery's team out at Iowa. The Hawkeyes are 17-9 overall, 6-7 in league and are currently in 7th place. However, other than #1 Indiana, the other 4 games left for Iowa are Nebraska twice, Purdue and Illinois. So there is a chance Iowa is 21-10 and 10-8 heading into the Big Ten Tournament.

6. After a lackluster start, Boston University has been on fire the last month. The Terriers have won 10 out of their last 12 and are now tied for second in the America East.

7. One team receiving a lot of buzz right now is Sacred Heart of the NEC. Former Boston Red Sox manager Bobby Valentine will be named athletic director at Sacred Heart, the Connecticut Post reported Thursday. Valentine doesn't have to worry about the baseball program, which has won the NEC two of the last three years.

8. Andre Roberson from Colorado is currently the nation's leading rebounder — a title I thought O.D. Anosike from Siena would have the entire season.

9. Freshman James Robinson from Pittsburgh has the best assist-to-turnover ratio in the Big East — not just amongst rookies...that includes everyone in the league.

10. And speaking of Big East rookies — they might as well just give the Rookie of the Year Award right now to JaKarr Sampson from St. John's.

Larranaga, senior-laden UM team a perfect match

Sun Sentinel

Dave Hyde

Feb. 21, 2013

Jim Larranaga stands outside the 3-point circle, holding a basketball, eyeing the basket. He's a numbers guy, he says. Stats. Tendencies. Charts. Nothing measurable goes unmeasured.

At the start of this year, he asked his University of Miami players who could shoot a 3-point shot.

"Eight or nine hands went up," he said.

The surprise was 7-foot Kenny Kadji's hand was up. Kadji didn't attempt a 3-point shot in two years at Florida.

"I'll show you what we did," Larranaga says.

He had each player line up outside the 3-point arc, just as he does now. He takes a shot. Swish. A trainer rebounds the ball, passes it back to him. Larranaga takes another shot. Swish. He gets the next pass and shoots again.

Swish again.

You go, coach.

In five minutes, these interested players had to make 50 shots outside the arc to get the green light in games. Make 40 and Larranaga gave them the yellow light. Under 40?

"Red light," he says.

He puts up another shot. This one clanks against the rim.

"OK, that's enough," he says.

Come on, he's 63. He has a practice to run. But maybe this gives a small glimpse into how Larranaga works, why he's succeeding, how

talent that hadn't done much has been molded into the No. 2 team in the country and the fun story in sports right now.

Kadji's shooting range, for instance, is a surprise weapon. It was always there, he insists. But he was asked to play inside at Florida.

"They had other guys like (Houston Rockets guard) Chandler Parsons to shoot from the outside," Kadji says. "I'm just glad the way it's working out here."

After Kadji made 55 shots in Larranaga's five-minute drill, he was given the green light. He's passed the regular check-ups since, making as many as 68 in one drill.

For the season, Kadji shoots a respectable 36 percent on 3-point shots (33 percent from distance represents 50 percent on normal field goals). He also beat Clemson on Saturday with a game-winning 3-point shot.

In so many ways, they're a perfect match, this coach enjoying life atop a big-time conference for the first time in a long career and this senior-laden team finding the spotlight after so many years in the dark.

Larranaga keeps monitoring the team for signs the success is getting to them. He doesn't worry about himself. He's been on the inside of teams others saw as surprises.

In 1984, Larranaga was a Virginia assistant when it went to the Final Four in the first year after Ralph Samson left.

"No one but us thought we would do that," he says.

In 2006, his George Mason team went to the Final Four in one of March's maddest moments.

"[TV commentator] Billy Packer was saying when we were picked for the tournament we

didn't belong, that we had no business being in it at all," Larranaga said.

Funny thing is, you hear the opposite about this Miami team. They don't just belong. For the last month, you've heard they're under-rated. Even at No. 2, the question is why they aren't No. 1.

Larranaga shrugs. He doesn't worry about such stuff. He moves into the weight room at the BankUnited Center, jokes with a couple of athletes and then settles down to a daily routine.

He places both feet on a machine that vibrates his entire body for a timed minute to soothe aches and increase circulation. Then, as he's had both hips replaced in the past couple of years, he positions himself so his hips receive the good vibrations.

"Now the shoulders," he says, laying down on the floor and putting his shoulders on the machine.

This season is why he came to Miami two years ago. He wanted to coach on the stage of the ACC before his career wound down. He's beat Mike Krzyzewski. He's beat Roy Williams twice. He gets up from the machine and walks through the weight room with a line his players no doubt hear.

"We hope the best is yet to come," he says.

Mailbag: Bubble teams, coach of the year candidate

USA Today

Nicole Auerbach and Eric Prisbell

Feb. 21, 2013

Andrew Geiger: The Georgetown Hoyas are one of the hottest teams in the country, having won 8 in a row and amazingly are 10-1 without Greg Whittington, its 2nd leading scorer and 2nd leading rebounder. Do you consider John Thompson III to be a leading candidate for National Coach of the Year?

Prisbell: No way. Let me first say that JTIII has done a tremendous job this season, for many of the reasons you cited. Period. Has there been a better coaching job in the Big East? No, there has not been. But you might as well take the national coach of the year award right now, wrap it up nice and pretty and ship it express delivery to Coral Gables, Fla. No one is taking it away from Miami's Jim Larranaga. He was underrated at Mason, which was viewed as the cute little engine that could. Miami has been one of the nation's toughest power conference jobs for years and years. To make Miami basketball chic, to see LeBron and Dwyane turn out for a game, and, above all else, to win and win big, Jim is the national coach of the year. Miami has played the nation's toughest schedule. It has demolished Duke and North Carolina. It has rallied to win dramatic games. It has seen Shane Larkin blossom into one of the three or four best point guards in the nation. I considered Miami a bubble team before the season. Now they are one of the national title favorites. I'm still trying to grasp that. And there is not a more compelling story in the sport right now. A refreshing story line.

Auerbach: I agree with Eric. This award has Jim Larranaga's name written all over it. Miami came out of nowhere to dominate a league traditionally dominated by Duke or UNC. (Hey, remember when everyone was talking about N.C. State in the offseason and nobody was talking about Miami? I do!) Anyway, I really like these Hurricanes. They've got to be one of the oldest teams in college basketball with

all those upperclassmen. I was at their game at N.C. State, and I just loved that they never freaked out or tightened up late in the game. After they won on a last-second tip-in from Reggie Johnson, all the players talked about their experience, and how it's the greatest strength they have. I love how Larranaga took a bunch of guys who someone else recruited and got them to buy into his system. I would not be surprised if we see this team in the Final Four. ... On the subject of Georgetown, I do think JTIII has done a great job. This team is not only the Otto Porter show, which it could have easily become. Instead, he's gotten production from a variety of guys -- 33 points from freshman D'Vauntes Smith-Rivera?! -- and the Hoyas have become one of the best teams in a strong league. I don't think anyone predicted this eight-game winning streak (all happening since Greg Whittington's suspension) but I also don't think it's enough to put JTIII in the national coach of the year discussion. He's behind not only Larranaga, but guys like Tom Crean, John Beilein and Bruce Weber (etc.) would also be ahead of Thompson, in my mind.

King's Court: Coaches raising the bar

ESPN.com

Jason King

Feb. 20, 2013

When Jim Larranaga arrived at Miami nearly two years ago, he didn't spend much time giving rah-rah speeches or playing get-to-know-you games with his new players.

"He walked in and introduced himself one afternoon," forward Julian Gamble said, "and the very next day we were on the practice court."

It was a fitting start for Larranaga's tenure in Coral Gables, where things are progressing at warp speed.

With Larranaga leading the way, a Miami program that has appeared in the NCAA tournament just once over the past decade is 22-3 overall and 13-0 in the ACC.

Barring a monumental collapse, the second-ranked Hurricanes will win their second conference title in school history. The only other championship came under Leonard Hamilton in 1999-2000.

"Coach L has achieved this kind of success before," Gamble said, "so we buy into everything he tells us. Everything he says ends up coming true."

Larranaga is most widely known for leading George Mason to the Final Four in 2006. His accomplishments at Miami thus far are equally impressive, mainly because of the short time frame it has taken him to turn the Hurricanes into a national power.

Larranaga is hardly the only coach in recent years to achieve success so quickly after taking over a new job.

New Kansas State coach Bruce Weber currently has the Wildcats in position to win a conference title for the first time since 1977. In his inaugural season at Colorado State, Larry Eustachy has helped propel the Rams into the Top 25 rankings for the first time since 1954.

North Carolina State reached the Sweet 16 last spring in Mark Gottfried's debut season while Missouri went 30-5 under first-year coach Frank Haith. Ironically, Haith was at Miami prior to Larranaga. There's a good chance they could be named national coach of the year in back-to-back seasons.

"Whenever you take over a program," Weber said, "there's a fine line between totally trying to change everything or just slowly adding and tweaking stuff as you get to know the kids. There's also nothing wrong with keeping some stuff the same, especially if it's worked for those players in the past."

"That's what we've been able to do."

Indeed, Weber, Larranaga and Eustachy all inherited unique situations. Instead of walking into programs that needed to be rebuilt, all three coaches took over teams that were far from broken or down-trodden.

K-State and Colorado State both reached the NCAA tournament last spring under previous coaches Frank Martin and Tim Miles. Miami fell short of greatness during Haith's tenure, but it's not as if the Hurricanes were bad. They had averaged 20.7 wins the previous three seasons before Larranaga was hired.

Ideal as the scenarios may seem, coaches said

inheriting semi-healthy teams and getting them to show improvement from the get-go is far from easy.

"The expectations are extremely high and sometimes false," Eustachy said. "That's the worst scenario, when you have huge expectations and they can't be met. Even if you were the resurrection of John Wooden, they couldn't be met."

Weber agrees.

When he became the coach at Southern Illinois in 1998, he said folks in Carbondale joked that winning five games in his first season would make fans happy.

"We ended up winning 15," Weber said, "but the pressure wasn't there. In other jobs I've had [at Illinois and K-State] people immediately say, 'Are you going to get us back to the NCAA tournament this year? Are you going to take us back to the Sweet 16?'"

"It's not an easy thing to do. It's a different dynamic. People don't appreciate coaches that come in and take over teams that are expected to win."

And even when success is achieved, coaches don't always get the credit.

Weber guided Illinois to a 37-2 record and an appearance in the 2005 NCAA title game just two seasons after replacing Bill Self after Self left for Kansas. But instead of praising Weber for the accomplishment, the common refrain among basketball fans is that he "won with Self's players."

"If you said that," Weber said, "then you could also say, 'Bill went to Kansas and won with Roy's players. And Roy went to North Carolina and won with Matt Doherty's players.'"

"After a while they become your players. You might not have recruited them, but when you're with them more than the previous coach ... it's part of it. It just happens. It has to happen."

Eustachy knows folks probably credit Miles as much as him for Colorado State's success.

"It's tough following a good coach and even tougher following a popular coach," Eustachy said. "But think about it: If a guy like Bruce Weber just showed up at Kansas State and rolled the balls out and said, 'OK, you guys know how to do it, see you at the game,' they wouldn't be very good."

Difficult as dealing with outside pressure can be, new coaches also must handle the delicate situation that exists within their own locker room. It's tough to tell a team to do things a certain way when it already has had success in a completely different style.

That's why wholesale change isn't always the answer -- at least not all at once.

Colorado State, for instance, was an efficient offensive team under Miles, and Eustachy said he couldn't have been more impressed with the Rams' work ethic and their willingness to follow instructions and accept coaching. But he also wanted the group to get mentally and physically tougher, because rebounding was an obvious weak point.

After placing an added emphasis on offseason conditioning, Colorado State now ranks first in the country in rebounding (42.3 RPG).

At Kansas State, the Wildcats always had been known for their defensive intensity and physicality in the paint under Martin. Weber encouraged his players to embrace those traits while becoming a more

structured, disciplined team on offense.

Even though they'd won a bunch of games under Haith at Miami, the Hurricanes couldn't seem to get things done in crunch time, as evidenced by only one NCAA tournament appearance in seven years. That's where Larranaga came in.

"He's very poised in all situations, because he's been through these situations before," Gamble said. "It trickles down throughout the team and the rest of our staff."

"He just taught us to be more consistent and to not let the frustrations of a big game get to us. We've had plenty of days in practice where we run things over and over again until it becomes second nature to us. Difficult situations in practice make games a lot easier."

So, too, does a raucous home crowd, which is exactly what Miami has been drawing in the wake of its recent success. Even Miami Heat stars LeBron James and Dwyane Wade have taken interest. The duo sat courtside for a Feb. 9 win over North Carolina.

"I think people noticed that," Larranaga told reporters. "I know recruits noticed. I think the nation is noticing now."

Important as it is to get fans behind the program, the most vital thing is to get players to buy into their new coach as a person.

During his first few months at Kansas State last spring, Weber hit the road for recruiting trips during the day before returning to Manhattan to put his team through 10:30 p.m. workouts each night. Haith had numerous one-on-one meetings with Missouri's players after arriving in Columbia prior to last season. Eustachy said he tried to be as candid as possible when addressing his new squad at Colorado State.

"I told them I wasn't going to judge anybody, nor did I want to be judged," Eustachy said. "Nobody was to compare either coach to either coach."

"I told them, 'In time, I'm not going to demand your respect. I'm going to earn it. The same goes for you. I don't care what you've done here. You're going to have to prove to me who are and where you fit on this team.'"

"Brutal honesty, from the heart, kind of takes care of everything."

Apparently so.

Colorado State, Kansas State and Miami are each in the hunt for conference titles and high seeds in the NCAA tournament. Missouri all but clinched a postseason berth by beating fifth-ranked Florida Tuesday in Columbia.

In some form or fashion, each team has created a buzz in college basketball. And they've done it with coaches who did more than maintain a level of success at their new program. They improved on it.

"No one thought Miami would do what they're doing or that Missouri would do what they did last year," Haith said. "But good things happen when everyone buys in."

"Sometimes change is good."

Larranaga leads wild COY race

ESPN.com
Dick Vitale
Feb. 20, 2013

This season, college basketball has been wacky. There have been so many surprises.

We should have an incredible March Madness. It is so wide open, and there are a number of teams that have a legitimate shot to cut down the nets in Atlanta.

There is also a crazy race for Coach of the Year. Right now, my favorite is Miami's Jim Larranaga, but there is still a lot of time left in the regular season.

Larranaga's Hurricanes were not expected to finish among the top three in the ACC. But the veteran-dominated club has been unblemished in league play. Miami has found a way to win close games, like Tuesday's victory over Virginia.

You can really make a case for a number of coaches. Think about the job done by these other top coaches, in no particular order.

Larry Eustachy, Colorado State
Before the season started, the Rams were not considered among the upper echelon teams in the Mountain West. Colorado State since broke into the AP top 25 rankings for the first time since 1954.

Tony Bennett, Virginia
His teams always play tenacious defense and the Cavaliers could shock ACC rivals by making the Big Dance. Virginia was picked seventh in the ACC preseason poll.

Dana Altman, Oregon
His Ducks have been a surprise in the Pac-12. He has a young backcourt and Oregon still has found a way to win. The Ducks were tabbed seventh in the Pac-12 preseason poll.

Bruce Weber, Kansas State
He was fired by Illinois last year. Now he has a team near the top 10 in the national rankings.

Travis Ford, Oklahoma State
His team sent an early message with a 20-point win over NC State. The Cowboys already won at Kansas.

Kevin Ollie, Connecticut
Look at the job he has done. The Huskies are not eligible for the Big East tournament or the Big Dance, and the team still plays hard.

Bo Ryan, Wisconsin
The Badgers lost Josh Gasser before the start of the season. Ryan always gets the most out of his players.

Jim Crews, Saint Louis
He had the tough assignment of taking over following the passing of Rick Majerus. He also started the season without star Kwamain Mitchell. The Billikens just blasted VCU.

Brad Stevens, Butler
His Bulldogs have wins over Indiana, North Carolina and Gonzaga. Who had Butler in the top 20 before the season started?

Herb Sendek, Arizona State
The Sun Devils are pushing for a 20-win season. Sendek was on the hot seat and now he is trying to make the Big Dance. ASU was picked 11th in the Pac-12 preseason poll.

Tom Izzo, Michigan State
The Spartans are trying to win the Big Ten title. He always has his teams prepared for postseason play.

Mark Few, Gonzaga
Could the Zags end up at numero uno? The big win at St. Mary's was impressive.

John Thompson III, Georgetown
Not many people had the Hoyas ranked before the season started. The Hoyas, picked fifth in

the Big East preseason poll, have been pretty consistent, challenging for the league title.

Andy Kennedy, Ole Miss
He led the Rebels back into the rankings and among the best of the SEC.

Michael White, Louisiana Tech
Look who is leading the WAC! How many people know the name of the Louisiana Tech coach?

Buzz Williams, Marquette
His teams always play so hard and with intensity. Williams is a winner.

Mike Krzyzewski, Duke
This is a different Duke team with Ryan Kelly on the sideline. He has done an incredible job.

Donnie Tyndall, Southern Mississippi
In his first season at the school, he has the Golden Eagles in contention in Conference USA.

Jamie Dixon, Pittsburgh
Last season, the Panthers had an off season. Pittsburgh is back in the top 25 and playing well.

Steve Alford, New Mexico
The Lobos have been ranked through most of the season.

Larkin Says Miami Could Finish Unbeaten in ACC Despite Distractions

Zags Blog

Adam Zagoria

Feb. 19, 2013

On the same night Miami received a notice of allegations from the NCAA, the Hurricanes fended off a pesky Virginia team, 54-50, to remain unbeaten in the ACC at 13-0.

And the way Shane Larkin sees it, there's no reason the Hurricanes can't remain undefeated through the remaining five games of the ACC schedule.

"It's possible," Larkin, who finished with 11 points, 6 assists and 3 rebounds in the win, told SNY.tv by phone.

"Anybody in our league could've been in our same position if they got a few different breaks. We have so many talented teams in the ACC, and every single night out it's a battle. And every single night we're gonna go out and play as hard as we can with energy and intensity. And if we do that every single night with the talent that we have and the experience and the coaching and the game plans we come up with, it's possible that we go undefeated the rest of the way."

The 1998-99 Duke team is the only one in ACC history to go undefeated through the league, but that was when they played 16 conference games.

Miami would have to win 18 to match — and improve upon — that mark.

Miami's next two games are certainly winnable — at Wake Forest (11-14, 4-9) and home to Virginia Tech (11-14, 2-10).

But after that comes a trip to No. 6 Duke (22-3, 9-3) March 2. Miami and Duke — along with Indiana and Gonzaga — are currently projected as No. 1 seeds in the NCAA Tournament by Joe Lunardi.

The 'Canes close out the season with home games against Georgia Tech (14-11, 4-9) and Clemson (13-12, 5-8).

"The ACC is a great league and every single night, you're playing against a great team, regardless if they're on the top of the league or on the bottom of the league with their record," Larkin said. "So we just gotta stay focused and try to handle business every single night."

Staying focused could be increasingly difficult as the NCAA situation heats up. Miami has 90 days to present its response to the allegations.

"We're able to stay focused because we have no say-so in what happened," Larkin said. "And we can't focus on that because at the end of the day, they're going to make their decision regardless if we look into it or not. We can just control what we can control, which is going out there and practicing hard and preparing hard and staying focused and playing every single game to win and hopefully get the top seed in the ACC Tournament."

"And from there on up go on and get a good see in the NCAA Tournament. So we only can control and that's what we're gonna do."

Meantime, Larkin says the Hurricanes have drawn some inspiration from having LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and James Jones attending the recent game with North Carolina.

"They were late, they made a fashionably late entrance," Larkin said. "When they walked in, everybody was screaming."

He added: "That's a great feeling knowing that the guys who are the top level, you can't get any higher than the NBA, and those dudes are taking time out of their day to come watch us play. It's a great feeling."

"We all watch the NBA. That's all of our dreams. We want to play at the next level. We watch them every single night, and LeBron I would say is the best player in the league right now. And the Heat are up there, too, so it's good to have the best player in the game at your games."

And if Larkin and the 'Canes can keep on winning to remain perfect, LeBron may come out again.

Canes in unprecedented territory

CaneSport.com

Jim Martz

Feb. 19, 2013

In a helter-skelter week that sent the Miami Hurricanes' basketball team from Coral Gables to Tallahassee, back to Coral Gables, up to Clemson, S.C., and back to campus late Sunday night, they learned Monday they had advanced from No. 3 to 2 in the AP and coaches' polls.

And there was little time to rest because the ACC's third-place team, Virginia, will challenge them tonight at 9 p.m. at the BankUnited Center.

"Kind of a crazy wild good week," coach Jim Larranaga said Monday as he addressed the media before holding what he termed a "very brief" practice followed by a "very short" preparation for the Cavaliers (18-7 overall, 8-4 in the ACC).

"Those were two highly competitive highly intense defensive battles (at FSU and Clemson). We were very fortunate to come out on top in both."

The Hurricanes continue to soar into uncharted and unprecedented territory for a program that didn't even exist from 1971-85.

They take a 21-3 record, including 12-0 in the ACC, and 13-game winning streak into the Virginia game.

They're coming off two hard-fought victories on the road against defensive-minded teams, 74-68 at FSU and 45-43 at Clemson. Not only have they become the talk of campus and South Florida but the entire nation, being mentioned as a potential No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament.

"I feel like I'm dreaming," said forward Kenny Kadji, a hero in the Clemson game. "It's insane around campus. In Miami everybody's talking about you."

"I talked to (ESPN's) Jay Williams before the game and he was telling us he went to Houston (where the NBA All-Star game was played Sunday night) and Dwayne Wade was asking him about Miami and how good you think Miami is and things like that. It's great seeing people recognizing your hard work and everything you put in on the court."

Canes' fans are encouraged to wear green tonight in an effort to "Green Out" the BUC.

The Athletics Department has teamed with the university's Energy and Conservation Organization to help promote their first annual Recycle Madness event. Recycle Madness is a program geared towards increasing waste diversion at athletic events and improving waste behavior in an effort to make Miami athletic events more "green friendly."

Meanwhile, the Hurricanes hope the BUC will continue to be unfriendly to opponents, who have gone 0-11 in the arena this season. The challenge will be enduring the short turnaround between games and taking on another defense-oriented team.

"Recovery mode started as soon as the game ended last night," said center Julian Gamble. "Today we'll do a lot of recovering, whether it's with our trainer or getting in the ice tub and just getting ready and mentally refocused for a completely different challenge but a similar defensive team."

He added, "Going into the Virginia game we have to absolutely respect them and give them our best effort. It's going to be a real challenge for us. They have a lot of shooters and try to spread you out on the defensive end and pack the paint on defense."

Larranaga said there are "a lot of similarities" among FSU, Clemson and Virginia on defense. "The biggest difference with Virginia is they 4-5 trap. Clemson didn't even trap us but they helped a lot. Florida State didn't trap at all, they front in the post."

"Every situation requires a player to understand what his reads are going to be. If I get double teamed, where's the open man?"

As the past week on the road showed, the Hurricanes know they are no longer hunters, they're the hunted. And they're surviving - the FSU game's out-

come going to the final minute and the Clemson game to the final seconds.

"I think we've been handling it well," Gamble said when asked how the Canes have handled success. "I mean, I've heard a couple rumblings of people saying it's getting to our heads and kind of been a little arrogant or cocky maybe. But that's not our approach at all. We're a very humble group on and off the court. Especially being around coach L. He won't let that get to our head, us become big headed at all because we have a lot more work still to do."

"We had two tough games this past week and a tough one coming up tomorrow with another really tough defensive team like Virginia, and looking ahead going back on the road playing Wake Forest (this Saturday night) that barely lost to Duke. I think every game from here on out is going to be a tough game for us. We have a huge target on our back like we have in these recent weeks, we plan on getting teams' best shot."

Added Kadji: "I think we're handling it pretty well. We don't want to take this for granted. Everyone is focused now. We have to play Virginia tomorrow and that's our focus."

"We're focused and we'll be ready."

Larranaga concurred, saying, "They've stayed very focused, very grounded. One of the things about having a veteran team is they've been through a lot of these games before. They've won some, they've lost some."

"We're just very pleased with where we are right now. We're two-thirds the way through the conference regular season race. We've got one third to go and it's the most important one third."

Kadji believes the Hurricanes gained knowledge, never mind that they're a veteran team, with their two close road victories.

"We definitely can learn from it, a lot of things we did that weren't very good," he said. "Obviously you want to learn with a win."

"It's very good for us. We're a team that never gets down on ourselves, never get frustrated."

The Hurricanes endured their worst shooting night of the season yet found a way to overcome a four-point deficit in the final 1:25 at Clemson.

"Offensively we struggled a little bit," said Gamble. "They really focused on packing the paint and it was really tough for Durand (Scott) and Shane (Larkin) to get penetration. At the same time the refs were letting us play. It was a real physical game. Some shots we took may have been fouls but they didn't call them so we had to play through that adversity and especially being on the road was tough."

"There's so much parity in this league any team can beat anybody on a given night. The Duke-Maryland game is an example of that. And especially going on the road, all the teams in the conference are playing great at home. It's good that we have an opportunity to really test ourselves both mentally and physically whether on the road or at home."

Kadji, who struggled on offense at FSU and fouled out of the game, had a team-best 12 points at Clemson, including a three-pointer with 34.7 seconds left for a one-point lead after he had missed all five three-point shots earlier in the game.

Here's how the crucial play developed: "I think I set a screen for Durand and he drove right and then came back left and my man had to help," said Kadji. "He did a great job finding me and I was open. All I had to do was nail down the shot."

Kadji said he had no hesitation in taking the shot despite the shooting woes at FSU or earlier in the Clemson game "because I've made those shots before and my teammates have confidence in me and I have confidence myself. I was wide open. I had to shoot it..."

"You have to have a short-term memory. You can't think about the other shots, as coach L always says. 'If you're open you shoot. You're a good shooter, that's what you do.'"

Added Larranaga, "I tell the guys when you get the green light shoot the three because you shoot it so well in practice. Some nights you don't make them all but he

made the critical one."

Gamble was asked if it feels any different for the Hurricanes to be ranked second rather than third in the nation.

"I don't think so," he said. "We were really lucky to escape with a win last night. Clemson played a great defensive game. We weren't hitting the shots we usually make, but the ability for us to go in there and scrape out that win really shows that we have the toughness and we can win every type of game you throw at us."

Short shots:

* Gamble on the excitement around campus: "Being No. 2 people recognize you a lot more. Walking around on campus students want to take pictures with you and talk with you and congratulate you on your success so far. That just puts things in perspective a little bit in knowing if we continue to do this they'll continue to be there for us and we have their support the rest of the way."

* Gamble on different players coming through in crucial situations: "We're very deep and that comes with our experience as well, knowing that any given guy can step up on any given day. And when a guy doesn't have a good game we still have a great chance to win it. We have so many guys who can do so many different things, so many different scoring threats. That makes it difficult for teams to scout against us to know that you can't really stop all the offensive options, because we have over five of them even though we have only five people starting."

* Gamble on where the Canes can improve: "Offensive rebounding and free throw shooting. And just executing."

* Gamble on second-ranked Duke losing at Maryland on Saturday night: "Regardless of what happened we still control our own destiny and that game doesn't really mean anything. We want to go out and win every one of these games left on our schedule. Winning is fun, this is what we want to do. We're competitors and want to win every game."

* Kadji on what Larranaga has told players about handling the winning streak: "Don't get too high, don't get too low. Just maintain and stay focused one game at a time. There's a long way to go."

* Kadji on being three games ahead of Duke in the ACC standings with six games remaining: "We don't think about that, three games up. I don't think the record really means anything now. We want to be the best team we can be and that's all we're striving for."

* Larranaga on whether it's a blessing to have a couple of close games to keep the team hungry: "I just think college basketball is all about that particular night. Every opponent is a little different, every game is different and the results are going to be different every night, not whether you win or lose but how the game is played. I think we were fortunate this week that we played two tough opponents and we were able to win and that keeps our guys feeling good about themselves but it also lets us know we have a lot of areas to work on."

* Larranaga on the short turnaround between the Clemson and Virginia games: "It's the challenge coaches have in preparing their team when there's a very short turnaround. In this case we have one day of practice, and because of the game last night the guys need their rest. The most important thing you can do to get your team ready is to somehow figure out how to give them energy. I think recovering is a very important part after a game, we will practice but it will be very brief, and the preparation will be very short, which is unfortunate because Virginia is such a good team."

* Larranaga on whether he can find a moment to sit back and reflect on what's happening this season: "Ah, no, and I really don't intend to. There's plenty of time for that after your year is over and you reflect back. But all through this year I keep notes, thoughts I have about what's working, what I need to do, what we should think about next year we need to add attention to detail."

No Hesitation for Confident Kadji

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 18, 2013

Despite missing all five of his previous 3-point attempts against Clemson, Kenny Kadji didn't hesitate when it mattered most.

Kadji stepped up and drilled a 3-pointer at the top of the key with 34.7 seconds left to give Miami a 44-43 lead, which held up as the difference in the game as UM won their 13th consecutive game with a 45-43 victory.

"I've made those shots before," said Kadji on why he didn't have any hesitation. "My teammates had confidence in me to make that type of shot and I have confidence in myself. I was wide open and I pretty much had to shoot it."

Kadji got himself open after setting a ball screen for Durand Scott, who then swung it back to Kadji for the shot.

"You just have to have a short-term memory," Kadji said on his earlier misses. "You can't think about the other shots. That's something coach always tells us, 'If you're open, shoot. You're a good shooter. That's what you do. There's always the next shot.'"

It was the lowest point total for Miami in a win since 1992.

"We can definitely learn from it," Kadji said. "There's a lot of things we did that wasn't very good and obviously you want to learn with a win. It's a great thing that we came away with a win."

Three of the four times UM has scored under 60 points this season, they have lost. So to get a win when they didn't play their best is a positive.

"It's very good for us," Kadji acknowledged. "We're a team that never gets down on ourselves. We never get frustrated. We stick to-

gether. You can always be good when you're scoring points and feeling good, but those types of games are going to happen. You want to win the games around the 40s."

With the win, Miami moved up to No. 2 in the AP Poll.

"It's great," Kadji said. "I feel like I'm dreaming. It's insane around campus. In Miami everybody is talking about you. I talked to Jay Williams before the game and he was in Houston talking to Dwyane Wade, and (Wade) was asking him how good he thought Miami is. It's just great to see people recognizing your hard work and everything you're putting on the court."

Kadji is third on the team in scoring averaging 13 points a game to go along with 6.5 rebounds. He's been able to show his versatility as a 6-foot-11 big man, who can knock down the outside shot as well as drive to the basket.

His driving ability has improved immensely from the beginning of the season after coach Jim Larranaga warned Kadji was getting into too much trouble when he put the ball on the floor.

"I just had to adjust and slow down," Kadji said. "When he told me about putting the ball on the floor and being a more versatile player, I think I just tried to speed up my game and tried to rush and do everything faster. Now I think I'm reading the situation more and putting the ball on the floor when I have a chance. I'm not really forcing it or predetermining what I'm doing. It's just different, I'm reading the situation better."

Being able to put the ball on the floor effectively has helped Kadji score in double figures in 14 of the last 15 games.

"It's helping a lot, people thought I was just a shooter and they were closing me out and now

they can see I can do some stuff like putting the ball on the floor and making some shots," Kadji said. "There's more indecision from the defensive side. They don't know what to do."

Prior to the Clemson game, Kadji scored a season-low three points against Florida State and fouled out.

"Those games happen so I didn't really put that much into it," he said. "I was waiting for the Clemson game. (Duke guard) Seth Curry was playing amazing before he came in and he had zero points, those games happen even to the best of us."

Miami hosts Virginia (18-7, 8-4) on Tuesday at 9 p.m. in what expects to be the team's fourth sellout of the season.

"I think (the crowd is) going to be great," Kadji said. "It's been great all year. From the Michigan State game to the Charlotte game, it was pretty loud. There's always been people this year. I think it's going to be a good crowd, a lot of students so we'll see."

Swoope Brings Energy, Athleticism

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 18, 2013

Erik Swoope is the best dunker on the team.

The 6-foot-6 junior small forward, who first starting dunking when he was 12 years old, credits his powerful dunking ability to growing up watching highlights of Dominique Wilkins.

"My idea was that I wanted to emulate what he was capable of, just trying to rip the rim off every rime," Swoope said. "Now it's like second-nature."

Swoope watched the NBA Dunk Contest over the weekend, but wasn't impressed.

"It was okay," Swoope said. "I would like to see a dunk contest with no props. That's my favorite time like the Dominique Wilkins and Michael Jordan battles, and Vince Carter, when it was just go out there and show what you have."

Swoope recently completed a windmill off the back side of the backboard that former teammate DeQuan Jones did in the college dunk contest last year and his teammates rave about his leaping ability.

"Yes by far he's the best dunker on the team," senior Kenny Kadji said. "He's the most athletic guy I've seen in my five years in college. He's so big and jumps so high. It's ridiculous."

Aside from dunking, Swoope has carved himself a niche on this year's team ranked No. 2 in the country with a 21-3 record, 12-0 in the ACC as he's averaging 1.4 points and 1.2 rebounds in 6.2 minutes.

"You could consider it a lot of pressure because I'm expected to come in and make a play or make something happen, but the easiest way is to just stay ready," Swoope said. "I treat every practice like this may be the scenario where I come in and I have to

make something happen. I have to always stay ready. It's a different role. I've never had it in my basketball career, but I've tried to embrace it as best as I can."

Swoope has been coming in at the end of a half or whenever the team needs a spark. He played nine minutes (the most in eight games) in Sunday's win over Clemson scoring two points and grabbing three rebounds, just one shy of his season-high.

"He doesn't get a lot of minutes, but he maximizes it every time he's on the court," Kadji said. "That's all we can ask of him. He practices good for us on the scout team emulating other teams and players and always gives us a hard time."

Regardless of having limited playing time, Swoope is one of the hardest-workers in practice and plays with a lot of energy.

"It's the thing that brought me here and all of my success that got me to the University of Miami," said Swoope, who is from Lake Elsinore, Calif. "I haven't always been the most skilled guy, but the way I define myself is through my work ethic in everything—the weight room, coming to practice trying to be a leader, just working hard, trying hard, talking, and doing all of the little things and that's what gotten me these recent opportunities."

Swoope says he's improved his strength as well his ability to play on the perimeter as a small forward as his greatest improvements since he's arrived at UM.

"I'd say I'm still taking baby steps, but I've been trying to take steps every practice and that's why I've been going so hard and trying to do as much extra work as possible," Swoope said.

As a junior on a team with five seniors, Swoope knows that he could be in line for a

larger role in the future, which is another reason why he's making sure he's looking to make the most out of practices.

"That's something I do think about, not a whole lot, but it is part of my approach to practice that I will probably in the near future my role will change even if it's this season or next season so I don't want to create any bad habits or get down because my playing time has been spotty," he said. "I just want to try to continue to improve and understand that this is going to carry over to next year. It's part of my thinking process, but most of it is just worrying about the next game."

Jekiri Earning Valuable Experience

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 16, 2013

Tonye Jekiri is earning valuable experience as a freshman.

The 7-foot center originally from Nigeria has played in 21 of 23 games for the third-ranked Miami Hurricanes as a role player off the bench.

With a team of three senior post players, Jekiri is just learning the ropes from the veterans.

"What I really love about Tonye is his enthusiasm for work," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "He's got a great work ethic, a great attitude towards work and he's going to get better and better. As much as he would get better if we would only had him play in practice, there's nothing that substitutes for game experience and he's getting some very valuable minutes."

Although Jekiri is not posting gaudy numbers, he has been more productive in the last seven games scoring in six. It's a stark contrast from the beginning of the season when he scored in just two of the first 10 games. During the recent stretch, he's averaging 2.0 points and 2.1 rebounds in 8.9 minutes.

"I've been playing good," he said. "I've been called upon at any time to help the team with the defense and offense. I've really put my effort in so every minute I play I really try to help my team. They all encourage me and let me know I'm still part of the team so I have a good feeling whenever I'm called upon and that I should be ready to go."

The Canes have struggled this season with their offensive rebounding ranking in the

200s nationally. But Jekiri has come down with some key offensive boards recently including tying for the team-high against Boston College on Feb. 5 with three.

"It really helps us," Jekiri said. "Getting offensive boards is one of my key focuses."

Since he's arrived at UM, Jekiri feels he's improved more on the defensive end grabbing rebounds and blocking shots.

"I just want to keep that going because our coaches tell us that it's all defense and defense wins the game so I every time I step on the court I concentrate on making stops," Jekiri said.

Jekiri attributes the Hurricanes' success with their preparation in practices.

"The whole thing comes from practice," he said. "We always want to practice good and practice hard, share the ball, play as a team and all of those things come from practice. We play together and bring everyone close to each other as a friend, teammate, and a brother. We have that kind of relationship. The way we practice is the way we play."

Jekiri's development will be one to watch the remainder of the season as he'll step to the forefront next year with the departure of Kenny Kadji, Julian Gamble, and Reggie Johnson.

Jekiri and sophomore Shane Larkin are the only two underclassmen in the program.

"He's a very good player," Jekiri said. "I've talked to him several times and we really get along. I always love playing with him because he really understands me. He talks to me and tells me to always be ready because he's going to pass me the ball when the defense isn't expecting it. Most of them are on lob plays so I'm always ready. We always have eye contact during the game."

Johnson Embraces Role in Win Streak

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Feb. 16, 2013

As much as Reggie Johnson would like to get back in the starting lineup, Johnson is content with coming off the bench.

With Miami ranked No. 3 in the country and on a 12-game winning streak, Johnson does not want to disrupt the chemistry with the starting lineup as Julian Gamble has filled in admirably when Johnson was injured.

"I'm not starting right now, but we haven't lost in a while so I even tell coach don't even change the lineup because something's bright right now," Johnson said. "Even though we were winning before I went out we are continuing to be hot and I don't want to change anything. My numbers are down, but we're winning and we're No. 3 in the nation--I can't complain about that."

Even with Johnson taking a reserve role--something he hasn't done since his freshman year--head coach Jim Larranaga has noticed Johnson's positive attitude in how he's dealt with his new role.

"Reggie has been fantastic," coach Jim Larranaga said. "He's enthusiastic and he's working very, very hard. The other night (against) for the first time in a while we were able to get him the able and it was at a crucial time in the game. ... Whether you start or come off the bench, everybody's role on this team is extremely important."

Johnson missed eight games (Dec. 23-Jan. 16) with a broken left thumb and the team went 6-2 in his absence. UM has won all seven games since his return with Johnson averaging 7.4 points and 7.3 rebounds since he's been back, but is shooting just 40.9 percent.

Overall, Johnson is averaging 10.0 points, 8.7 rebounds, and a career-high 1.5 blocks in 14

games, but is shooting a career-low 41.9 percent.

"I just have to get back to finishing chippies around the rim," Johnson said. "I feel I've missed a lot of chippies and that's not like me. I guess it's from being out a month and it's kind of coming back to me. I feel I'm real close."

Johnson is hoping to build on his last performance against Florida State on Wednesday as he scored 14 points making all five shot attempts and grabbed eight rebounds.

Reggie Johnson is looking to build on his 5-for-5 performance last game.

With Kenny Kadji starting at one post position and Gamble at the other, the Hurricanes have a nice rotation going with Johnson mixed in as all three seniors are averaging 21-24 minutes in their last six games.

"It's been working out great," Gamble said. "It's a great feeling knowing that we have three bigs that can all start at any point in the season. Unfortunately we can only have five starters, but that helps us out a lot. The other night Kenny wasn't having a great game, but that just shows our depth. We can have one guy that doesn't have a great night and we can still produce and can still win games."

"With our size and what we have, we have a great responsibility to really produce inside, rebound, and close out games," Johnson said.

Looking back to last summer, Johnson was very vocal about his confidence in this year's team. While he didn't envision the team being ranked No. 3, he always believed the team could contend for the ACC title.

He was also one of the first players on the team to really express his confidence in the potential success of the team.

"I told the team that we could really do something special," Johnson recalls. "We have all of the ingredients. We just have to put it together. We have a Hall of Fame coach who has been to the Final Four."

A lot of that came from watching N.C. State's run in the NCAA Tournament, which included a Sweet 16 appearance. Meanwhile, Miami was stuck in the NIT and was blown out by Minnesota in their season finale.

Jealousy sank in with Johnson's feelings towards the Wolfpack, who beat UM twice last season and edged the Hurricanes for a bid in the big dance.

"It was kind of jealousy, it hurt," Johnson said. "We was in the NIT and they were in the tournament. You want to play in the tournament."

Part of Johnson's motivation for his final season at UM was seeing Malcolm Grant's career end on a sour note with the 18-point loss to Minnesota at home and not playing in the NCAA tournament in his career.

"That's my brother and he went out on a terrible point getting blown out by Minnesota," Johnson said. "I know we have five seniors on this team and I didn't want any of these guys to have bad regrets about college."

Miami (20-3, 12-0) faces Clemson (13-11, 5-7) on the road Sunday at 6 p.m. as the Hurricanes continue their quest towards their first ACC title.

"We are playing at a high level right now. We can continue to get better, that's the scary part."

PG Larkin Playing at a High Level

Inside the U
Tyler Cooney
Feb. 16, 2013

The Miami Hurricanes basketball team is No. 3 in the nation coming off a big road win against rivals Florida State and don't show any signs of slowing down.

Now at 20-3 and 11-0 in the ACC, the big reason for such a special season is their sophomore point guard Shane Larkin.

The stats might not always show it, but Larkin is one of the best point guards in the nation and is playing some of his best ball here in February.

He's averaged 17.6 points on 61 percent shooting (53 percent from beyond the arc) and 5.2 assists in his past five games dating back to January 30th at Virginia Tech and has been the mainstay of a deep team of players who usually rotate good scoring days.

In addition to being one of Miami's more consistent players, lately he's begun to acquire a rapport with his teammates for being a closer, a role usually reserved for seniors Durand Scott or Reggie Johnson.

"He never ceases to amaze me," said Julian Gamble, the team's starting center since Johnson's thumb injury. "He really focuses on getting other people involved but at the same time he knows he can be aggressive at any point and we want him to do that. And when the game is really on the line we know that he's going to step up and make that big shot for us."

This level of unselfishness rarely seen in point guards at the college level, or at any level really, has impressed Larkin's teammates and enabled the offense to be rallied round him. Larkin has a large repertoire of offensive weapons, from his spot-up three-point shot to his ankle-breaking crossover to his fierce

drive to the basket looking to dish or to sink a tough lay-up. Yet no matter how effect Larkin is on the court, he is always looking to improve.

"I didn't shoot the smartest shots last year," Larkin said. "I'm just a smarter player watching film with the coaches and practicing against great competition in practice. As a team, we've just become a lot better and it's made my individual performance that much better."

Final Four veteran coach Jim Larranaga echoes the praise for Larkin's team-first mentality.

Shane Larkin is one of 12 finalists for the Bob Cousy Collegiate Point Guard of the Year Award

"Shane is just all about winning," Larranaga said. "He just wants to win. It doesn't matter if he scores five points or 20 points; he's going to do whatever the team needs him to do to win the game."

The 63-year old coach recalled the Canes' last match-up against Florida State where the stingy Seminole defense pressured the men on the wings and Miami had a tough time playing their favorite game—the three ball. So Larkin brilliantly recognized this emphasis and began using ball-screens more often to drive to the hoop, looking for an open teammate or making the play at the rim. And this was after he was benched for not playing defense against FSU sharpshooter Michael Snaer as Larranaga wanted him to.

"I wasn't guarding Michael Snaer with enough intensity," Larkin admitted. "When (Larranaga) sat me down he actually said 'you're guarding Michael Snaer like he's the 10th man on a high school roster.' I was over there just trying to be as good for my team on the bench and when I got back in I definitely picked my

intensity and that's pretty much what propelled me to have a pretty good rest of the game."

Larkin came back in and scored 13 of his 22 points in the final 7 1-2 minutes of the game to quell any attempt at a Florida State run.

Larkin's resiliency, attention to detail, desire to get better, and team-first approach to basketball has the Hurricanes undefeated in the ACC at 11-0 and third in the AP poll rankings with a 20-3 ranking. It is by far the best start in team history and Larranaga's squad has been lauded by national media as one of the best in the country. But the team recognizes their need for continued growth. With Larkin getting better and better each week and his Bob Cousy Award resume piling, there's no reason to believe that this wouldn't be the case.

Larkin is someone who definitely understands his talent; his in-game confidence is evident to all those watching, especially when propelling his team to slap the floor against Duke and flipping an off-the-backboard alley-oop to Kenny Kadji against North Carolina. Yet he also realizes the support he gets from the fans, his teammates, and especially Larranaga. According to him, that love is what's made his season so special.

"I just believe that Coach L believes in me a lot and my team believes in me and that's pretty much what's propelled me to have a good year," Larkin said. "When everybody believes in you, when you believe in yourself, it doesn't matter what anybody outside says about you. And their faith in me pretty much has helped me have a good year this year."

Larranaga saw talent others missed in speedy PG Larkin

Palm Beach Post
Jorge Milian
Feb. 16, 2013

University of Miami sophomore Shane Larkin has emerged as an ACC Player of the Year candidate.

Larkin is also one of 12 finalists for the Bob Cousy Award, given to the nation's top point guard, and is regarded by ACC coaches as the most important player in the third-ranked Hurricanes' thrilling ride up the Top 25 polls. But when he was a scrawny, 5-foot-9 teenager playing AAU basketball in Orlando during the summer of 2009, few were projecting those types of achievements for Larkin. The son of Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin, 15-year-old Shane didn't leave a big impression on college coaches and scouts.

Except for one guy — Jim Larranaga.

Then coaching George Mason, Larranaga loved what he saw in Larkin, a whirling dervish who played with a high-energy style on both ends of the court. Other coaches were less enthralled.

Larranaga remembers comparing notes with some coaching friends after an AAU tournament that Larkin participated in and getting an unexpected reaction.

"When I asked about Shane, it really surprised me the doubts they had," Larranaga said. "It was, what do you think of Shane? 'Eh, he's all right.'"

Spotting an opportunity, Larranaga became the first coach to offer Larkin a scholarship. Larkin didn't accept the invitation, choosing to sign with DePaul. But Larranaga ended up getting his man.

Feeling homesick and dealing with an undisclosed family medical issue, Larkin left DePaul a month after arriving in Chicago. He received

a release from his scholarship and signed with Miami, where Larranaga had been named coach a few months before.

The rest is UM history.

Heading into tonight's game (ESPNU, 6 p.m.) at Clemson (13-11, 5-7), the surging Hurricanes (20-3, 11-0) are looking to extend their 12-game win streak and maintain a three-game advantage atop the ACC standings.

Larkin has been at the center of UM's rise to No. 3, running the team's offense like a veteran while consistently hitting big shots and maturing into the team's defensive stopper. He ranks first in the ACC in steals (2.1), is tied for third in assists (4.3) and has played more minutes than anyone in the conference but Virginia Tech's Erick Green. Larkin is also averaging 13.4 points and his three-point field goal percentage (.437) would be first in the ACC if he had enough attempts.

"It starts with the little general they have there in Shane Larkin," said Virginia Tech coach James Johnson.

Leonard Hamilton calls Larkin "the best point guard in the league" and the FSU coach should know. Larkin torched the Seminoles for 13 of his game-high 22 points in the final 7 1/2 minutes on Wednesday in Tallahassee as UM extended its win streak with a 74-68 victory.

"In the second half we didn't have an answer for Larkin," said Hamilton. "He made some really, really great plays. His speed, quickness and his ability to make decisions is phenomenal for a sophomore guard. I haven't seen anybody that has the whole package like he does."

Larkin continually blew by FSU defenders for layups and used his quickness and tenacity in holding Michael Snaer, the Seminoles' leading scorer, to nine points and a bad shooting night.

"In the FSU game ... they were in the huddle saying, 'Man, he's fast. I need some help,'" UM center Reggie Johnson said of FSU's players. "You know he's pretty fast when you hear teams complaining about it."

McKinney Jones and Gamble among ACC's most overlooked

College Chalk Talk
Joshua Parrott
Feb. 15, 2013

Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji and Shane Larkin handle most of the scoring this season for Miami.

Reggie Johnson and Kadji grab most of the rebounds for the third-ranked Hurricanes (20-3, 11-0 ACC).

Johnson commands plenty of attention off the court as perhaps the most entertaining interview in college basketball, while Larkin has an intriguing background as the son of former Cincinnati Reds Hall of Famer Barry Larkin.

With those players sharing most of the spotlight, the contributions of seniors Trey McKinney Jones and Julian Gamble remain largely overlooked by those outside of Miami. Second-year Canes coach Jim Larranaga certainly recognizes their importance in a historic season for his squad, which has won 12 straight games and has its highest ranking in school history going into Sunday's contest at Clemson.

"We have a lot of guys who get attention from the media: Shane Larkin, Durand Scott, Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadji," Larranaga said. "But we have two guys – Trey McKinney Jones and Julian Gamble – who are such valuable contributors because they're kind of flying under the radar yet do exactly what the team needs them to do."

McKinney Jones has been slowed recently with a shin injury but is still chipping in various ways as the Canes seek their first NCAA tournament berth since 2008. The 6-foot-5 guard leads the team in free throw percentage (.868), is second in 3-pointers made (34) and third in 3-point percentage (.370) and minutes per game (30.7).

Fifth on the squad in scoring (9.3 ppg), McKinney Jones scored a career-high 18 points and drilled five 3s in a Nov. 28 win over then-No. 13 Michigan State.

Larranaga added that McKinney Jones, who has scored in double digits 12 times this season and made at least two 3s in 10 games, does many things that never show up in the scorebook.

"Trey is someone who keeps us in the offense, makes the simple pass, plays very smart and plays a very conservative brand of basketball yet can shoot the heck out of the ball," Larranaga said. "Every time you leave him open he can hurt you from 3-point range."

Larranaga described Gamble, a 6-10 center who missed last season with a torn ACL, as "one of those guys who plays defense, rebounds, hustles and is strong and tough." The sixth-year senior is having a career year, ranking fourth in the ACC in blocked shots (1.9 per game). He is also the team's third-leading rebounder (5.0 rpg) and sixth in scoring (6.7 ppg) while shooting 56 percent in barely playing 20 minutes per game.

On a Miami squad with several standouts, Julian Gamble can be easily overlooked. The senior center is fourth in the ACC in blocked shots and is having a career season. (Credit: HurricaneSports.com)

His numbers (7.7 ppg, 6.1 rpg, ACC-best 2.7 bpg) against league opponents are even better. Since replacing an injured Reggie Johnson (broken thumb) in the starting lineup in mid-December, he has averaged 8.1 points and 6.7 rebounds and shot 57.1 percent (52 of 91) from the field over the past 15 games.

Gamble's best performance was a 16-point, 13-rebound effort in a Dec. 23 win over Hawaii. Gamble also averaged 11 points, six rebounds and 3.5 blocks in two wins over North Carolina. He added 10 rebounds and four

blocks in the program's first win over a top-ranked team against Duke on Jan. 23. Those games were extra special for Gamble given that he grew up in Durham and was a North Carolina fan.

"This is definitely something that you dream of," Gamble said of this season. "Just being here now and having this opportunity to play with this great group of guys and our coaching staff is a great feeling."

Larranaga architect of Hurricanes' surprising surge

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Feb. 14, 2013

The Miami Hurricanes' basketball program has long lived in the shadows of its football dynasty, rarely being ranked as a top basketball program compared with five national football titles.

After almost 20 years in relative obscurity, the University of Miami basketball team is now squarely in the national spotlight with a meteoric rise through the national college rankings. UM can thank its basketball coach Jim Larranaga, who arrived on campus two years ago to rehab a program that has never had a winning season during its schedule in the Atlantic Coast Conference, a league considered one of the top basketball conferences in nation.

The program has been to the NCAA Tournament only five times since 1985.

Despite the Hurricanes history, Larranaga, who spent most of his college basketball career in the relative minor leagues, came to Coral Gables with a vision to lift the program to previously unreachable heights. Players were skeptical — even though he'd become the darling of the sport with his miracle run to the Final Four five years earlier at George Mason.

"I would say everybody wondered why'd they hire this guy," said Reggie Johnson, then a rising junior. "But once he got us in a room and talked to us and seeing the vision and plan to do something special. I kinda believed him."

And so it began.

Larranaga's first team meeting was a seminal moment in the program's rise. Less than two years later, the silver-haired native of the Bronx not only has the players sold; the whole country is buying into Hurricane basketball hysteria.

With a 19-3 record, UM is ranked third nationally in this week's Associated Press poll — the highest in program history. Just five weeks ago, UM was an afterthought not even receiving votes.

But this team caught fire with 11 consecutive wins that sparked a revolution. It is selling out the on-campus BankUnited Center regularly while building a national brand for a school typically associated with football.

As the school with the on-going NCAA investigation into alleged violations that involve the pre-Larranaga basketball program, the current crop of experienced athletes are bringing a new level of energy to the game.

It starts with Larranaga, the architect of the hottest new attraction on the South Florida sporting scene.

The program was coming off a 21-15 season when Larranaga arrived in 2011 after predecessor Frank Haith's departure to Missouri. The Hurricanes started fast in the 2010-11 season, but faded after compiling an 11-3 record. There were lingering issues internally.

"I wouldn't say it was coach Haith's fault," said basketball player Rion Brown, now a junior. "But the team didn't really buy into it with what he was doing."

But he, like Johnson, was sold with the first impression of Larranaga. The coach was smiling and Brown was staying. He had considered transferring, but he saw something special brewing.

"The biggest change I see is the organization — a real plan," said Brown, who tied a career-high with 22 points during Sunday's 87-61 beating of traditional powerhouse North Carolina. "I know coach Haith had a plan, but it's just the way Coach L goes about it," Brown said. "They way he laid it out and put in the foundation last year and really getting us to

buy into the system was the main thing."

Methodically structured practices are paramount to the plan. Larranaga has notebooks on top of notebooks of every practice plan he's devised in 28 years as a head coach. No detail is too small; every dribble, pass and layup matters in Larranaga's program.

But he's not the task-master type who rules by force.

Larranaga finds ways to relate to the 20-somethings on his team. They really respond to the pre-practice circle where a coach shares an inspirational quote and the meaning behind it. He's a youthful 63-year-old even if he walks with two artificial hips.

Senior forward Kenny Kadji notices his coach "bopping his head," when pregame rap blasts in the Hurricane locker room. Johnson made a connection when Larranaga recognized a Tupac rap song sampled the beat of his favorite Bruce Hornsby song. He quickly downloaded "Changes" to his iPhone and listens to it along with Hornsby's "The Way It Is" on team road trips.

"So he's down with it, I guess," a smiling Johnson said.

But this is a results-based business, and Miami seemed to underperform in Larranaga's first season. Injuries and suspensions associated with the NCAA investigation contributed to the Hurricane's late-season slide back into the National Invitational Tournament. The 20-13 record was a disappointment.

Home crowds averaged 3,936 — about half of the BankUnited Center's capacity and well below the 4,763 Haith's last team averaged. Through 11 games this season, home crowds average 4,844 including three sellouts in the last four dates. Miami had never sold every ticket for consecutive games in program history.

Gamble a Productive Leader for UM

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Feb. 14, 2013

Last year when Shane Larkin was a freshman he first roomed with Durand Scott on the road.

Since Larkin and Scott were both backcourt players and with Scott being an upperclassman, it seemed only fitting the two would be together.

Only problem was, both liked to sleep in causing them to miss meetings on the road. Eventually the coaches decided to split the two up and pair Larkin with Julian Gamble, another upperclassman.

Gamble took in his new partner and kept him under his wings.

"He showed me the ropes like how to be on time and all that," Larkin said. "He's been here for six years so he knows what he's doing."

Since then Gamble and Larkin have remained close.

"It was an instant click," Gamble said. "He's a great guy. I love him to death. He's like a little brother to me and I'd do anything for him."

Gamble's veteran leadership as a sixth-year senior has been an important asset to the Hurricanes' success.

"He's a really good dude," Larkin said. "He's very determined, very competitive, and a fun-loving dude. He's always smiling and having a good time. He's definitely one of my best friends on the team. He's a great dude to be around and I'm glad he's on my team."

Gamble is having a career year after being inserted into the starting lineup in December. Since then, he's averaging 8.1 points and 6.7

rebounds while shooting 57.1 percent (52 of 91) in 15 games.

Miami (20-3, 11-0) has won 12 straight and is currently ranked No. 3 in the AP Poll with Gamble as a key piece of the puzzle.

"This is something you dream of," Gamble said. "Everybody wants to play basketball at the highest level and be the best team at it. We have an opportunity to do that. We're one of the best teams so far, but the rest is far from over. We want to be the No. 1 team come early April and win a national championship. That's our ultimate goal, but before that we have to take care of these games and win an ACC championship as well."

Indiana (22-3) and Duke (22-2) are ranked ahead of the Hurricanes, but Gamble is confident his team is the best in the land.

"I would love to believe we're the best team in the country," Gamble said. "I think we have everything a team needs to be successful. We have senior leadership, we have Shane a great point guard in him, Durand (Scott), a great coaching staff so I would love to believe that."

Recovering From Injury

Head coach Jim Larranaga wasn't sure where or if Julian Gamble was going to fit into the rotation this season last year at this time.

Gamble was coming off a torn ACL and when he got back on the court he wasn't performing the way he had hoped.

"I was just rusty, not 100 percent healthy and still working to kind of get back," Gamble said. "It was a little frustrating because as soon as you get back on the court you want to play to the best of your ability. Unfortunately it doesn't really work out like that."

Larranaga had a meeting with Gamble and

gave him some advice on the recovery.

"Usually when you get injured and say if you're rehab process was six months, six months after you get back is when you really start to feel back to yourself," Larranaga told Gamble.

And as it turns out, Larranaga was right.

"That was pretty accurate to what he said as a matter of fact," Gamble said. "But at the same time, it's difficult because once you get out there; I'm playing with my teammates and I'm missing easy shots that I usually make and not being able to move the way I am. But really staying persistent and having that great deal of perseverance really helped me out."

In time Gamble began to get his legs back underneath him and by the time preseason practices came around, it was clear he was going to have a key role on the team. He came off the bench for the first eight games, but after Reggie Johnson got hurt, Gamble hasn't relinquished the position.

"I didn't question if I would fit in or not," Gamble said. "I kind of didn't know what my role would be but I knew I would be able to contribute at some level whether it be just little things or as big as it has been. I'm a team guy, always have been and have played every single role throughout my six years here so whatever role I would have got—I even told Coach L this in a meeting—I would accept it and do it to the best of my ability."

Larranaga: Old-school coach with new-world approach

CBS Sports.com

Gary Parrish

Feb. 13, 2013

Less than 24 hours after five players combined to make 15 3-pointers in a blowout win over North Carolina that kept Miami perfect in the ACC, Jim Larranaga was sitting on the patio of an Italian restaurant called Villagio, enjoying the weather, ordering salmon, discussing where his Hurricanes might land in the Associated Press Poll that would be released the next day.

I told him the top five seemed likely.

"Really?" he said.

At which point, I asked what he thought.

"Honestly, I never think about it," Larranaga answered. "The only rankings that are important to me are the rankings of the KenPom.com stats in all of the categories that determine success or failure."

This struck me as interesting because, just a day earlier, I'd sat with two dozen other reporters and listened to Larranaga detail his affection for advanced statistics. Now this 63-year-old supposed old-school coach was doing it again, in a different setting, while his wife, Liz, picked at a bowl of lentil soup. He was bucking stereotypes.

"I value those statistics," Larranaga said. "I value them for motivation."

Jim Larranaga has 20 winning seasons as a Division I head coach, a trip to the 2006 Final Four on his resume and the reputation of a highly-skilled tactician. His credibility has long been established. But when he arrived at Miami in April 2011 after 14 seasons at George Mason, this son of a Floridian and grandson of a Cuban immigrant didn't rely on past achievements to grab the attention of his new players. Instead, Larranaga asked them questions about them, confident the answers would probably come as a surprise.

"When I took the job at Miami, I met with the team and the very first thing I asked is, 'How good do you guys want to be?'" Larranaga said. "They were like, 'We want to get to the Final Four! We want to win a national

championship!' I said, 'OK. Well, here are some categories that are important.'"

Larranaga mentioned defensive 3-point field goal percentage.

He asked his players where they thought they ranked.

"They said, 'Oh, we're pretty good,'" Larranaga said. "So I asked, 'What is pretty good? There are 345 Division I teams. One is the best. The worst is 345. Where do you rank?'"

They told him they were in the top 100.

Larranaga told them they were actually 224th.

"Then I told them, 'OK, turnovers are important,'" Larranaga said. "'One is the best. The worst is 345. Where do you rank?'"

They told him around 100.

He told them they were actually 218th.

"The first thing I needed them to know is where they needed to improve, and those numbers showed them because they are totally objective numbers," Larranaga said. "You can't argue with them. They show you what you need to work on. And, as a coach, if you don't know what you need to work on, then you're just practicing ... stuff. Yes, I want to practice what we're good at. But what I really want to practice is what we have to improve on to be really good, and I want my players to understand why we're doing it."

Those numbers forced Larranaga's players to understand.

So they got to work immediately.

Now the Hurricanes are 37th nationally in defensive 3-point field-goal percentage, 17th nationally in offensive turnover percentage, and those are just two of the reasons why they're 19-3 overall and 10-0 in the ACC heading into Wednesday night's game at Florida State. Larranaga and his staff took over, used advanced statistics to identify problems and then worked meticulously and relentlessly at solving those problems. That approach, combined with an experienced and talented roster, helped create one of college basketball's best stories and reinforce one of Larranaga's favorite expressions.

Think like a gardener; work like a carpenter.

"What does a gardener do?" Larranaga asked. "He plants seeds. And then he nurtures those seeds, but it takes a while. And a carpenter? He's very precise. If he makes a chair, one leg can't be longer than the other three. He has to be precise. So when we're working with our players, we're constantly planting seeds but each day working on things that are very, very specific. Those things might not come to fruition in a week or a month. It might take years. But when we planted those seeds like gardeners, we knew that, if we worked like carpenters, we could get here."

Here is on top of the ACC at a school that had never been ranked higher than eighth before this week and has advanced in the NCAA tournament just once since the 2001-02 season. Miami has long been considered such a tough job that Missouri hardly cared that Frank Haith never finished better than tied for fifth in seven years in the ACC. Missouri hired Haith anyway because, the administrators figured, who could do better than fifth in the ACC at Miami?

Answer: Jim Larranaga.

He took Haith's players, added point guard Shane Larkin, planted a bunch of seeds and started working like a carpenter -- on everything, but especially hard on the things that these same players struggled with before his arrival. Now Larranaga has a team that's pretty good at guarding beyond the arc, really good at taking care of the ball and two games ahead of everybody else in a league typically dominated by a Duke program that the Hurricanes beat by 27 and a North Carolina program that they beat by 26.

Confident Hurricanes storm college basketball rankings

Florida Today

David Jones

Feb. 13, 2013

It took Miami, which visits Florida State at 7 tonight, four weeks to go from being unranked to the top five in both polls — something only five schools have ever done. Talk about taking the college basketball world by storm.

The Hurricanes, who are 19-3 overall, and 10-0 in the ACC, sit No. 3 in the AP and No. 4 in USA Today. They got 17 first-place votes in AP and five in the USA Today polls. The last time UM got a No. 1 vote? That was March 1, 1960. Hurricanes third-year coach Jim Larranaga, who turns 64 in October, was 10 years old at the time.

ESPN's Joe Lunardi has Miami as a No. 1 seed right now for the NCAA Tournament. So how are things in Coral Gables?

"I would say so far, so good," Larranaga understated. "They have a clear mindset as to what they want to accomplish. They've worked very hard. I think when you make a commitment to something and you're willing to devote a lot of time and energy, then you start to see the results of all your hard work, you feel very, very good about it.

"I think they're very excited that we've gotten a lot of support here in Coral Gables. The arena has been packed, great home crowds. ... They know a lot of the programs in our league and around the country have gotten, and maybe some of these guys haven't. They were pretty hungry to try to do something that they hadn't done before."

Done.

But now comes the hard part — staying there. And the 'Canes are already seeing a media crunch taking form as the national media has started to sit up and take notice. Larranaga has been down this road before. In 2006, George Mason did the impossible — becoming the second mid-major (Utah in 1998) to reach the Final Four.

That team lost to eventual national champion Florida, but Larranaga knows how to keep a team level-headed.

"I would say that you need to appreciate that because that only happens when you're doing well," he said of all the attention. "If you don't want that, that says you don't want to win. That's not the case. We want to be as good as we can be."

We want to accommodate the media because, as I've told the team, we've got our job to do, and the media has their job to do. They shouldn't interfere with each other and they shouldn't be a distraction.

"My responsibility is to promote the University of Miami and our men's basketball program. We feel very, very fortunate that people

do have interest. When we took the job, everybody said, You're never going to have anybody interested in your program. Yet we saw the other day when we played North Carolina, not only did we have a great crowd on hand, we had LeBron James and Dwyane Wade sitting courtside. That's a major step for our program in the right direction. That's something I think the national media pays attention to and we hope that our future recruits will pay attention to it and want to come and play here."

Miami has won a lot of its games in recent weeks by large margins — beating FSU 71-47 in the first meeting, bombing Duke 90-63 and blowing past North Carolina 87-61. Is it a sign of a team catching steam?

"I would just say every day is different, every opponent is different," Larranaga said. "We were 3-21 from three at N.C. State. That was a one-point game (79-78). Against Carolina we were 10-16 in the first half. Same players, same shot. Some days you make them, some days you miss them. When you make them, you have an opportunity to build a substantial lead. We were able to do that against North Carolina.

"Every game, you just don't know. Kids are kids. They're 17 to 22, 23 years old. The opponents play them differently. So we're more focused on just being well-prepared and the guys are playing hard."

Leonard Hamilton has a pretty good idea what Larranaga is going through. Florida State (13-10 this season, 5-5 in the ACC) got a lot of attention during its rise to the top of the ACC. He thinks Miami is for real. One thing that sets the 'Canes apart is it is a veteran team.

"You like watching them play," Hamilton said. "They have a maturity and a poise about them and confidence that they are allowing — they are doing a lot of things right from a defensive standpoint, they are in the positions that they need to be. They are rotating. They are helping each other out. It's like they are kind of reading each other's minds; they have such good focus with one another."

"Offensively, they have that balance of shooting as well as the big strong guys inside so that you have to give their inside offense a lot of attention. And then they have guys that stretch you on the perimeter. . . . They are if not the hottest team in America, they are definitely one of the top two or three. They are the team right now in the ACC to beat."

FSU was an older team last year. He sees a lot of that team in the 'Canes.

"I think they are consistent with their execution, and I think that's one of the reasons why we were as consistent as we were last year," Hamilton said. "We were consistent with our effort and our focus. I think also they execute and they allow the game to come to

them, and everyone is kind of holding their end of their responsibility."

While Indiana is No. 1 in AP (Duke is No. 1 in the USA Today poll), North Carolina coach Roy Williams is perhaps the one person who can compare the Hurricanes and the Hoosiers when decide who's best.

"I think Duke and Miami both, if I'm a voter, I'm going to put both of them in the top five. I'm going to put Indiana up there as well," Williams said. "I think Miami is a sensational basketball team. They have no holes. There's not anything that they cannot do. They can guard you, they can rebound, they can run, they can shoot, they can play slow, they have scorers that score at every spot. ... I think Indiana, we played Indiana at Indiana, and we felt we were in a hornet's nest. Did the same thing at Miami. I think, as I said earlier, Duke and Miami could both be a Final Four team, one of the four top seeds."

Florida coach Billy Donovan knows Larranaga well — both are Providence graduates and the Gators ran into the Miami coach's Cinderella team when he was at George Mason, which beat Michigan State, defending national champion North Carolina and UConn — the region's No. 1 seed — to advance to the Final Four in 2006.

"He's a great guy," Donovan said. "You know, (Miami has) probably a lot of older guys, somewhat similar to we've got some older guys, but they've done a great job. I think it's very good for basketball in the state of Florida, what they're doing. They've had an exceptional year. The hardest thing for me is when you get into league play I really never get a chance to watch a lot of other leagues. Maybe periodically, but I really haven't had a chance to really watch them play, but from all accounts it sounds like they're playing tremendously."

One of the 'Canes' top players is forward Kenny Kadji, who started his career under Donovan at UF. He's second on the team in both scoring (13.5) and rebounding (6.8).

"I think Kenny probably needed to grow, mature, I think his experience here probably helped him become who he has become as a player," Donovan said. "It's never been a talent issue with Kenny. He's always been very, very talented, very gifted. I think for him a fresh start was probably the best thing for him, and a good thing for him. And again, I haven't seen them play a lot but I've always felt like Kenny is a gifted and talented player and when he's focused and he's working hard, the sky is the limit for him as a player."

Larranaga delivering

Toledo Blade
Dave Hackenberg
Feb. 13, 2013

Serving on the staff of the Michael Jordan Fantasy Camp in Las Vegas was a tough ticket. It helped if you coached in the NBA or were in the Basketball Hall of Fame. Then there was the case of Jim Larranaga and some others who had coached in an NCAA Final Four.

He made that magical trip, a mid-major miracle of sorts, with George Mason University at the end of the 2005-06 season and found himself coaching at Jordan's camp the following summer.

There, he met two Miami businessmen, Jose and Jorge Mas, well-known Cuban-Americans in south Florida. They became friends, especially after learning the ties went even deeper.

You might not guess it from his last name or his Bronx birthplace or his New York City/Eastern seaboard accent, but Larranaga's paternal grandfather was Cuban and immigrated to Key West in the early 1900s. The coach's father was raised there.

So when the University of Miami coaching job opened in April of 2011, Larranaga knew what phone numbers to dial. It became a hurry-up process. The George Mason coach was traveling and didn't have a resume at hand. So he cut-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and forwarded it to the selection committee. To make a long story short, including a hearty recommendation from Boston Celtics coach Doc Rivers, he got the job.

Before becoming head coach at Bowling Green State University in 1986, Larranaga had been an assistant under Terry Holland at Virginia for seven seasons. In four of those years the Cavaliers had, at one time or another, been ranked No. 1 in the country, and twice they went to the Final Four.

From the day he left he had one burning desire — to return to the Atlantic Coast Conference as a head coach. A quarter of a century later, he owned 470 collegiate victories, had led George Mason to five NCAA tournaments, and in that regard was a hot prospect. He also

had celebrated 61 birthdays and in that regard he was not.

For various reasons — storm clouds of an NCAA investigation that would envelop the entire Miami athletic department were brewing, minimal interest in a basketball program that had never been competitive in the ACC — big names weren't exactly lining up for the job. After Coach L used his connections to crack the door, he blew 'em away with an energetic interview. As the school's new athletic director said at the time, age went out the window. He couldn't imagine not hiring Larranaga.

Today, the Miami Hurricanes will play at rival Florida State as the No. 3 ranked team in the nation. They are 19-3, 10-0 in the ACC, and have made a wild, almost unprecedented climb the last five weeks going from unranked to No. 25 to No. 14 to No. 8 to No. 3. Their power ranking, strength of schedule and RPI are off the charts. Once a ghost town at a football school in a pro-sports town, fans now line up for tickets at the beautiful but fairly small (7,972 seats) BankUnited Center on the campus in Coral Gables. The NCAA tournament is a foregone conclusion; the discussion now is over a No. 1 seed.

Larranaga said Tuesday he is not the least bit surprised; if not for injuries and suspensions he felt as if last season's team, his first at Miami that won 20 games and posted a first-ever winning record in ACC play, might have done the same.

"It's been great," he said via telephone. "When I took the job people said, 'You're never going to draw fans; you'll never create any interest in the program.' They told me the same thing at Bowling Green and George Mason. By the end, we were packing the place at both schools. This past Saturday, our North Carolina game (a blowout 87-61 win), we had LeBron and Dwyane Wade sitting courtside. I think people noticed that. I know recruits noticed. I think the nation is noticing now."

When the Miami job opened, coupled with coaching changes at other ACC schools, Larranaga said he saw a league in transition with Miami sporting a veteran team while sitting in

the midst of a fertile recruiting area.

"It's the ACC, the best basketball league in the country, and I saw an opportunity to succeed," he said. "The first meeting I had with players at George Mason in April of '97, I asked them who had the best programs, the role models. The first two places mentioned were Duke and North Carolina. And I tried to build the program at Mason in their image, that ACC image. I loved every minute of my 14 years there, but when [the Miami] opportunity came up I very much wanted to achieve this goal.

"I envisioned success."

Larranaga has always had a vision, even if it wasn't clear to others. Maybe never fully appreciated at BG — he is the second winningest coach all-time at 170-144 while operating in an antiquated Anderson Arena, but never took the Falcons to the NCAAs — many were surprised when he made what appeared to be a lateral mid-major move.

At George Mason Larranaga saw a modern, 9,500-seat arena and a chance to make an impact at a school where no resources were siphoned off by football or hockey. Fans saw a lateral move to a fairly anonymous school in a similar, maybe then slightly better league; he saw potentially another Gonzaga or Butler. And, for the most part, he delivered.

Now, Larranaga's latest vision is coming into focus. And he is delivering big again, finally back home, in the ACC and south Florida.

How remarkable is Larkin's rise to stardom at Miami?

Sporting News

Mike DeCourcy

Feb. 13, 2013

Sometimes a coach gets lucky in recruiting, but Miami hit a jackpot here. Larkin's discomfort upon spending time at DePaul in the summer before his freshman year led him to pursue a transfer closer to his Orlando, Fla., home.

Consider how remarkable it is that DePaul got him in the first place, given that his uncle, Byron, is Xavier's career scoring leader and still the analyst on the school's radio network. Xavier wasn't heavily involved, so the Blue Demons beat Clemson, Colorado and South Florida, among others.

Consider how remarkable it is that Larkin didn't enjoy a Chicago summer. Between June and August, there may be no better place on the planet, but he wanted out.

Consider how remarkable it is that one of the schools that recruited Larkin in high school was George Mason, where Jim Larranaga worked at the time. So the connections he and his staff had made during that process made it a good deal easier for Larkin to find a new home at Miami upon departing DePaul.

This might be as fine an example of serendipity as we've seen in basketball recruiting.

Everything that had to go right for the Hurricanes did go right. That includes Larkin's blossoming into a high-level Division I point guard. He had a solid freshman season but nothing that indicated he would average 13.0 points, 4.3 assists and 2.2 steals per game and shoot 47.7 percent from the field and better than 43.4 percent on 3-pointers (his numbers entering Wednesday's action).

Larranaga is a fantastic coach. But even the best need a little good fortune now and then.

HEAT, 'CANES, HOLYCOLEY ... MIAMI IS A HOOPS HAVEN

AP
Tim Reynolds
Feb. 12, 2013

MIAMI (AP) — LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and the reigning NBA champions. One of the hottest teams in NCAA men's basketball. The leading collegiate women's scorer in the country.

All in one city.

Welcome to Miami.

Long considered a football town, thanks to those perfect-season Dolphins and five-time-national-champion Hurricanes, it seems like Miami now has an identity crisis of sorts. Football town or a basketball town? It's been the source of debate for some time, perhaps now more than ever, and South Floridians may all agree that it's a nice problem to have.

"People here like basketball," said Jerica Coley, the FIU guard whose 25.5-point-per-game average easily tops the women's Division I charts — and whose nickname, HolyColey, is part of a big-time marketing push by her school. "They want to see good basketball. And as a city, I guess we're pretty good right now."

Pretty good?

That's an understatement.

The Heat will have the best record in the Eastern Conference at the All-Star break this weekend and boast a star-studded roster — keyed, of course, by the reigning MVP in James, who seems to be in line to win that award for a fourth time this spring.

Down the road a bit in Coral Gables, the Miami Hurricanes and coach Jim Larranaga have gone from unranked to No. 3 in the nation and atop the Atlantic Coast Conference in about a month, easily becoming the biggest story in the college game this season after enjoying

blowout wins over Duke and North Carolina. A few more miles away at FIU, Coley is starring on a nightly basis despite almost-constant double- and triple-teams against her.

Not to mention, the city also lays claim to a former women's national coach of the year in Miami's Katie Meier and a surging FIU men's program led by Richard Pitino, the son of legendary longtime Louisville coach Rick Pitino.

"It's cool. We turned this into a basketball town," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "And I'm a fan of the other sports. I've gotten to know coach Larranaga the last two summers ... and since then I've spent a handful of times on campus meeting with him and his staff, just talking hoops. I'm a big fan of his. And what they've been able to do down here is very cool."

That also means games in Miami tend to be a tough ticket. This past weekend, the Heat played host to the Los Angeles Clippers on Friday, the Hurricane men's team hosted North Carolina on Saturday, and the Heat closed the three-day extravaganza at home again Sunday with a matchup against Kobe Bryant and the Lakers.

Three days, three sellout crowds, about 50,000 tickets sold in all.

When the Heat won the NBA title, team radio announcer Mike Inglis excitedly shouted that Miami was "the center of the basketball universe." These days, it seems like that statement has never been more true. And in a city where the football teams aren't exactly filling stadiums, hoops is hot.

"It's well-deserved," said Heat guard James Jones, a former Hurricane player and a Miami native. "We have a very good coach and very good team down at the University of Miami. Evidently, we're the defending champs. FIU is on the way up. I think the game of basketball is continuing to grow here. This is always been

predominantly a football town. The Dolphins have been here longer than anyone. But basketball has slowly gotten better."

Of late, it's seemed to have gotten better in a hurry.

The Heat won a title in 2006, were the NBA's worst team two years later, then landed James and Chris Bosh to play with Wade in 2010 — with two trips to the NBA Finals and one title to show so far. The Hurricanes' women's program was one of the nation's best over the past two years. And this season, the Miami men are the talk of the NCAA game, with many people already tabbing them as a Final Four-caliber team, even though few even listed them as a top-four team in the ACC entering the season.

"A lot of good things are happening in Miami," Wade said.

Even the stars are fans of the other teams in town these days. Wade, James and Jones were courtside for the Hurricanes' win over North Carolina this weekend, and it's not unusual to see college players in turn showing up at Heat games.

But even Hurricanes point guard Shane Larkin isn't sure that Miami has truly turned the corner from being a football town — yet.

"Miami has traditionally been great at football," Larkin said. "Until we have that type of success year after year after year, it's going to be a football town. But with what we're doing right now, people are going to start taking notice ... so we can keep building until they say it's a basketball town."

Larranaga Says 'It's Electric' Around Miami Basketball

Zags Blog
Adam Zagoria
Feb. 12, 2013

Miami has long been considered a football town.

The Hurricanes' football program was a national power in the 1980s and the Dolphins have had their moments as well.

But now that the Heat are the reigning NBA champs and the Hurricanes are ranked No. 3 in the latest AP Top 25 poll, there's a buzz surrounding coach Jim Larranaga's program.

LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and James Jones sat courtside for a recent game, and Hall of Famer Barry Larkin, the father of Miami guard Shane Larkin, is a regular presence.

"I'd say it's electric," Larranaga told SportsCenter Tuesday. "When we played Duke, the students camped out overnight for the first time in school's history. We've had three sellouts in our last four home games. There's a lot of excitement in Miami, both for the Hurricanes and the Heat.

"Having LeBron and D-Wade and James Jones come to our game gives us a lot of credibility with our recruits. So we're headed in the right direction here in Miami. It's a great academic institution so anybody that wants to get a great education and play in the best basketball league in the country in the ACC, this is the place to come."

As far as recruiting, this success can only help.

Larranaga confirmed that prospects text him at 1 o'clock in the morning and that an eighth-grader texted "one of my coaches."

"My wife says to me, 'Who's texting you at 1 o'clock in the morning?' and it'll be one of our

prospects who watched the game and wants to text," he said.

Led by former Rice High School star Durand Scott and his team-best 14 points per game, the Hurricanes (19-3, 10-0 ACC) have won 11 straight and remain unbeaten in the ACC.

Still, Larranaga said his team is working on improving its offensive rebounding by utilizing bigs Kenny Kadji, Reggie Johnson, Julian Gamble and Tonye Jekiri.

"So we want those guys to really spend a lot of time carving out space," he said, "and getting us a some second shots because the teams in the ACC are all terrific defensively."

Rising Star: Miami Sophomore Shane Larkin

CBS Local - Chicago

Mark Chalifoux

Feb. 12, 2013

If Shane Larkin has been on a sports fan's radar, it's mostly because he's the son of Baseball Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin. After his breakout game against North Carolina this weekend, it's time to recognize him as one of college basketball's rising stars.

Miami can be an afterthought in the tradition-rich ACC, but the Hurricanes are a top-10 team this season and the sophomore point guard is one of the chief reasons why. On a nationally-televised game Feb. 9, Larkin dropped 18 points and nine assists on the Tar Heels as Miami smacked UNC 87-61. For the season, he's averaging 13 points, four rebounds and four assists per game.

What's even more impressive is his long-range accuracy. The sharpshooter has been averaging a blistering 43 percent from behind the arc (he had five against North Carolina).

The Hurricanes (18-3) are having one of the best seasons in program history as Miami has reached the program's highest ranking (No. 8) and seems poised for a run in March. Larkin's defense has also been a boon to the Hurricanes, as he averages more than two steals per game and is regarded as one of the best defenders in the conference.

While both Larkin and Miami are having banner seasons, don't expect Larkin to jump ship any time soon. He's heating up but still hasn't generated much chatter around NBA scouts just yet. He is a little undersized (5 foot 11-inches) and has trouble finishing around the rim occasionally. He will need all four years to convince scouts to spend a draft pick on him but it won't take him that long to become a great college point guard.

He may fully make that jump this season and if he keeps Miami near the top of the ACC over

the next few seasons, there won't be many people who don't know who Shane Larkin is.

Miami Hurricanes move up to No. 3 in AP Top 25

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Feb. 12, 2013

Julian Gamble was stopped at a traffic light at lunchtime on Monday when he looked down and saw his mother had texted him from North Carolina. "#3! Wow! That's Crazy!"

Yes, it is.

Take a deep breath, University of Miami basketball fans. The unfathomable is happening.

The Hurricanes on Monday were No. 3 in The Associated Press poll, behind Indiana and Duke. Yes, No. 3. As in, third-best team in the nation. Not only that, they received 17 first-place votes. First. Place. Votes. UM. In basketball.

Miami, 19-3 and 10-0 in the Atlantic Coast Conference, has made a meteoric rise during the past five weeks from unranked to No. 25 to No. 14 to No. 8 to No. 3.

No UM team ever has been ranked higher.

The national pollsters clearly have noticed the Hurricanes' jaw-dropping stats this season. UM is the only undefeated team in conference play of the six major conferences.

The Canes have not lost since Christmas; are riding an 11-game win streak; are the first team ever to beat Duke and North Carolina by more than 25 points in the same season; and their Ratings Percentage Index is No. 1 or No. 2, depending on which computer you choose to believe.

Whoever imagined UM basketball would reach the point where many fans believe the Hurricanes got slighted by being ranked third behind Duke after beating the Blue Devils by 27 points?

"I never really thought that Miami could be a top-10 program," the always-candid senior center Reggie Johnson said. "I knew we were a good team, and we'd compete and take down some of the big dogs that are always in the top 10, but I didn't think we'd be here in Febru-

ary. It's surreal. Our school has never been ranked this high and to be part of it with this group of guys is really special."

He is among those who believe UM deserves to be ranked ahead of Duke.

"If the poll was really legit, we should be ranked in front of them, but that's for the media and fans," Johnson said.

Senior guard Durand Scott was taking a nap Monday when he heard his phone vibrate repeatedly. He knew then that the Canes had moved up the rankings.

SURREAL IS REAL

"I checked, saw we were No. 3. I went to the bathroom and was listening to the radio while I brushed my teeth, and a Drake song, Started From the Bottom, Now We're Here came on and it felt real good. ... I really didn't think we'd be here. Being at No. 3 is surreal. We're embracing it and having fun."

Coach Jim Larranaga insists he doesn't get caught up in the polls, calls them "popularity contests" and "beauty contests," but he conceded they help create buzz and attract recruits.

The coach got an ovation from Heat fans at American Airlines Arena during Sunday's Heat-Lakers game when they showed him on the Jumbotron.

Said Scott: "I don't have to wear a UM shirt for people to know who I am now."

And Larranaga joked that an eighth-grader called to commit Monday.

"We told him it's a little too early," he said.

Watching it all from Fort Myers is Kevin Norris, the UM point guard from 1994 to 1998 and now an assistant coach at Florida Gulf Coast University, one of three teams that beat the Canes this season.

"I'm on Cloud 9 seeing UM reach No. 3 because I have orange and green blood. We were

0-18 my first year there, and feel like I'm part of the stepping stones that got UM to this point. Beating UM this year was bittersweet for me. I'm really excited for what's happening at Miami and tip my hat to those players and coaches."

Asked whether they should be in the conversation for No. 1, senior forward Kenny Kadji said: "I don't know. I really don't want to pay attention to that. We're having too much fun — 10-0 and I just want to keep going. No. 1 right now doesn't mean anything. You want to be No. 1 at the end of the season."

Later Monday, Kadji "tweaked" his shoulder in practice, according to Larranaga, and his status will be evaluated on Tuesday.

NOW A TARGET

Scott is not worried about his team getting distracted by the excitement.

"Coach Larranaga's going to make sure of that because he's our leader, and we're his students," he said.

The Hurricanes are on the road at Florida State on Wednesday night. That was all Larranaga was thinking about Monday.

"I'm going to be on them very, very hard in practice," he said. "We can't afford any slippage. Our offensive rebounding efficiency is 280th in the country, we need to do better because from now on, we're getting everybody's best shot. No sneaking up on anybody anymore."

Basketball Buzz: 2/12

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 12, 2013

The Miami Hurricanes are one of the hottest teams in the nation and have climbed to No. 3 in the latest AP Poll after entering the rankings four weeks ago.

Miami (19-3, 10-0) is the sixth school to ascend from unranked to the top five in four weeks or less since 1989-90. It is the highest ranking ever for a Miami team.

"It's wonderful for a university to get this kind of media attention and now over an extended period of time that hopefully will create interest not just with our basketball recruits, but students all over the country," coach Jim Larranaga said.

While the Miami program has not been ranked this high, Larranaga has been on the staff of a team in the top five when he was an assistant at Virginia in the early 80s, the Cavaliers were ranked No. 1 in parts of four seasons led by Ralph Sampson.

"I watched Terry Holland go through this and he handled it with class and a great deal of focus, not on the media, but on the team, working with the players and getting them ready for the next opponent," Larranaga said.

Miami, winners of 11 straight, plays at Florida State (13-10, 5-5) on Wednesday and at Clemson (12-11, 4-7) on Saturday.

"You're going to get everybody's best shot," Larranaga said. "There's no sneaking up on anybody."

News & Notes

- SG Rion Brown followed his 22-point performance against Boston College with 11 points on 3-for-6 shooting against North Carolina to give him back-to-back double-digit scoring efforts for the first time this season. With Brown as the only guard off the bench, his role is an important one. "Once you come off that bench you have to be ready," Durand Scott said. "... When he comes in we expect we expect him to go out there and get two, three, four rebounds and make three 3s, make some free throws, get fouls, and things like that."

Kenny Kadji

- PF Kenny Kadji suffered a minor shoulder injury in Monday's practice, but later tweeted, "lol it's not serious, I'm fine." Kadji recently moved up to No. 35 on NBADraft.net's latest projections as he's averaging 15.9 points in the last nine games.

- Miami has not lost since Dec. 25 against Indiana State, 57-55 in overtime at the Diamond Head Classic in Honolulu. "It was not fun," Larkin recalls. "You know you need to play your best, but coming off a loss to Arizona you are not playing for the championship so it was tough to get up for that game. We didn't really have the crowd support to get us hyped. There's no excuses, it wasn't a good game for us. We came out flat and we got punched in the mouth early." Larkin added that "the whole trip was tough" as Trey McKinney-Jones was in the hospital with a temperature of 103 and Reggie Johnson broke his finger. "After that I think everybody just woke up to the fact that we don't have Reggie now. We faced adversity last year and this year was no different," Larkin said. "Every team in the country has to face adversity and I think we just tightened it up and got back to business."

- Monday's practice was a tough one after the team was off on Sunday. "I'm going to be very, very hard on them," Larranaga said before practice. "We have a number of areas that we need to work on and we can't afford any slippage. There's areas that we can dramatically improve on and they need to know that." Offensive rebounding is one area that Larranaga would like to see the team improve on. "We're like 280th in that category and with the size of our guys and our interior guys, that needs to be improved dramatically right now. You don't always shoot like we did against North Carolina and we need to be all over the backboards."

- Playing baseball is a way the coaching staff has kept their teams loose in previous years, but they haven't felt the need to do it with this year's team. "This team doesn't need it and they probably wouldn't appreciate it, probably don't want to do it," the assistants told Larranaga said. If Larranaga saw signs of fatigue or anxiety, then different coaching tactics like baseball could be used. "Right now we see signs of hunger. These guys are hungry yet they remain very, very humble," Larranaga said. "They understand this is really a once-in-a-lifetime experience for this season."

- C Julian Gamble has played against a number of top players during his time at UM, which piques the interest of sophomore PG Shane Larkin. Larkin sometimes asks Gamble who was the best he played against and Gamble responds, "You're one of the best players I've seen in my six years here." Larkin, who is one of 12 finalists for the Bob Cousy Award, is having a breakout season averaging 13.0 points and 4.2 assists. "He's really humble and doesn't really want to accept (the praise)," Gamble said

- C Tonye Jekiri continues to progress in his freshman year as a big man off the bench. Jekiri is in his best stretch of the season averaging 9.2

minutes in his last six games scoring 12 points and grabbing 13 rebounds. "Tonye is coming along real good," senior center Reggie Johnson said. "He's getting more confidence. At first he was a little hesitant, but right now when he's in the game he's rebounding, catching the ball, passing the ball real well and I'm real proud of him." Johnson added: "He's just young right now. He can make a major impact (in the future) with what he can do in this program. I came in the same exact way, I little nervous and wasn't expected to get as good as I got in my career. I think Tonye, if he continues to work because he has a nice touch and get strong, he can do some damage in this league."

- The staff is hoping the success on the court will translate in recruiting. "Definitely. We had an eighth grader commit to us, but we told him no and that it was a little too early to be committing to college. He just got all excited about it." Larranaga and his staff have been busy texting recruits as the team has five open scholarships available.

- Larranaga attended the Miami Heat-Los Angeles Lakers game on Sunday and was given an ovation from the crowd when he was shown on the scoreboard. "It was a little bit of a surprise," Larranaga said. "I was watching the dance team perform and all of a sudden the crowd starting going wild. I was like, the dance team doesn't normally get that kind of reaction; what is going on? And I looked up and there was my face on the JumboTron and the crowd was—that's very nice. It's heartwarming to me and made my wife feel really good and that's important."

- SG Bishop Daniels left the team in December citing personal reasons, but Larkin, who still remains close with Daniels, remains hopeful that Daniels could return next season. "I don't know where he's going to school yet, but I just wish him the best," Larkin said. "If there's any chance in the world that he can come back to the school, I would love it. He was probably my best friend when he was here and we all miss him. If there's any chance he could come back, we'll let him come back." Larkin added: "It was tough, but if he needed to go home for reasons he couldn't tell me, then I support him. I told him that he would be my friend forever because we built our relationship last year. Wherever he is whether it's here or Florida State, I'm still going to support him. He's one of my best friends."

Teams who are fairing the best/worst away from home

CBS Sports.com

Matt Norlander

Feb. 12, 2013

We're whittling away the season, now officially less than a month to go before conference tournament play begins in earnest. With that in mind, the NCAA tournament selection committee -- which will hold its mock selection process for the media later this week in Indianapolis -- will start to really inspect team resumes.

One thing that carries a lot of cachet: road wins. Ironic, considering there are no true road games come the middle of March in that beloved big bracket. But winning away from home does show us how good you can be, what your mettle is. Piling up road wins is one of the most effective ways to slither up the S-Curve. To paraphrase Scott Van Pelt: How good is your good? How great is your great? That question can often be quantified based on how often you played away from your own barn -- and what your record is in those situations.

Before we look at the big boys, let's give those who've gone out and won the most road games this year a moment of applause. Notice there's only one team from a major conference on this list.

Bucknell: 10
Stony Brook: 10
Northeastern: 9
Lehigh: 9
Albany: 9
College of Charleston: 9
Southern Miss: 8
Louisiana Tech: 8
Miami (Fla.): 8
Middle Tennessee State: 8
Stephen F. Austin: 8
Vermont: 8
Bryant: 8
Texas-Arlington: 8
Norfolk State: 8

Credit to Memphis, which is 6-0 on the road this season and has a nation's-best 10-game streak overall away from home, dating to last season. On the flip side, Grambling State is 0-15, followed by Portland State, Maryland-Eastern Shore and Fordham getting 12 shots in foes' gyms and failing each time.

Now, let's look at the major leagues. I've gone through the top eight leagues -- according to Ken Pomeroy's and Jeff Sagarin's ratings, both of which agree on basketball's upper fourth quadrant -- and looked at every team's road performance this season. That also umbrellas in overall road play for each league. Which conferences are fairing best in hostile houses? Here's how it looks as of today. Numbers in parentheses are total road wins per league.

All data as of Tuesday morning.

The specific winning percentages span from the Big East's .477 to the SEC's .324, only further validating what many have said all season: The SEC has been beyond mediocre, and teams like Missouri and Arkansas reinforce this by going winless on enemy territory.

Mizzou is most interesting because it's the only team in Division I that's undefeated at home and winless in true road contests.

Here are the major-conference programs with six or more road wins. The number seem low to you? It does to me.

Miami: 8
VCU: 7
Arizona: 6
Florida: 6
UMass: 6
La Salle: 6
Wyoming: 6

As for the full road record ledger, here you go.

Big East
Louisville: 5-3
Villanova: 5-4
Cincinnati: 4-2
Syracuse: 4-2
Pittsburgh: 4-2
St. John's: 4-4
DePaul: 4-4
Georgetown: 3-2
Notre Dame: 3-2
Connecticut: 3-3
Rutgers: 3-5
Seton Hall: 3-6
Providence: 2-5
Marquette: 2-5
South Florida: 2-7

Mountain West
Wyoming: 6-4
New Mexico: 5-3
San Diego State: 4-2
Colorado State: 4-4
UNLV: 4-5
Boise State: 4-6
Air Force: 3-6
Fresno State: 3-8
Nevada: 2-7

Big Ten
Indiana: 5-1
Michigan State: 5-3
Illinois: 4-3
Michigan: 4-3
Wisconsin: 3-4
Ohio State: 3-4
Minnesota: 3-4
Purdue: 3-4
Iowa: 1-6
Northwestern: 3-4
Nebraska: 2-6
Penn State: 0-6

Atlantic 10
VCU: 7-1
Massachusetts: 6-2
La Salle: 6-4
Butler: 5-3
Temple: 5-4
George Washington: 5-5
Saint Joseph's: 5-5
Saint Louis: 4-2
St. Bonaventure: 4-7
Charlotte: 3-4

Xavier: 3-5
Richmond: 2-7
Rhode Island: 2-7
Dayton: 1-5
Duquesne: 1-9
Fordham: 0-12

Pac-12
Arizona: 6-1
Oregon: 4-3
California: 4-5
Washington: 4-5
Colorado: 4-6
UCLA: 3-1
Arizona State: 3-2
Stanford: 3-5
Southern Cal: 2-6
Utah: 2-7
Oregon State: 1-5
Washington State: 1-6

ACC
Miami (Fla.): 8-1
Florida State: 4-4
Duke: 3-2
Virginia: 3-4
North Carolina: 3-5
Maryland: 2-4
Virginia Tech: 2-4
Boston College: 2-5
North Carolina State: 2-5
Clemson: 2-6
Georgia Tech: 1-5
Wake Forest: 1-7

Big 12
Kansas: 5-2
Kansas State: 5-2
Oklahoma: 4-4
Baylor: 3-4
West Virginia: 3-5
Iowa State: 2-6
Oklahoma State: 2-4
TCU: 1-6
Texas Tech: 1-4
Texas: 0-6

SEC
Florida: 6-3
Ole Miss: 5-3
Kentucky: 4-3
Texas A&M: 3-3
Georgia: 3-4
Alabama: 3-5
LSU: 2-6
Vanderbilt: 2-6
Auburn: 2-7
South Carolina: 1-5
Tennessee: 1-6
Mississippi State: 1-7
Missouri: 0-5
Arkansas: 0-6

The Curious Case of Coach Larranaga: COY Frontrunner

State of the U
Josh Kaufman
Feb. 12, 2013

In the similarly titled movie starring Brad Pitt, the titular character, Benjamin Button, gets younger and younger throughout the span of the movie.

In the Miami Hurricanes version the team gets better and better the longer Coach Larranaga is around. If the Coach L was radioactive, then the controversial theory of hormesis holds water. He's reverse kryptonite. Coach is a veritable smelter of basketball talent, driving out impurities inside a crucible of his own design. Let's take a closer look at the case Coach Jim Larranaga is making for the NCAA Coach of the Year award.

New Beginnings: There was no joy in 'Canesville after Frank Haith won the award last year. Hurricane fans were overjoyed that Haith left for Missouri paving the way for the Coach Larranaga hire. Fans were troubled by long-standing habits prior teams couldn't seem to shake.

The Eye Test: When Coach L arrived in Coral Gables less than 2 years ago, the 'Canes consistently dropped close games, turned the ball over at an alarming rate, had difficulty in-bounding the ball in key situations, had difficulty breaking the press, and often played porous zone defense. Now they win close games, don't turn the ball over much, in-bound the ball successfully in various situations, chop the press up like Danny Trejo in Machette, and are one of the best man-to-man defensive teams in the country.

Mission Briefing: Coach Larranaga was able to get his players to buy into the mission of building winning habits. The entire team stayed on campus last summer instead of going back home and spending time with their friends and family. Conclude what you want from this, but getting a team of 18-24 year olds to give-up summer vacation to practice and get themselves into peak physical conditioning is an accomplishment. The players deserve tons of credit for working hard - there is no doubt that the guidance of a coach matters. A look inside Miami's grueling workout regiment HERE

The 2nd Half: The 'Canes have been a 2nd half team much of the year and often come out of the locker room and punish opponents in the latter frame. Recently, they've started to become a 1st half team as well. The 2nd half performances can be linked to Miami's improved conditioning and adjustments made by Coach Larranaga in the locker room. It's been amazing to watch.

Heavyweight Matchups: In head-to-head matchups with some of the premiere coaches in college basketball - Tom Izzo, Roy Williams, and Coach Krzyzewski - Coach Larranaga and the 'Canes are 4-0. All 3 looked frazzled post-game. Leonard Hamilton, whose team is in a rebuilding year, was very impressed with Miami's performance. Click on a coach to link to post-game video.

Conference Dominance: Miami is currently 18-3 and undefeated in the ACC with a sterling 10-0 mark. No Hurricane team has ever gotten off to such a start in the ACC - or the Big East for that matter. In fact, the 'Canes are the only major conference left team this season with an unblemished conference record. As of this publication, Miami is

the #3/4 team in the country in the polls.

Even Keel: The media coverage has gone from a isolated campfire into a virtual firestorm. At times just a handful of reporters showed up for media days and post-game conferences. Now the room is packed with TV cameras and getting a seat is difficult. Coach Larranaga and his staff have done a great job mitigating the effects of the massive influx of outside attention. The players are focused and look at each game as just another game.

History: When Coach Larranaga and George Mason made a magical run to the Final Four in 2006, their two best players were Tony Skinn and Jai Lewis. Both were unranked D-star prospects. Skinn was only recruited by George Mason. In addition to George Mason, Lewis was recruited by basketball powerhouses such as Central Connecticut State, Drexel, Robert Morris, and Towson. Why is this even worth mentioning? There's a trend here of Coach L putting players in position to maximize their abilities under the umbrella of a total team concept. If you look at the stat-lines of the 2005-2006 George Mason and the 'Canes this year, you see a lot of similarities which somewhat reflects the adherence of players to Coach L's system. The player point distributions are also similar. LarranagaBall works.

Playing Field: High school players that head to the ACC are instantly upgrading their competition. Isn't the same true for coaches? At Miami, Coach Larranaga has the opportunity to develop and recruit players that wouldn't have considered George Mason. This is not to disrespect the Patriots - just the simple truth that the majority of basketball talent gets funneled into the 6 major conferences. You give a master chef some decent ingredients and he or she can make a great meal. You give them the finest and . . .

Undefeated: When at full-strength (no significant injuries) the 'Canes are undefeated on the season. Their loss to Florida Gulf coast is officially a footnote. Arizona is an elite team and Indiana State has defeated multiple ranked opponents. Both those teams beat Miami with a hobbled Durand Scott, an injured Reggie Johnson, and a sick Trey McKinney-Jones.

Offense: it's impossible to remember a 'Canes squad capable of such fluid and exciting play. Alley-oops, crisp passing, eagle-eye shooting, and now a backboard lob from Larkin to Kadji that brought LeBron James and Dwayne Wade to their feet.

Defense: It's been over a decade since a 'Canes team has harassed opponents like this group does. Spectacular blocks, game-changing steals, and all-out hustle has become the norm in Coral Gables.

Upgrade: The players have gotten better. Not since the days of Leonard Hamilton have Miami players improved at such a clip. The team chemistry is evident and Coach L is the straw that stirs the drink. The 'Canes are poised, prepared, and do not give up.

After a few muddling years at Miami, DeQuan Jones had his best season and landed on the Orlando Magic after his suspension-shortened senior year.

Kenny Kadji didn't fit somehow in Gainesville, and now he's one of the top 4's in the country. Kadji has also matured into one of the team's leaders.

Here's a snippet from the Swamp Things Blog at the Orlando Sentinel (1/13/2012): "He was young. He was immature. He had a lot of ups and downs, and he just figured, 'You know what? I've had too many ups and downs here,' said Coach Billy Donovan. 'I don't have enough invested here. I just wanna go somewhere and start over.' And I think that's ultimately what happened."

Durand Scott is often referred to as the 'heart and soul' of the team. He's playing the best basketball of his career and his love of the game is infectious. The senior combo-guard can do it all and is tough as nails.

Trey McKinney-Jones was best known for a ridiculous dunk against Centenary, and now he's a stat-sheet stuffer, having his best collegiate seasons after stepping up the competition level and transferring to Miami.

Reggie Johnson looks more focused than he's ever been. A veritable Mac Truck down low, Johnson has the ability to utterly dominate opposing big men with his size and soft touch. The trip to Hawaii cost Reggie a month of floor time with a broken thumb and really put the 'Canes in a bind they had to fight their way out of. Hurricane fans wondered if the team was cursed. If they were, then Coach L is some type of basketball exorcist.

Julian Gamble . . . until this year, Gamble was thought of by most 'Canes fans as a capable body to give Big Reggie Johnson some quality rest. Gamble has morphed into a shot-blocking and dunking machine with a ridiculous motor. He never stops and seems to stalk the painted area like a tattooed Terminator. He has gone up against some of the best big men in the ACC and more than held his own: he's put his name into the conversation. Gamble worked tirelessly in the off-season to build his body and expand his game and it shows.

Shane Larkin had an inconsistent freshman year - which is commonplace for almost any college-bound PG playing in the talent-rich ACC. But there were signs of potential greatness. In just his second season Larkin is a finalist for the Coussey award and leaves opposing coaches awestruck after darting from one end of the court to the other for nearly 40 minutes. Under Coach Larranaga, Larkin has learned how to control games. Coach after coach leaves the BUC remarking on Larkin's ability to get his teammates involved.

Rion Brown went through a shooting slump earlier in the year of which he is emerging from in a hurry. Even when the shots weren't falling, Brown's on-ball defense was evident as he routinely shuts down opposing scorers or forces them into difficult shots. Brown has improved noticeably in other areas of his game: passing and ball-handling. He's also been shooting the ball well the last several games which is a great sign for Miami and a bad omen for everyone else.

There are so many program firsts this season they're difficult to keep track of. The team is playing at such a high level - and if there is a profound effect of coaching on a team, that it's not just having talent - then Jim Larranaga has to be the frontrunner for not only the ACC COY award, but National COY as well.

The next home game is Feb 19th when the 'Canes host the 17-6 (7-3) Virginia Cavaliers. We shouldn't need an Operation Sellout. Let's get it done and show our appreciation to Coach Larranaga, his staff, and the Miami Hurricanes basketball squad.

History of 10-0 ACC starts bodes well for Miami in March

Daily Press

David Teel

Feb. 12, 2013

At 10-0 in the ACC and No. 3 in the Associated Press national poll, Miami absolutely has national-championship potential. No stranger to such teams, North Carolina coach Roy Williams is piloting the Hurricanes' bandwagon.

"I think Miami is a sensational basketball team," Ol' Roy said Monday, two days after losing to the Hurricanes 87-61. "They have no holes. There's not anything that they can not do. They can guard you, they can rebound, they can run, they can shoot, they can play slow, they have scorers at every spot. ... They have no weakness."

No question, Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, Shane Larkin, Reggie Johnson, Julian Gamble and friends make Miami (19-3 overall) legit. And if they can prevail Wednesday at Florida State, don't be surprised to see the Hurricanes 15-0 in the ACC headed to Duke on March 2.

Now that would be intriguing, especially given Miami's 90-63 hammering of the Blue Devils last month in Coral Gables.

The Hurricanes have advanced more than one round in the NCAA tournament only once, in 2000 under current FSU coach Leonard Hamilton. But as this history of 10-0 ACC teams shows, that might well be about to change.

* 1957: Led by Lennie Rosenbluth and Tommy Kearns, North Carolina completed a 32-0, national-championship season. The Tar Heels went 14-0 in conference, survived Wake Forest by two points in the ACC tournament semis and capped an unrivaled NCAA run with triple-overtime, Final Four victories over Michigan State and Wilt Chamberlain-led Kansas.

* 1959: Doug Moe and Carolina shared the regular-season title with North Carolina State at 12-2 and lost to the Wolfpack by 24 in the ACC tournament final. But with N.C. State on NCAA probation, the Tar Heels went to the NCAA, where they lost their opening game to Navy.

* 1961: Ineligible for the ACC and NCAA tournaments due to NCAA sanctions, North Carolina won the regular season at 12-2. Runner-up Wake Forest, with Len Chappell and Billy Packer, won the league tournament and lost in the NCAA East Regional final to Saint Joseph's.

* 1963: Art Heyman, the ACC's first consen-

sus national Player of the Year, led Duke to a 14-0 league record, the conference tournament championship and the Final Four, where the Blue Devils lost to Loyola of Illinois.

* 1964: Duke and Jeff Mullins went 13-1 in the league, won ACC tournament games by 31, 16 and 21 points and reached the Final Four, where they lost the title game to UCLA, John Wooden's first national championship.

* 1968: Different year, similar story. Larry Miller and Charlie Scott carried North Carolina to a 12-2 ACC finish and league tournament championship. The Tar Heels advanced to the NCAA final, falling to Lew Alcindor-led UCLA.

* 1973: NCAA probation loomed again as David Thompson-led N.C. State went 27-0, including a 12-0 ACC mark and league tournament championship. Runner-up Maryland went to the NAAs instead, losing to Ernie DeGregorio, Marvin Barnes and Providence in the East Regional final, Lefty Driesell's closest brush with the Final Four while coaching the Terps.

* 1974: Thompson and the Wolfpack became the first, and only ACC team, to author consecutive undefeated conference seasons. After the 12-0 league regular season, State survived the epic ACC tournament final against Maryland and conquered seven-time defending NCAA champion UCLA (Bill Walton) at the Final Four in double-overtime before besting Marquette for the title. The Wolfpack's only loss was to UCLA during the regular season.

* 1981: Ralph Sampson and Virginia went 13-1 in the ACC, lost to Maryland (Buck Williams, Albert King) in the conference semis and reached the Cavaliers' first Final Four, where they fell to North Carolina (Al Wood and James Worthy). Current Miami coach Jim Larranaga was then a Virginia assistant to Terry Holland.

* 1984: The defending national champion Tar Heels appeared poised to repeat for much of the season, until freshman point guard Kenny Smith sustained a broken wrist. North Carolina finished 14-0 in the ACC, but lost to Duke in the conference tournament semis and to Indiana in the NCAA East semis, Michael Jordan's final college game.

* 1987: As a senior, Smith led the Tar Heels to another 14-0 ACC record. Again, they stumbled in postseason, losing to N.C. State in the league tournament final and to Syracuse in the NCAA East final.

* 1999: Arguably the most dominant team

in ACC history, Duke went 16-0 in the league, winning 15 by double figures, the other by eight. The Blue Devils, paced by Elton Brand and Trajan Langdon, then won conference tournament games by 37, 15 and 23 points. But their season ended at 37-2 with a 77-74 loss to Richard Hamilton and Connecticut in the national title game.

* 2004: Duke and J.J. Redick stumbled late to finish 13-3 in conference, fell in the ACC tournament final to Maryland, but reached the Final Four before losing to UConn.

* 2006: A senior and the national Player of the Year, Redick led the Blue Devils to a 14-2 ACC record and league tournament title. But Duke lost to LSU in the Sweet 16.

* 2008: These Blue Devils became the only 10-0 ACC team not to at least share the regular-season title. At 13-3, Duke finished a game behind North Carolina. The Blue Devils lost to Clemson in the ACC semis and to West Virginia in the second round of the NAAs.

So Miami is the 16th team to win its first 10 ACC games. Of the previous 15, eight won the ACC tournament, eight reached the Final Four and two won the national championship.

How are the Hurricanes handling their newfound prominence?

"I would say so far, so good," Larranaga said. "They have had a clear mindset as to what they want to accomplish. ... We have gotten a lot of support here in Coral Gables. ... They have appreciated the media attention we've gotten. ... They (are) pretty hungry to try and do something they haven't done before."

Miami's local support included sellout crowds for Duke, Florida State and North Carolina.

"We feel very fortunate that people do have interest," Larranaga said. "When we took the job people said, 'You're never going to draw you're never going to have anybody be interested in your program.' And yet we saw the other day when we played North Carolina, not only did we have a great crowd on hand, but we had LeBron James and Dwyane Wade sitting courtside."

"That's a major step for our program in the right direction, and it's something I think the national media pays attention to, and then we hope that our future recruits will pay attention to it and want to come and play here."

3-point shot: Will Miami be a No. 1 seed?

ESPN.com

Andy Katz

Feb. 11, 2013

1. Ole Miss is hoping to hear Monday if there will be further punishment from the SEC against Reginald Buckner for his punch thrown at Missouri's Laurence Bowers in the Rebels' loss at the Tigers Saturday. Buckner was ejected for a flagrant two foul (contact above the shoulders), but not for fighting. The Rebels are at Texas A&M Wednesday. Ole Miss has two games left against SEC teams with a winning record (Alabama on March 5 and suddenly surging Georgia on Feb. 16).

2. The argument for who is No. 1 is a fun debate and certainly gets fans going on social media. I wrestled with Miami or Indiana and went with the Hurricanes. Both are playing championship level right now but the 'Canes didn't lose this past week while the Hoosiers did. I would have no issues with either choice. The one thing though that is certain: Miami can be No. 1 in the polls but the Hurricanes are a much longer shot than Indiana to be a No. 1 seed unless there are more losses from the teams ahead of the 'Canes. You could have a scenario where Miami is No. 1 in the polls but not a No. 1 seed. Polls are not used by the selection committee so the polls are simply just for organizing teams.

3. VCU's Shaka Smart was thrilled with the chance to coach with Florida's Billy Donovan and Gonzaga's Mark Few again on the USA Basketball U-19 team this summer in the Czech Republic. Smart had teamed up with the pair in Brazil for the U-18 team. "It's a tremendous honor to have the opportunity to work with Billy and Mark for a second consecutive summer," Smart said. "I have a great deal of respect for both and look forward to another incredible learning experience as part of the staff." The sharing of ideas among the three has benefited each of the programs this season.

Irish's epic win and more musings

ESPN.com

Andy Katz

Feb. 11, 2013

- But as of late, Miami has been as dominant, if not more, when the game matters most.

- If you're talking about one of the most important point guards in the country, the list better include Miami's Shane Larkin. He has helped transform this team into a title contender.

Scott Having Fun in Final Season

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 11, 2013

When Durand Scott chose Miami over a number of big-time schools including Connecticut, UCLA, Louisville, Memphis, and Pittsburgh, he envisioned helping turn around a program.

After three years, Scott has helped turn Miami the corner into one of the best teams in the country, as well as one of the most surprising, during his senior season as the team's leading scorer.

"Most definitely this is what I had in mind," said Scott, who was a top 50 recruit. "I wanted to come in here, just do my best to help this program as much as I can, help us grow as a team, help turn around this program. I think after four years things have been falling into place and things are going well. This is the year it is happening and I'm grateful to be a part of it. I'm just embracing it and enjoying the moment."

Scott, who is averaging a career-high 14 points a game, is looking to play in his first NCAA tournament after two years in the NIT and the team is in search for its first ACC title winning its first 10 conference games. UM leads second-place Duke by two games.

"This is the most fun I've had since I've been here," Scott said. "It's the most exciting year because everybody on the floor is enjoying themselves. That's what you like. I like when all of my teammates are having fun, just playing well, enjoying the wins, and creating a great environment for us and everybody around us. This is why I came here and I don't want it to end."

It wasn't always easy during Scott's first three seasons at Miami as the team finished last in the ACC when he was a freshman. Crowds were sparse. His head coach left for another school. He was suspended six games

by the NCAA for taking impermissible benefits.

Meanwhile, some of the schools Scott, a Bronx, New York native, was recruited by were having plenty of success including Connecticut's national championship in 2011.

Nonetheless, Scott says he never had regrets about going to Miami.

"Not at all," Scott said. "I never regretted coming here. When I made my decision, I wanted to make sure I didn't have any regrets. This is four years of my life that I've enjoyed and I couldn't do it any better than with these guys. I've enjoyed myself. I just want to finish strong. This is a big year for me and my team. We just want to continue to strive."

Durand Scott is shooting a career-high 47.8 percent from the floor.

Scott has played in front of some very small crowds at UM, which ranked last in the conference in attendance last season. But things have changed this season as UM has averaged 7,266 fans in the last four games as UM has been ranked, which includes three sellouts. Last season, UM averaged just 3,936.

"We didn't play the good teams (in the past), had a so-so crowd and this year started off the same until we started winning, became ranked so now the games are sold out," Scott said. "You can't control the fans so we try to have our mind on that. We just tried to form a team, play as hard as we can, and we're happy that they're coming out to support us. We just hope they continue to do that and show the trueness of being a fan."

Scott has taken pride in not just being a scorer as he's also one of the team's best defenders and he averages 4.4 rebounds and 3.0 assists a game while playing with a high level of intensity.

"It's just hard work showing the effort, how much you want it, and that trickles down to your teammates," Scott said of his all-around game. "It makes them want to play hard. Sometimes you might not be the most talented, but if you work hard and you focus on giving out the effort, that will help you make that shot, that layup because you are so focused on the game. That's what I try to bring. I try to bring the intensity, the energy to my team."

For Miami to continue their strong play as they have won 11 straight, Scott believes defense and not being content are the keys.

"Defense is always a key," Scott said. "We have to stay focused, don't be content, don't be happy with the success we've had now. We have to keep grinding, keep striving for me, just stay hungry like we were when we weren't ranked. At the end of the day, Coach L knows what's best and what we need each game because every game is different. We just need to run behind him and let him be the leader of this team. I think he's going to lead us in the right direction and down the right road to be successful."

Miami travels to Florida State (13-10, 5-5) on Wednesday.

Why Miami should be No. 1

ESPN.com
Ryan Feldman
Feb. 11, 2013

The No. 1 ranked team in the AP Poll has lost five weeks in a row. The top three teams all lost in the last week.

With so much parity, who really is the No. 1 team in college basketball?

How about the team that has the longest active win streak among Power 6 teams, the only Power 6 team undefeated in conference play, the team that is a perfect 11-0 with all of its top players?

The Miami (FL) Hurricanes haven't lost a game since Christmas. They're off to a 10-0 start in the ACC, the first team other than Duke or North Carolina to do so since the 1980-81 Virginia Cavaliers. They're the first team since ACC play began in 1953 to defeat both Duke and North Carolina by at least 25 points in the same season (according to the Elias Sports Bureau).

Miami has won 11 straight games -- no other Power 6 team has an active win streak of more than five games.

The Hurricanes' only three losses came without one of their key players -- they lost to Florida Gulf Coast without Durand Scott, and to Arizona and Indiana State (in overtime) without Reggie Johnson.

Highest BPI With All Top Players
This Season

W-L		
Miami (FL)	96.1	11-0
Duke	95.0	14-0
Indiana	90.4	21-3
Florida	90.0	15-3

Miami has the highest BPI in college basketball with all of its top players (Shane Larkin, Trey McKinney Jones, Kenny Kadji, Scott and Johnson). BPI defines "top players" as play-

ers who are top five on the team in minutes per game and have played at least half of the team's games.

When debating who the No. 1 team is in college basketball and who deserves the top ranking in the polls, it usually alludes to which team is currently the best team at the moment.

When looking at the likely top candidates for No. 1 -- Miami, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Syracuse, Gonzaga and Duke -- Miami has the highest BPI with each team's roster as is at the current moment. As it stands, each of those teams has all of its top players except for Michigan, which is missing Jordan Morgan (ankle injury), and Duke, which is missing Ryan Kelly (foot injury). Of those seven teams, Duke has the lowest BPI with its current roster.

Highest BPI Since Jan. 1

W-L		
Miami (FL)	93.3	11-0
Michigan	92.0	8-3
Florida	90.4	10-1
Michigan St	90.2	9-1

The college basketball season gets cranked up after the New Year, when conference play gets underway. Since Jan. 1, Miami has the highest BPI in the country.

Which team plays the best against the best teams?

Miami has won six of its seven games against teams ranked in the BPI top 50, the best such win percentage (85.7) among teams to play at least five such games.

Best BPI vs BPI Top 50 Since Jan. 1
Minimum 5 Games

W-L		
Miami (FL)	95.7	5-0
Pittsburgh	90.2	4-2
Louisville	90.0	3-3
Indiana	89.9	4-1

Miami has the best BPI against top-50 teams since Jan. 1 among teams to play at least five

such games, and it's not even that close. The Hurricanes, who are 5-0 in those games, are the only team to play at least five games against BPI top-50 teams since January 1 and not lose a game.

Miami certainly had a few lackluster performances before the New Year when it wasn't at full strength -- the loss to Florida Gulf Coast, the 19-point loss to Arizona, and a narrow eight-point win over Stetson -- but the Hurricanes have brought their 'A' game as much as any team.

No team has more "Game BPI" scores of 95 or better than Miami (12). BPI takes into account margin, pace, location, opponent and key players missing for each "Game BPI" and then averages those scores to calculate a team's BPI for the season. Miami's 99.8 "Game BPI" in its 90-63 win against Duke is the best performance by any team this season.

Which team do the fans think should be No. 1? We asked fans to tweet their choice at @ESPNStatsInfo on Twitter and the verdict was overwhelming: Miami got more than half the votes.

No. 3 hoops Brimming with Confidence

CaneSport.com

Staff

Feb. 11, 2013

It was 53 years ago that the Hurricane basketball team received first place votes in the polls.

It was 1960, and UM had seven votes and was ranked eighth.

Today Cane basketball history was rewritten. Miami received a school-record 17 first-place votes and is ranked No. 3 by the Associated Press.

A week ago the team was ranked No. 8, tied for the best in program history.

"I never really thought Miami could be a top 10 program," senior center Reggie Johnson said. "I knew we were a good team coming into this year, that we'd compete, take down some big dogs always in the top 10. But I didn't think we'd be here in February.

"It feels real good. The program never being ranked this high, being part of that is really special."

Johnson also said "there's work to do" because two teams remain ahead of UM, adding that "It does feel strange that Duke is ahead (in the polls considering the Canes blew out the Blue Devils), but that's for the media and fans."

Guard Shane Larkin added that "We knew we'd be a great team this year, believed in each other. It doesn't change anything. We still have to go out and play hard. We actually have to play harder now because we have that No. 3 ranking and people are going to try and get us any given night ... we'll get everyone's best shots."

Of getting the first-place votes, Larkin said, "That means a lot that people actually believe we're the top-ranked team in the nation."

Does this team think it is the best in the nation?

"I would love to believe we're the best team in the country," center Julian Gamble said. "I've been around for a while, have played on a lot of different teams. I played on a team that was last in the conference. Being on top is a surreal feeling, but we really worked for this.

"The target on our back is bigger than it ever has been."

He said the polls aren't a distraction

"We have a lot of experience and coach L definitely keeps us grounded," Gamble said. "We have a lot more work to do. (Coach Jim Larranaga) reminds us nobody wins the race at halftime."

Guard Durand Scott said the ranking "gives us more confidence."

"We realize what the team can be," Scott said. "We're just going out there playing basketball, having fun. Right now we're clicking. Everyone is in the right position at the right time."

The team now continues its one-game-at-a-time approach with the next test at Florida State on Wednesday night.

"They're a great team - we have to go in there prepared and be ready for a tough battle," Larkin said. "They're going to be hyped in front of their home crowd, will have a chip on their shoulder because we beat them pretty soundly at home."

UM is 19-3 overall and 10-0 in ACC play.

"I thought we played two good games this past week and now we really have to get focused going to Florida State," Larranaga said. "It's rivalry week, Florida State is our biggest rival and I'm sure it's going to be a real war."

Larranaga says he likes the way his team is handling the national attention.

"So far, so good," Larranaga said. "They've had a clear mindset on what they want to accomplish, have worked very hard. When you make a commitment to something, are willing to devote time and energy and see the results of your hard work, you feel very, very good about it.

"We're just appreciative of where we are right now, the support we're getting. And I'm very, very proud of my team how they've been able to stay focused and do a good job."

Asked his reaction to the new ranking, Larranaga smiled.

"I just feel good that my back is feeling good - we have this new machine that helps me stretch better so I can do all these interviews from 7 in the morning till 11 at night," he said.

Then Larranaga turned serious.

"It's wonderful for a University to get this kind of media attention," Larranaga said. "And now over an extended period of time that won't just create interest in basketball recruits but students all over the country. Because everybody follows college athletics."

He added that "I'm going to be on them very, very hard today. We have a number of different areas that need attention. We can't afford any slippage. There's areas we can dramatically improve in. The players know that."

Larranaga said he especially wants improvement in the offensive rebounding efficiency that ranks 280th in the nation.

Larranaga was part of a Virginia program that was ranked No. 1 in the nation, so the high ranking is nothing new to him.

"The thing that stands out is you're going to get everybody's best shot," Larranaga said. "There's no sneaking up on anybody. The league is so good and there's so much parity in college basketball, anybody can beat anybody."

* Larranaga said he texted out to recruits the team's

new rankings and heard back from all of them with congratulations.

Asked how the team's success affects recruiting, Larranaga responded "We had an eighth grader commit to us - I told him it was a little too early to be committing to college. He just got excited."

* Players say they are enjoying being recognized by fans when out and about around town.

"There hasn't been a day where someone hasn't noticed who I was, congratulated me," Scott said. "It's a great feeling."

Larranaga says he's certainly gotten more attention when walking around town.

But he lamented that "I went to Publix and nobody knew me."

* Larkin said he communicated with LeBron James and Dwayne Wade after they attended the UM-UNC game.

"I tweeted them telling them they're welcome any time," Larkin said.

* Larranaga got a big cheer at the last game when his face went up on the big screen during a timeout.

"I was watching the dance team perform and all of a sudden the crowd started going wild," Larranaga said. "I looked up and there was my face on the Jumbotron. That's heartwarming."

* Larkin said he found out about UM's No. 3 ranking from a trainer outside of class; Johnson said Garrius Adams told him during class; Scott said his phone vibrating with texts woke him up to the news.

Gamble found out in a text from his mother.

"(She texted) 'No. 3, wow that's crazy,'" Gamble said. "I didn't even know what she was talking about."

* Asked if Reggie Johnson is back to where he was pre-injury, Larranaga said, "I would say he missed an entire month of practice, and when you come back despite the fact that he's in great shape and is running the floor better than he ever has and is rebounding and defending, offensively his presence was missed. And we had to go in a different direction offensively and it still worked for us very, very well. Now that he's back we haven't been able to incorporate his scoring ability into our offense, but that's coming now that he's been able to practice more.

"He came back Jan. 23, it's now February. We've had him back for two weeks or so. But we're just getting comfortable with him being back in synch offensively with us."

Billy Donovan: Transfer to Miami “good” for Kenny Kadji

Palm Beach Post

Jorge Milian

Feb. 11, 2013

Kenny Kadji has plenty of fans in Coral Gables. He has an important one in Gainesville, too.

Kadji, UM's sweet-shooting 6-foot-11 senior forward, played two seasons at Florida under coach Billy Donovan before transferring to UM in 2010.

Donovan didn't stand in the way when Kadji, who averaged more than 12 minutes with the Gators as a freshman but sustained a back injury in his sophomore season and played only eight games, decided to leave Florida.

"I think it was good for Kenny," Donovan said. "I think Kenny probably needed to grow, mature. I think his experience here probably helped him become who he has become as a player.

"It's never been a talent issue with Kenny. He's always been very, very talented, very gifted. I think for him, a fresh start was probably the best thing for him, and a good thing for him. I haven't seen [Miami] play a lot but I've always felt like Kenny is a gifted and talented player and when he's focused and he's working hard, the sky is the limit for him as a player."

Going into Wednesday's game against Florida State, Kadji is averaging 13.5 points and 6.8 rebounds. Kadji has been a key component in UM's climb from unranked five weeks ago to No. 3 in the Associated Press poll on Monday. With his own team to worry about, Donovan hasn't watched much of UM this season "but from all accounts, it sounds like they are playing tremendously."

"I think it's very good for basketball in the state of Florida, what they're doing," Donovan said.

Both Donovan and UM coach Jim Larranaga played college basketball at Providence. Larranaga was there from 1967-71 and left as the school's fifth all-time leading scorer.

"He had an unbelievable career there," said Donovan, who played at Providence from 1983-87. "He's a great guy."

Who's the No.1 team in college hoops now?

USA TODAY
Scott Gleeson
Feb. 10, 2013

In case you were out partying (likely) or going to bed early to get up for church (semi-likely) last night, there was some college basketball you missed.

There was this this incredibly boring game between No. 12 Louisville and Notre Dame. That was the first 39 minutes. Then came the last minute of regulation and a whopping five overtimes. That part was epic.

Now that the NFL season is over, it's time to embrace the madness that precedes March on the hardwood:

I. The No. 1 team should be Miami:

Imagine this: Five of the top 10 teams in the country lost last week and the highest-ranked team remaining out of those five teams that didn't lose is a team that lost by 27 points to a team that has clearly been the best team in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Enter the No. 11 Miami Hurricanes, who made North Carolina their latest victim in an 87-61 rout on Saturday to move to 10-0 in the ACC. Miami Heat players LeBron James and Dwyane Wade watched courtside. Jim Larranaga's group hasn't reached celebrity status, but with two of the NBA's best players taking notice, it's the perfect wake-up call for the rest of the country to start taking notice.

"Miami is the best team in the country," ESPN analyst Jay Bilas said. "I think they're capable of beating absolutely anybody. They've proven that."

Odds are, Duke will become the No. 1 team in the country on Monday in both polls. But voters will certainly have to scratch their head when they have a Miami team that's so hot right now (like Hansel). Duke's resume-lifting

November is what makes them No. 1. But let's not mistake the Ryan Kelly-less Blue Devils for the best team in the country, especially when they're not the best team in the ACC. Just do me a favor and look at the top 10. Then find me a team that's better than Miami. Exactly. Told you. Now listen to Will Smith.

James, Wade Show Support of Canes

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 11, 2013

Two of the NBA's greatest players are supportive of the Miami Hurricanes basketball team.

Miami Heat superstar teammates LeBron James and Dwyane Wade attended the Miami game Saturday against North Carolina to see the eighth-ranked Hurricanes win their 11th consecutive game in commanding fashion, 87-61.

"Their team has been playing very well," Wade said. "I have a good relationship with coach (Jim) Larranaga. I'm proud of what he's been able to accomplish with the team. They play very hard. ... It wasn't a game really. North Carolina isn't have a year that we're accustomed to, but I'm glad we can go out and support those guys. They deserve it. Basketball in Miami is doing pretty good. I'm just glad that we have the time that the schedule allows us to go catch a game."

The Hurricanes have been one of the top national stories in college basketball this season as the program has made a quick rise in the rankings. UM entered the rankings three weeks ago at No. 25 for the first time in three years. Then they climbed to No. 14 after blow-out wins over Duke and Florida State followed by another jump to No. 8.

Miami (19-3, 10-0), which has never been higher than No. 8, is expected to receive their highest ranking ever when the polls are released Monday afternoon as four of the top seven teams lost last week.

"They are playing well," Wade said. "Good luck to them in their run with what they're doing. To be undefeated in the conference is amazing so hopefully they can keep it up."

Heat head coach Erik Spoelstra also praised Larranaga and his squad.

"It's cool," Spoelstra said. "Turn this into a basketball town. I'm a fan of the other sports. I've gotten to know coach Larranaga the last two summers. ... I'm a big fan of him. What they've been able to do is very cool."

It is not the first time Wade, a Chicago native who attended Marquette, has been to a Miami game while with the Heat. Coincidentally, Wade attended the Miami-North Carolina back in 2008 with former Heat teammates Jason Williams, Dorell Wright, Daequan Cook, and Earl Barron. North Carolina, ranked fourth at the time, beat Miami 98-82.

James has been supportive of the UM program since signing with the Heat in 2010. Last season, the Hurricanes wore the Nike LeBron 9 "Miami Hurricanes" shoes.

Larranaga, who recruited James' primary business partner Maverick Carter during his time at George Mason, returned the favor Sunday by attending the Heat game against the Los Angeles Lakers. James scored 32 points and Wade added 30 in Heat 107-97 win.

Larranaga was given an ovation from the Miami crowd when he was shown on the scoreboard and he proceed to flash the signature "U" in response.

Miami will travel to Florida State on Wednesday.

Case for No. 1: Larranaga has Miami in blue-blood territory

ADL Sporting News.com
David Steele
Feb. 10, 2013

Miami, the No. 1 team in college basketball. Hey, why not?

Well, besides the usual reasons, such as: nobody really has a clue to which really is the best team right now, in early February, or which will be the best when they cut down the nets in Atlanta two months from now. Whether it's Miami or someone else when the next polls come out Monday, the top-ranked team won't remind anybody of last season's Kentucky team, or North Carolina in 2009.

None of that matters right now. Who's better than the U today? Who's better on the court—and who's a better story all around? Where do you find the best advertisement for college ball as it exists right now, strengths and weaknesses, beauty and flaws included?

Waxing North Carolina by 26 points on Saturday is a pretty solid argument. Here are two more, though:

1) Jim Larranaga.

2) The new ACC.

Larranaga needs little explanation, but ... when the author of a legendary Cinderella story moves into the big leagues, it doesn't always work the way the fairy tale is supposed to. It's coming true for Larranaga, though. Once he took George Mason to the 2006 Final Four, he could have stayed at the suburban mid-major school forever. All parties would have been thrilled. He had his niche, Mason had its, and everybody was benefiting from it.

But Larranaga took a risky leap two seasons ago. It's the leap that Brad Stevens has not made away from Butler, and Shaka Smart has not made from VCU. There was a great chance that by choosing Miami, Larranaga would have finished his big-time coaching career in obscurity, bobbing in the middle of the league

standings, dabbling with the occasional NCAA trip, staying just long enough to remind everybody who he used to be before he walked away from his comfort zone.

After all, this was Miami.

Which brings up the second argument. If Miami were not in the ACC, it might not have had nearly the same appeal to Larranaga as it did. And Miami might not have had a chance in hell of attracting him there.

Stop us if you've heard this before: since the ACC football expansion of 2004—starring the U, above all the others extracted from the Big East—ACC basketball has not been the same. (The football has been worse.) Neither the league nor the newcomers seems to have gained much at all from the partnership.

(This seems like a cozy place to slip in the reminder that the game that's sure to be the most talked-about of this season, Notre Dame over Louisville in five overtimes, was between two more teams about to bolt the Big East for the ACC. As you were.)

On top of that, the ACC ploy was the first blow in the conference-realignment wars that haven't slowed yet. Again, it's hard to see who the winners are even when the shifting flow of money is considered. What schools are really better off after all the leapfrogging from league to league?

As of today ... Miami. Because Larranaga, with old ACC ties and a history of working ACC territory at little George Mason, boarded the ACC basketball train on a middle-of-the-pack school, and in just a year and a half has engineered it to the top.

Even with potentially-faulty hindsight factored in, Miami isn't nearly the same program had it stayed in what eventually became of the Big East. It was an afterthought in basketball there already. If nothing else, it upgraded its afterthought-neighborhood when it moved into the ACC.

By being part of a league with a still-strong rep, great legacy and a few blue-blood, title-contending programs, Miami became a logical entry point for a still-underappreciated mind and presence like Larranaga.

Those blue-blood programs, by the way, are Duke and North Carolina, if you haven't guessed. Larranaga's 'Canes have now beaten them both by more than 25 points this season, the first ACC program in its 60-year history to accomplish that.

Miami isn't the first of the Big East transplants to make that kind of national noise in the ACC, of course. Actually, it's the last, years behind Virginia Tech and Boston College. As potent a name as it was in football, it was equally non-descript in basketball.

Not any more, though. Not now that it finally made good on its sleeping-giant promise and used its status as an under-the-radar destination to lure a coach deserving of a bigger stage.

In conclusion, then ... a mid-major coach has moved up a level and is still playing David to the sport's Goliaths. A program that had represented one of the worst elements of greed-driven conference musical chairs, has proven that a lot of good can come of it after all.

And in a college landscape configured to reward the big boys, the little kids still have a chance to be as big as they dream of being.

Plus ... seeing Duke and North Carolina get their heads handed to them still seems to please a large segment of the population.

And, to seal the deal, the Miami students on Saturday didn't rush the floor after the win. They acted as if Miami walloping North Carolina was supposed to happen. Thanks to Jim Larranaga, it was.

That alone ought to make Miami No. 1.

Is Miami A Basketball Town, Thanks To Hurricanes & Heat?

Sun Sentinel

Dave Hyde

Feb. 10, 2013

Here is what Dwyane Wade said on his way out the door Saturday, a step behind LeBron James, even as the cheers were still rising in the BankUnited Center for the other basketball team in town:

"Who'd have thought this in a football town?"

That we're the surprise center of the basketball universe?

"It's cool, isn't it?" the Heat stars said after watching Miami dismantle North Carolina 87-61. "It's different."

Look at this paradigm shift. We've got the Heat on one side of Miami, defending their NBA championship, spreading their brand internationally, taking on the Lakers today.

We've got the Hurricanes on another side of town, rolling to 10-0 in the ACC and becoming the first team to beat Duke and North Carolina in the same season by 25 points since the ACC formed in 1953.

On Saturday, the two sides of success met, too. Miami coach Jim Larranaga received a phone call earlier in the week about leaving tickets for LeBron, Wade and James Jones, a Miami alum.

"We told them, 'no, sorry, sold out,' " Larranaga said.

He kids because he wins.

LeBron and Wade sat courtside for Saturday's game in a good statement about the program's arrival. A better one? When LeBron and Wade stood, cheered and high-fived each other after Miami guard Shane Larkin bounced a pass off the backboard so teammate Kenny

Kadji could dunk it.

"Some recruits might see that," Larranaga said.

They'll hear this story, too: Two summers ago, Chris Bosh worked out with the Hurricanes a month after the Heat lost to Dallas in the NBA championship. Larranaga, who had just taken over the program, asked Bosh after the workout what he thought.

"Can I be honest?" Bosh said.

"Please do," Larranaga said.

"Your guys don't run the floor," Bosh said. "They don't work very hard. They had no physicality, no spirit to their game."

Larranaga did what any good coach would. He asked Bosh to tell his players that. It resulted in an impromptu team meeting in the Miami weight room where Bosh delivered "the best five-minute talk I've ever heard," Larranaga said.

Bosh began by saying he wished he'd played better in the season-ending Game 6 loss to Dallas. That game haunted him, he said. It was why he was working harder than ever in his life. He then turned the focus on the kids.

"You guys don't work hard enough -- you don't deserve the wins you want," Bosh said.

Larranaga said that speech became an impetus to his players working this past summer. Center Julian Gamble lost 20 pounds. Kadji lost 24 pounds.

"The success we're having, we worked for," guard Durand Scott said.

Miami is ranked eighth now, but brace yourself. Four teams in the top five lost this week. There's some thought it could vault all the way to No. 1. ESPN analyst Doris Burke pushed that

idea during Saturday's blowout. And such talk buoys the thought, considering her platform.

"Miami needed to win in a big way to be considered for No. 1, and they did exactly that," Burke said after the game. "Duke and Indiana are two other teams ranked above them, and they were No. 1, and they lost it.

"There's going to be a lot of sentiment to give someone else a chance there. And if Miami gets to No. 1, they might hold it for a while. The only ranked team they play from here on is Duke."

This will take a moment to digest. For generations, we've been a football town. But the Dolphins and UM football are down. But now?

"We'll be back," Wade said, leaving Saturday's game.

"We watch them all the time," Larkin said of the Heat.

The last teams from the same area to win NBA and NCAA titles were the University of Michigan and the Detroit Pistons in 1989. As UM rises and the Heat are the Heat, can this basketball town do the same?

Rapid Reaction: Miami 87, North Carolina 61

ESPN.com
Dana O'Neil
Feb. 9, 2013

A quick look at Miami's 87-61 win over North Carolina on Saturday.

Overview: Any lingering doubters out there about the Hurricanes? Didn't think so.

Miami ran its record to 10-0 in the ACC, dominating the Tar Heels in a game that was one in name only. Bigger, older and tougher, Miami ran roughshod over North Carolina at home, drilling the Heels on offense and frustrating them on defense.

In uproariously topsy-turvy and unpredictable season, Miami may be one of the nation's few reliable teams.

Turning point: Tipoff. Seriously. Kenny Kadji hit a 3-pointer, setting the tone for what was to come. The Hurricanes led 13-2 early and never looked back.

Key player: Shane Larkin. The Miami guard is the prototype for the new model point guard, a guy who can score (18 points) and create (nine assists). He is equal parts nimble and smart, a deft ball handler but a savvy distributor as well and the engine for a pretty well-oiled Hurricanes machine.

Key stat: The Hurricanes owned the box score but really made the difference beyond the arc. Miami, which had a season high of 11 3-pointers coming into the game, swished 10 in the first half and finished with 15.

Miscellaneous: Midway through the first half, the BankUnited Center crowd stood up collectively and whipped out camera phones. Why? LeBron James and Dwyane Wade were in the house. Yes, the Hurricanes have officially arrived. James didn't want to talk. "Nah, it's my day off," he told ESPN.com. This was Miami's first win at home against North Carolina since Jan. 4, 2003.

Next game: From the "you've got be kidding me" annals of scheduling cruelty, the Tar Heels head to Duke on Wednesday for the first of its two annual tap dances with the Blue Devils. Miami has something of a rivalry game too, but not quite like UNC. The Hurricanes are next at Florida State on Wednesday.

Miami shows power by whipping UNC

ESPN.com

Dana O'Neil

Feb. 9, 2013

The King was courtside at the BankUnited Center.

No, not that King. Yes, LeBron James was there, but in this building and on this campus, even he must defer to the royalty presiding over the Hurricanes' bench.

That would be Jim Larranaga, a man who blends in better with the Miami retirement set than the South Beach flavor.

The black gold and traditional gold necklaces hanging from James' neck like Mardi Gras beads probably cost more than Larranaga's entire wardrobe, and odds are, Erik Spoelstra doesn't take a seat in the middle of the press scrum while his players talk at the podium -- as Larranaga did on Saturday.

But the unassuming 63-year-old is quickly becoming the talk of this town. The man who coached the first Final Four Cinderella entrant while at George Mason is now making that miracle look like a piece of cake.

What he's doing at Miami, in what should be the twilight of his career, is nothing short of the impossible.

He has built the University of Miami into a national championship contender.

In basketball.

Ponder that for a moment.

The Hurricanes on Saturday continued their decimation of Tobacco Road, beating the North Carolina Tar Heels, 87-61, in a game that was somehow more lopsided than that uneven score.

Couple that with Miami's 90-63 win against Duke earlier this year and you have stats of historic proportion. According to ESPN Stats & Info, the Hurricanes are the first team since the start of ACC play in 1953 to beat Duke and UNC in the same season by 25-plus points each.

In a season in which top teams seem to have all the consistency of a wet noodle -- please, take my No. 1 -- Miami of all things has been the model of consistency. The Hurricanes have lost just three times, each without one of their best players in the lineup (no Durand Scott against Florida Gulf Coast, not that that's an excuse, and no Reggie Johnson against both Arizona and Indiana State).

More impressive, perhaps, while everyone else is riding some sort of runaway rollercoaster, Miami is following the sort of arc a team wants to be following come February -- steadily upward. The Canes are better now than they were a week ago, were better a week ago than they were a month ago, and so on.

This is not a good team beating average competition.

This is a very good team. Period.

Worthy of a No. 1 seed right now? Absolutely.

A candidate for the top spot in the ranking? Sure.

A national championship contender? Why not?

"As a coach, when I look at a team to evaluate them, I look at the whole package," said North Carolina's Roy Williams. "They have the whole package. I'm impressed. They lost to Florida Gulf Coast? I'd hate like hell to play Florida Gulf Coast."

The team that decimated North Carolina drained 15 of 26 3-pointers; won the rebounding edge by nine, dished out 17 assists, and shared the scoring. Shane Larkin, the son of Barry but who might soon change the dynamic to read Barry Larkin, father of Shane, had 18 points with nine assists; Scott and Kenny Kadji each chipped in 17.

Larkin and Kadji even put together a nice little off the backboard dunk that got James out his chair.

"We say, 'Bring everyone into the circle,'" Larranaga said. "When you get more people involved in the game, the more they feel good. Shane probably could have gone for a layup, but he saw an opportunity to get his teammate involved, so I have no problem with that."

That's the thing about Larranaga. Maybe he's not young or particularly electrifying -- think Jim Boeheim's smilier, happier twin brother -- but he's far from stodgy.

He's been through the rodeo a few dozen times and isn't easily fazed. Asked about the current Miami mania while weaving through a collection of fans outside his office waiting for autographs, he shrugged.

The only thing I can compare it to is our Final Four run at George Mason, but that didn't start until March 17," he said. "This has been going on since about Jan. 23. But it doesn't bother me. Why? Because I watched Terry Holland deal with it every day for four years at Virginia."

When Larranaga was named to replace the departing Frank Haith, the hire was met with a mixed bag of arched eyebrow and eh. Even the coach's inner circle wasn't sure.

They told him the obvious -- that Miami was a football school; that the state was a football and baseball state; that no one would come in from the 80-degree weather to watch basketball.

He shrugged, and without even a hint of defiance or arrogance said, watch me.

And now. Please.

Watch him.

The BankUnited Center enjoyed its third sellout in its past four games. Students lined up outside for tickets -- not exactly the hardship it is at, say Michigan, but still -- and earlier in the week when the university fielded the call that James, Dwyane Wade and Co. were looking for tickets, Larranaga jokingly said, "Tell them we're sold out."

"I wouldn't call it stubborn or optimistic," he said. "I'd say it's experienced. They told me we couldn't draw well at Bowling Green. There may have been 1,000 people there my first season. They told me we couldn't get good players at George Mason, that they'd all go to Georgetown,

Maryland or George Washington. When we went to the Final Four, eight of our guys lived within an hour of campus."

Building the little engine that could versus a power in the North Carolina-Duke-centric world of the ACC, of course, are not exactly one and the same.

This was supposed to be the year when someone else dominated the league. Only that someone was supposed to be NC State, not Miami.

And yet, here we are.

"People talk about how experienced and how old this team is," Williams said. "But they're also really talented."

Williams may be a believer, but plenty still aren't.

Skeptics are hard sells, and the Canes are well aware.

"We definitely have a chip on the shoulder," Larkin said. "We're the University of Miami. We're not a traditional powerhouse. Some people still don't think we're a top-10 team in the country and coach has done a very good job of letting us know what people think about us."

Two years ago, Chris Bosh came to Miami in the offseason and played a little pickup with the Hurricanes.

Afterward Larranaga asked the Miami Heat player what he thought about his team. After asking if he could be frank, Bosh told Larranaga a hard truth -- that his team was soft physically, that they didn't work hard enough and that they simply weren't very good.

A few weeks later, Larranaga had Bosh tell that to the Hurricanes. The coach had been preaching that for weeks, but he knew it would resonate slightly better coming from Bosh than himself.

Bosh came back to work with the Hurricanes this past summer.

"It wasn't the same," Larranaga said. "And we knew that."

Now slowly everyone else is coming around to see what Bosh learned.

Even the King.

James declined an interview during halftime, telling ESPN.com, "Nah, it's my day off."

So the King rested.

And watched the other King do his work.

UNC Basketball: Defending Miami's Reggie Johnson

SI.com

Matt Hamm

Feb. 9, 2013

On January 10th North Carolina lost to the Miami Hurricanes 68-59 without senior center Reggie Johnson. In that match up the Heels were out played inside by Kenny Kadji and Julian Gamble who combined for 32 points, 15 rebounds and seven blocked shots. Miami took 26 three pointers in that contest with an effective inside out game and controlled the tempo, this time around Carolina faces a whole different animal with Johnson manning the paint.

Johnson stands a massive 6-10 292 lbs an imposing figure to which UNC has no easy answer. If you consider frame alone Joel James is the only big man on the Tar Heels roster who can match up physically but the freshman James has often committed silly mistakes on the defensive end and isn't up to the task alone.

UNC will likely have to throw everything and everyone they've got at Johnson if they hope to contain him. Since returning from injury on January 23rd against Duke, Johnson has scored in double figures just once but he's got it done on the boards. He's likely to be a huge part of the game plan today. NC State succeeded in going right at James Michael McAdoo and causing early foul trouble that threw Carolina off balance, someone else is going to have to defend Johnson, UNC simply cannot risk McAdoo getting into foul trouble.

This is a game in which the Tar Heels desperately need Desmond Hubert to come up big. Given the fact that McAdoo is too big of a risk for the assignment and Brice Johnson is far too skinny to even attempt it's up to Hubert and James. Hubert is the teams best interior defender and James has the bulk.

Roy Williams has been going with Jackson Simmons a lot lately and I expect that trend to continue against a Miami team with a lot of depth inside. Simmons plays smart basketball and should do a serviceable job on Gamble or Kadji, but that still begs the question who and how will UNC stop Johnson?

I suggest a two pronged approach, the hack a Johnson strategy can work if the bigs stay out of foul trouble and the game is close in the second half. For the rest of the time the bigs needs to have the most active game of the season trapping Reggie the minute he gets the ball and taking him out of the game. This strategy comes with inherit risks, the most obvious risk when trapping a player in the half court is the fact that somebody is left open. The other is Carolina's season long struggles at effectively communicating in the half court with one another.

Everything is going to have to go right for UNC to pull off the upset against a Miami team that might just be the best team in the country right now (more on that in our game preview). The biggest test both figuratively and literally lies inside the paint.

Miami flexes ACC dominance with James, Wade watching

USA TODAY
Scott Gleeson
Feb. 9, 2013

It was fitting in a game with LeBron James and Dwyane Wade in attendance that Miami (Fla.) point guard Shane Larkin would dish an assist off the backboard to Kenny Kadji for a throw-down dunk that emphasized a 24-point lead against the team that usually dominates the Atlantic Coast Conference, North Carolina.

The off-the-backboard alley-oop specialists James and Wade, accompanied by Heat teammate James Jones, gave the Hurricanes a standing ovation after the play and were on their feet several other times throughout Miami's 87-61 rout of the Tar Heels.

"Kenny said, 'Backboard, backboard,' " Larkin said. "I didn't see anybody behind him, so I tossed it off the backboard really soft, and he killed it."

"It was definitely a fun thing to have (James and Wade) come to a game," Larkin said. "It's a great feeling knowing people at that level are realizing what you're doing."

Jim Larranaga's group hasn't reached celebrity status, but with two of the NBA's best players taking notice, it's the perfect wake-up call for the rest of the country to start taking notice. Larranaga said he received a phone call early in the week requesting tickets for the Heat players

"I told them, 'Sorry, it's sold out.' But then we said, 'We think we can fit you in.' For our recruiting purposes, it gives us a lot of credibility when we tell them we're a hot ticket in town and our program is headed in the right direction," he said jokingly.

The No. 11 Hurricanes put on another show at home, making a school record-tying 15 three-pointers and extending their winning streak to 11 games. Another climb in the polls for the Hurricanes is likely next week, which might mean their best ranking ever.

"Everybody from North Carolina always thinks it's just about North Carolina," Tar Heels coach Roy Williams said. "It's not. Miami is pretty dadgum good."

Larkin had 18 points and a career-high nine assists for the ACC leaders, who built margins of 9-0 and 44-27 en route to another rout. They improved to 11-0 at home, where each of the past four wins have been by at least 22 points.

Such success is unprecedented for the Hurricanes (19-3, 10-0), who set a school record for ACC victories in a season with eight games to go. They are the last unbeaten team in league play among the major conferences.

Miami's smothering defense did the rest, flustering a team averaging an ACC-best 79.1 points a game.

Larranaga works Miami magic

Pittsburgh Tribune

John Harris

Feb. 9, 2013

It didn't take long for Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga to change the culture in south Florida. Once-indifferent fans who hardly bothered to show up for games now storm the court following big Hurricanes victories. One of only two Atlantic Coast Conference teams ranked in the top 25 this week, Miami was the talk of the league after routing then-No. 1 Duke, 90-63, on Jan. 23 and setting off mass hysteria inside the BankUnited Center. Since replacing Frank Haith in April 2011, Larranaga's goal has been selling the program nationally while repairing the team's image locally.

Last year, Larranaga became the first Miami coach to win 20 games in his inaugural season. In the process, the Hurricanes established milestones by winning for the first time at Duke and defeating Florida State for the first time since 2009.

For an encore, Miami has won 19 of its first 22 games while earning a No. 8 ranking in the polls this week. The Hurricanes carried an 11-game winning streak after Saturday's game against North Carolina.

"There is a difference in tradition (now)," Larranaga said. "You've got to remember that the Miami basketball program was dropped for a number of years and didn't come back until 1985. Back then, you're starting from the basement level, even below the basement, just trying to lay some form of foundation."

Larranaga, who built a solid program at George Mason that made a Cinderella run to the Final Four in 2006, understands that selling basketball at Miami involves more than what occurs on the court.

"It's very, very challenging," Larranaga said during his weekly conference call. "We had the

same situation at George Mason. We were in a large metropolitan area where competition for the entertainment dollar was keen. Everybody said we couldn't draw and we couldn't build a great basketball program because, basically, Maryland and Georgetown dominated the D.C. area. And the fans that were sports fans or pro fans followed the Wizards and the Caps. But we didn't listen to the naysayers." Larranaga wore those same earplugs in Miami.

"We did (at George Mason) what we planned on doing here in Miami, and that is build a grassroots network of people who support our program," Larranaga said. "My staff and I have reached out to the local community to try to get young kids to follow our program.

"We had our first high school basketball game in the BankUnited Center. Those are the kind of people that want to become season-ticket holders and fans of the Miami Hurricanes program."

But you can't win over the fans without winning games. And that takes recruiting winning players such as sophomore guard Shane Larkin, the son of Hall of Fame baseball player Barry Larkin.

Larkin originally signed with DePaul but changed his mind and wanted to be closer to his family in Orlando, Fla. He transferred to play for Larranaga, who recruited the player when he was at George Mason.

Larkin leads Miami in assists and steals and is second in scoring this season.

"I think sometimes you connect with a young man or his family," Larranaga said regarding his relationship with Larkin. "They feel like they know you. They listen to your approach to coaching, and they listen to how you develop your players and your program. Coming back to Florida, he had that familiarity with us."

No Dream: Canes Continue Winning Streak

CaneSport.com

Jim Martz

Feb. 9, 2013

Could anyone ever have thought the following fact would have happened at a school known nationally for its football and baseball prowess?

The Miami Hurricanes' men's basketball team on Saturday achieved something no other program in the 50-year history of the ACC has done, according to ESPN: defeat both Duke and North Carolina in the same season by 25 points or more.

In yet another pinch-me-we-must-be-dreaming game, the Hurricanes whipped the Tar Heels 87-61 at the BankUnited Center to extend their winning streak to 11 games and improve their ACC record to 10-0. On Jan. 23 they trounced Duke 90-63 at the BUC, marking the first time in school history they defeated a top-ranked team.

As if a national TV audience (ESPN) and sold-out crowd of 7,972 wasn't impetus enough for Saturday's game, the Canes may have gained another boost when Miami Heat stars LeBron James, Dwayne Wade and former Hurricane James Jones showed up a third of the way through the first half and took front row seats in one corner. James leaped to his feat to applaud a Kenny Kadji dunk that came after Shane Larkin's feed off the backboard, a play James and Wade and others on the Heat frequently use.

Miami coach Jim Larranaga was asked after the game how he feels about his team beating tradition-rich Duke and UNC by unprecedented margins in the same season. His answer helps explain why the Hurricanes this season never get too high or too low.

"I'd feel exactly the same way if we won by one," he said. "It still counts as one game and one win. No matter what the scoring differential is, you don't get a plus. It's not A-plus. You earned a win, it's one out of 18."

Senior guard Durand Scott was asked if he ever imagined his team could win by such margins against the Blue Devils and Tar Heels.

"Not at all, not at all," he replied. "As Shane (Larkin) said, they're a real good team, a tradition team and you come and try to play as hard as you can. I just thought they would be close games and we'd just come out and compete, and when you come up with W's you'd be very excited about it. Now it's like it's crazy how great of a team we can be, how much confidence we have now. We're just rolling."

As for the Heat players showing up, Larranaga said, "It was great. They called early in the week. I told them, 'Sorry, it was sold out. But then we said, 'We think we can fit you in.'"

"Those guys are great. Great ambassadors of the game of basketball. A lot of the NBA guys come here during the summer. They work out, they're in our weight room, our guys get to see them work out. And to see them come to a game like this was great."

"When you watch an NBA game, often the camera will pan the sideline, you'll see celebrities. And for our recruiting purposes it gives us a lot of credibility. We're a hot ticket in town, our program is headed in the right direction, there's a lot of enthusiasm, the students are lining up outside in big numbers to come into the game."

Cool that the Heat players were there, right?

"Definitely a fun thing to happen," said Larkin. "I think that was the first game. I've never seen them since I've been here. It's a great feeling knowing that people at that level realize what you're doing down here. Even at the professional level they have enough respect to come watch the college kids, and that's a great feeling."

The Hurricanes, now 19-3 overall and poised to improve on their ranking of 8 in the AP poll and 11 in the USA Today coaches poll, were led in scoring by Larkin's 18 points and 17 apiece by Kadji and Scott. Off the bench, guard Rion Brown contributed 11 and center/forward Reggie Johnson added eight points.

The Canes shot a 54.4 percent from the field, including a blistering 57.7 percent from three-point range as they connected on 15 of 26 shots from beyond the arc.

"When we shoot like that I think we're one of the better teams in the country," said Larkin. "Tonight was just one of those nights when everything was going in for us."

"It's never easy. Carolina is one of the best teams in the country. They're one of the traditional powerhouses, one of

the teams you look forward to playing in the ACC. And tonight was one of those nights we were making all our shots and they weren't shooting as well as they usually do."

We're just playing great basketball right now and hopefully we can keep it up."

Said Larranaga: "We just played very well today. We did everything we planned and at a very high level. We have the ultimate respect for Carolina, they're program. They've got some incredible three-point shooters. There was one stage in the first half where they made like three in a row and that concerned us. But as it turned out, we went down and made some threes and that gave our guys a lot of confidence at the offensive end. The guys just never let up, and that is the mark of a good team."

The Tar Heels had won six of seven games since losing to the Hurricanes at Chapel Hill 68-59 on Jan. 10. They were held Saturday to their lowest point total in that stretch.

"It's all about the defense," said Larranaga. "I think Carolina had 28 points in the first half, that's really good defense and we were able to keep it up and prevent them from getting on a good roll."

His message to his team before the game: "I just told them to attack with the defense and the offense, to be aggressive. One of the things about North Carolina, they're a very good defensive team and they can put you back on your heels if you're not sharp. One of the things you have to do is get by that first line of defense. We had five turnovers in a row at one time. That's they're pressure defense bothering us, but it was also a little carelessness, we were a little over anxious at that point in the game. We got ahead early and all of a sudden started make mistakes, and we regrouped and finished the half strong."

North Carolina coach Roy Williams was impressed by the Hurricanes and disgruntled with his team, which dropped to 16-7 overall and 6-4 in the ACC.

"There's not a lot to say," he said. "We didn't play as well as we wanted by any means and they were playing pretty well and hitting on all cylinders and we didn't have many answers for them. We got off to a terrible start and I think mentally that affected us."

"I didn't think Miami was playing all that great, had four or five turnovers in the first seven or eight minutes, then all of a sudden they started hitting every shot."

"Larkin just dominated the game. He's really, really good," Larkin, the ACC and National Player of the Week last week, made six of 10 shots from the field, including five of eight from long range, and contributed nine assists.

"I'm a big believer in numbers," Larranaga said of Larkin. "When you combine all of his skills he's having an incredible sophomore year."

Larkin was asked if he could have any more fun than he did on the floor in this game.

"Not really," he said. "When you go out there and play hard and you're executing the game plan and just playing a great game like that and everyone's playing well, it's extremely fun. We stuck to the game plan, we worked hard on the defensive end and it was just a great time."

The pass off backboard, was that for LeBron and Company?

"I mean, yeah, I guess it was for them," Larkin said. "We would have done it if they weren't here either. It was just one of those moments when we were having fun out there. We got a steal, Trey (McKinney-Jones) passed it to me on the outlet and Kenny said backboard, backboard and I didn't see anybody behind him close enough where he could get hurt. I just tossed it on the backboard and he killed it."

Kadji set the tone when he drilled a three-pointer from the top of the key on the first possession of the game. Soon the Hurricanes owned a 9-0 lead.

The three-point brigade continued as Larkin, Jones and Larkin again sank consecutive shots from long range as the Canes opened a 22-9 advantage.

And that was just a tuneup. After Scott scored on a dunk, the next five baskets, yes five, also came from three-point range by Scott, Brown, Larkin, Brown and Larkin as the score grew to too 39-23.

Midway through the second half the dunk brigade brought LeBron James out of his seat to give his own standing ovation. A bullet pass from Larkin to Kadji set up the first dunk, by Kadji. Johnson followed with a dunk on the next possession, then a Kadji dunk elicited the praise from James as Miami

owned a 70-46 lead.

The Hurricanes kept pushing the ball inside as Gamble scored on a dunk, Scott on a tip-in and Gamble on another dunk. That one led to a technical call as an official said he hung on the rim too long, though the basket counted for a 79-54 lead.

When Williams was asked by a North Carolina reporter about his team's performance, he offered praise for the Hurricanes.

"Everybody from North Carolina always just thinks it's about North Carolina," he said. "Miami's pretty dad gum good. They dominated the way we played. It wasn't all a failure of what North Carolina did, give Miami credit."

"They're playing better (than when they won at Chapel Hill), even before today's game, and I thought we were playing better."

"I think they're really solid. I think they guard like crazy. Larkin sets a great standard out front. I think he's leading the league in steals or is close to that. They can score inside, they can shoot outside, they can get to the free throw line, they can guard without fouling. They made three fouls in the first half and none in the first six minutes of the second half. They can turn their defense into offense and get some fast break baskets. People talk about their experience and how old they are but they're also talented. So I think they're really, really good."

"As a coach I look at the whole package. What I'm most impressed with is the whole package. They've beaten some pretty good basketball teams. I know they lost to Florida Gulf Coast. I'd hate like hell to play Florida Gulf Coast. They've played a very good schedule and they've played very good well against a very good schedule."

With top-ranked teams falling week after week (Duke, Michigan, Indiana), reporters asked the Hurricanes what they might think if they move up to the top spot eventually.

"I really don't know," said Kadji. "Michigan is a pretty good team. Duke is real good. I don't know and I really don't want to pay attention to that. We're just having too much fun, we're 10-0 and I just want to keep it going."

Said Scott: "Right now number one doesn't mean anything. We want to be number one at the end of the season. I just think it's going to be the same."

Added Larkin: "Being in that spot would definitely be great. The success we're having is not by mistake. We're gaining this success from the amount of work we put in the weight room, the amount of work we put in during the summer, the amount of work we put in practice, the focus we have. It's going to our favor now. Number one, that's not going to change our focus, our determination. Coach Larranaga is going to make sure of that, he's our leader and we're his students and hopefully we come out with a W at the end of the day."

Larranaga was asked if he would think differently if his team would be number one.

"No. I know that's a simple answer," he said. "Right now we've got a good formula. My staff deserves an awful lot of credit. And players feel confidence knowing they're well prepared. Surprised? I wouldn't say surprised, I would say proud. I think what we're doing is what my staff did at Bowling Green and George Mason. Our formula hasn't changed."

In the RPI ratings, the Hurricanes are listed as No. 1 by Warren Nolan and No. 10 by Sagarin. In the KenPom ranking they are 13th.

"I look at the RPI and the KenPom stats," said Larranaga. "The reason we look at the KenPom stats so much is because it gives you a ranking in every single category. And we know to be as successful as we'd like to be those numbers need to reflect our performance. And we share those numbers of our opponent. Carolina is number three in the country in tempo, our players need to know that. They're fast, they're racing down the court."

So are the Hurricanes, who impressed former star Ron Godfrey, a member of the 1960 team that also was ranked eighth in the national polls, highest in school history.

"They were some of the finest moments in my life," said Godfrey, who was honored at halftime along with several other former UM standouts. "I think it was about midway through the season and just kept going. I hate to say but I don't remember how we finished in the polls."

"I think they're going great, playing great. Coach is doing a great job and got them on the right track."

SG Brown Searching for Consistency

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 8, 2013

Rion Brown has been wearing a pair of orange shoes for the majority of the last two seasons.

Mainly to please his mother, Lisa Brown.

But after a change to a pair of green and white shoes on Wednesday in a game in which he tied a career-high with 22 points in a win over Boston College, he's planning on leaving his orange shoes in his locker Saturday against North Carolina.

"Honestly I think I'm going to wear exactly everything I wore the last game on Saturday," Rion said.

Lisa constantly searches the internet for different styles of orange shoes to give Rion ideas.

"My mother loves orange and she sends me pictures of orange shoes," Rion said. "I can't play in anything but orange shoes."

So what did his mother think of the change of shoes?

"I don't think she noticed it," Rion laughed. "But she probably didn't care after the game I had."

Brown's 22-point outburst came after being held scoreless against N.C. State for the first time this season.

Rion Brown has two 20-point games this season.

"Actually I honestly didn't even realize I didn't score until after the game," Brown said. "I was just so concentrated on playing defense on Tyler Lewis and just sitting over there (on the bench) and seeing what he was doing. My whole mind was on defense. I think I only shot

two times in the game. I just wanted to do something else to help our team win and we came out with the victory."

It was the second time this season has scored 22 points, but he has just one other double-digit scoring output on the year as he's shooting just 38.8 percent from the floor and 26.9 percent from the 3-point line resulting in his scoring average has dipped from 7.2 as a sophomore to 6.6.

It's not the season he expected to have after ending last year on a positive note scoring in double figures in the final four games averaging 14.3 points during the stretch.

"I definitely was expecting to have a great season (this year) after the end of last season, but everything doesn't work out the way you think it is or how it's planned," Brown said. "I know everything happens for a reason and there are a lot of games to be played and I can still have a better year than I did last year."

Brown was in a battle to earn a starting job before the season with senior Trey McKinney-Jones, but McKinney-Jones out-played Brown during preseason practices and early in the season to put a stranglehold on being a starter.

Still, Brown has a vital role on the team as the team's lone guard off the bench after Bishop Daniels left the team in December. Brown receives ample playing time filling in for Shane Larkin, Durand Scott, and McKinney-Jones as he's averaging 22.5 minutes a game.

"We are not real deep at the guard spot so it basically all falls on me," Brown said. "It's a little pressure, but it's fun at the same time knowing that you do a lot of things to really help the team."

When his shots aren't falling, he tries to maintain a positive outlook and looks to help the team in other areas--something head coach Jim Larranaga has praised him for.

"I try to mainly concentrate on rebounding, but Reggie (Johnson) knocks me out of the way for most of them," Brown said. "Just playing defense, try not to let my man score and just helping my teammates, just doing little things like running the floor, getting loose balls, steals, the little things to help us win."

"Rion's been playing progressively better and better," Larranaga said. "I know it's not noticeable to the average fan or even sports guys, but Rion has been doing a good job for us."

Brown has had good weeks in practices, but his shooting ability hasn't always translated in games.

"That's the funny part about it," Brown said. "It doesn't seem like I've been shooting bad just from practice. I barely miss in practice. I've had really two games where it's transferred to the games. I'm trying to get the consistency because we're good now, but we'll be really good if we get the bench scoring."

Brown says he feels at times his footwork is off which affects his shot. He feels more comfortable when he takes a good step into the shot instead of a few small steps that are rushed.

"I think I get a little antsy sometimes," Brown said.

Despite not having the individual season he has envisioned, he's enjoying himself as a key player on the 8th-ranked Miami Hurricanes (18-3, 9-0) who host North Carolina (16-6, 6-3) on Saturday with a 10-game winning streak on the line.

"This is the most fun I've had in my life even though I'm not having the best year," Brown said. "It always feels good to win. They say winning isn't everything, but it definitely is a big part of it."

Hurricanes' Larkin a big hit on basketball team

AP
Steven Wine
Feb. 8, 2013

Shane Larkin was still in grade school when the Cincinnati Reds began grooming him for the big leagues.

The son of a shortstop, Larkin enjoyed hanging out with the Reds at spring training and receiving tutorials on hitting from such experts as Pete Rose and Tony Perez.

Then one year he returned home to Orlando and his Little League coach insisted Larkin's swing was all wrong.

In frustration, Larkin gave up baseball.

"It kind of crushed me," says his father, Hall of Famer Barry Larkin. "I laugh about it now, but I'll tell you, I was bent out of shape about it."

While dad was mad, the Miami Hurricanes are delighted with his decision to focus on basketball.

A sophomore this season, Larkin has blossomed into perhaps the best point guards in the Atlantic Coast Conference. He's a major reason the Hurricanes are ranked No. 8 and take a 9-0 league record into Saturday's game against North Carolina.

"Shane Larkin is probably the key to the team," Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton says.

Following road victories last week against North Carolina State and Virginia Tech, Larkin was chosen the Oscar Robertson National Player of the Week and the ACC Player of the Week.

His season statistics are solid, though not dazzling — 12.8 points, 4.1 assists and 2.3 steals per game, plus 41 percent shooting from 3-point range. But coaches rave about the way he plays defense and runs Miami's

balanced offense.

"I think he's the best point guard in the league because he makes very few mistakes, he knows his role, he has an unselfish spirit and the ball is safe in his hands," Hamilton says.

It's no surprise to Miami coach Jim Larranaga. He was at George Mason when he started recruiting Larkin, a ninth-grader at the time.

"I loved him then. I love him now," Larranaga says. "He's terrific at everything, and he's having an all-conference-caliber year."

It's a breakthrough year for the entire program. The Hurricanes have matched the school record for ACC wins in a season, and the last time they were ranked so high was in 1960.

"We believe in ourselves, and the rankings have furthered that confidence," Larkin says. "The way we're playing, our confidence is through the roof."

Miami is a senior-dominated team steered by a 20-year-old sophomore who plays with the poise of someone who grew up around world-class athletes.

As a youngster, Larkin went to spring training with his father every year and attended half a dozen All-Star Games. He visited Cooperstown last year when his dad was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Tiger Woods made fun of his long hair. Deion Sanders gave him the nickname "SugaShane."

"I met all these famous people," Larkin says. "It was a humbling experience knowing your dad was one of the most famous people in the game."

These days, Barry Larkin enjoys being a fan, and makes the four-hour trip from Orlando to attend most of the Hurricanes home games.

"To watch him interact with people who appreciate the way he plays the game, that's the most fun thing," Barry says. "To see when he walks in someplace on campus after a game and people give him an ovation, and to see people walk up to him and ask him for his autograph, it's so fun to watch that."

Hurricanes on a run of 'firsts'

The Examiner

Paul Borden

Feb. 8, 2013

With nine conference wins heading into Saturday afternoon's home game against North Carolina, the University of Miami (18-3, 9-0) already has matched last season's total for league victories, which were the most since the Hurricanes began competing in the Atlantic Coast Conference in the 2004-05 season.

The 9-7 record in coach Jim Larranaga's first year also was their best finish in the ACC, topping the 8-8 mark of the 2007-08 team.

The best conference record ever for the Hurricanes is the 15-3 mark set by the 1998-99 team when it was competing in the Big East.

Including that season, the Hurricanes managed to get into double digits in conference wins only four times in 13 years in the Big East.

Thus a win over the Tar Heels would give the Hurricanes their first 10-win season in the ACC.

Some other firsts, according to Miami publicists, for the Hurricanes this season:

- A win over a team ranked No. 1 (Duke).
- A No. 8 ranking in the Associated Press poll, matching the program's highest ever.
- Three wins over teams in The Triangle (North Carolina, Duke, North Carolina State).
- Three wins over teams ranked in the Top 25 at the time of the meeting (Michigan State, Duke, N.C. State).
- A win over N.C. State in Raleigh.
- A 9-0 start in league play (previous best was 5-0 in 1997-98).

In addition, an expected full house of 7,972 Saturday will be the third sellout at the BankUnited Center this season, also a program first. The games against Duke and Florida State also sold out this season.

And if the Hurricanes win, they will sweep the Tar Heels for the first time in the program's history as well. They won 68-59 in Chapel Hill on Jan. 10, snapping a 10-game losing streak in the series.

They have beaten the Heels only two other times, on Jan. 4, 2003, in their first game in their on-campus arena and again on Jan. 14, 2006.

In with the old as Miami Hurricanes bank on experience

Palm Beach Post
Jorge Milian
Feb. 8, 2013

The University of Miami has one of the best teams in college basketball. One of the oldest, too.

According to Statsheet.com, the Hurricanes have the 10th most-experienced roster among 347 programs playing Division I this season. On a scale of 1 (freshmen) to 4 (seniors), UM's average of 3.35 is highest among any team from a major conference.

Kenny Kadji, the Hurricanes' leading scorer and a fifth-year senior, will turn 25 on May 19. The NBA's Oklahoma City Thunder start three players younger than Kadji.

UM's starting lineup includes a sixth-year senior (Julian Gamble), two fifth-year seniors (Trey McKinney-Jones, Kadji) and Durand Scott, another senior and four-year starter. Reggie Johnson, the first player off coach Jim Larranaga's bench, is a fifth-year senior.

"The thing that makes them dangerous is that they're old," Maryland coach Mark Turgeon said.

Turgeon and his ACC cohorts have learned that first-hand this season. Heading into Saturday's game (2 p.m., ESPN) against North Carolina at sold-out BankUnited Center, the eighth-ranked Hurricanes (18-3, 9-0) are on a 10-game winning streak, lead the conference standings by two games and are threatening to break into the Top 5 for the first time ever. What has set the Hurricanes apart, opposing coaches say, is a mental edge that comes with experience. Unlike younger teams that become flustered in tight spots or come apart under the weight of increasing expectations, Miami maintains its composure.

In back-to-back road wins last week against Virginia Tech and North Carolina State, UM

fell behind by double digits in hostile environments but never resorted to poor shot selection or panic. Miami came back to win both games.

"We don't get rattled too easily," said Johnson, the 6-foot-10, 292-pound center whose tip-in with 0.8 seconds beat N.C. State last Saturday. "Been there, done that."

The victories at Virginia Tech and N.C. State are part of a perfect 5-0 ACC record on the road for UM.

How impressive is that? The 11 other ACC teams had combined to win 10 conference road games coming into this week.

Before this season, the Hurricanes had never won more than four away games in the ACC during a single season.

"They're coming together and making everybody pay for what they've learned," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said after his team was routed by UM, 71-47, on Jan. 27. "They've gained a lot of wisdom and savvy from the challenges they've had to overcome. Now, they're a mature team that's surprising everybody except me."

Hamilton aside, the Hurricanes are surely the nation's biggest surprise. A month ago, UM was unranked and considered a fringe NCAA Tournament possibility. On Friday, CBS Sports.com projected Miami as a No. 1 seed for the NCAA Tournament.

While UM may be built around seniors, its success would be impossible without sophomore point guard Shane Larkin. The 20-year-old was named a finalist this week for the Cousy Award, which goes to the nation's best point guard. With Larkin running the show, the Hurricanes rank 11th nationally with 10.8 turnovers per game and have committed the fifth fewest total turnovers (227) in the country. Larkin said playing on a veteran team is "re-

ally comforting because I know I'm out there with dudes that have been through the ACC a couple of times, through tough games. It's definitely a calming factor."

The combination has been unbeatable of late. "You have a team that has an incredible amount of confidence and a team, that if they do the little things, they could be really, really good," said Boston College coach Steve Donahue after his team was trounced, 72-50, on Tuesday by UM. "They're talented, older and they don't have a lot of weaknesses."

Skeptics wrong, coach is right on guard Shane Larkin

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Feb. 8, 2013

The kid was scrawny. No taller than 5-9 and maybe 150 pounds with his high tops on. He had curly hair and a baby face that made him appear even younger than his 15 years.

Although his father was a Major League Baseball legend, his was not among the names on the college basketball coaches' watch lists as they gathered in a gym in Orlando to scout recruits at an AAU tournament in the summer of 2009. But Shane Larkin, son of Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin, is the kid who immediately captured the eye of Jim Larranaga, then the coach at George Mason University.

Larranaga is now coaching the eighth-ranked University of Miami Hurricanes, and is delighted that, through a bit of luck and a circuitous route, Larkin eventually became his point guard. That scrawny kid is now a college sophomore, and on Thursday was named one of 12 finalists for the Bob Cousy Award, given to the top point guard in the nation.

He is a big reason the Canes are favored to beat perennial power North Carolina on Saturday afternoon in front of a national TV audience and a sold-out BankUnited Center.

"He made a defensive play in a 3-on-1 fast-break situation," Larranaga recalled, of the first time he laid eyes on Larkin. "When you've got a small point guard back on defense and three great athletes running at him, you think they're at the advantage. But I saw [Larkin] fake at the dribbler, who was gonna try to make a no-look pass.

"Shane had already probably evaluated that guy, knew he liked to make no-look passes. ... Guy looked right, threw left, Shane picked the pass off, pitched it down the floor, and his team got a layup. For a kid just out of 10th grade to have that kind of defensive presence, you don't see that very often.

"On offense, he was making high-speed layups going right, high-speed layups going left, shooting threes, and distributing the ball like a real point guard does. First time I saw him, I said, 'That's the guy. That's who we need.'"

Larranaga's longtime assistant coach Eric Konkol felt the same way.

"He was really small and he was really skinny,"

Konkol said. "But he had a real quick burst, and was very clever. The game was in slow motion for him at times. He could see things happen before they occurred, and he had a great feel for when his teammates were open."

Larranaga continued to keep tabs on Larkin, and was surprised — but relieved — that many coaches doubted his potential. "I'd ask my coach friends, 'Hey, what do you think of Shane?' They'd say, 'Eh, he's all right.' And I felt like, 'Wow, maybe there's a shot we could get Shane at George Mason.'"

That August, Larranaga called Larkin and offered a scholarship. It was his first offer. Larkin was sitting poolside at his family's Orlando home when the call came. "I got so excited I slipped into the pool and my pants got all wet," Larkin said, laughing. "I ran in the house dripping, and yelled, 'Mom! I got my first offer!'"

CLOSE-KNIT FAMILY

More offers were to come, from Clemson, Boston College, Florida State, South Florida and Central Florida. The Clemson coach, Oliver Purnell, left for DePaul, and Larkin chose to go play for him. But after a month in Chicago, Larkin started doubting his decision and feeling homesick.

Larkin is extremely close with his family. He has two sisters, Cymber, a high school lacrosse player and aspiring singer, and Brielle D'Shea (in honor of Shea Stadium, where Barry Larkin liked to play), a cosmetology student. He is also very close with a former high school teammate, Isaac Lane, who lived at the Larkin house and whom Shane considers a brother.

He has a special relationship with his mother, Lisa, and makes no apologies. With his father gone so much during his Major League Baseball days, Shane was the only male in the house and was protective of his mom. Still is. The feeling is mutual. He worries when she drives alone from Orlando to Miami for UM games. She reminds him to gargle with salt water when his throat hurts.

Larkin knew his mom worried about him being so far away, and that made him worry for her. There were also undisclosed medical issues in the family, and Larkin was able to get a release from DePaul. Larranaga had just been hired at UM, so it was a match made in heaven.

"My mom's a worrier, to the point that she

sometimes panics, and it's better for my health and hers if I'm a four-hour drive from Orlando," he told The Miami Herald last year. "I really liked Coach Larranaga, so it all worked out for the best."

Lisa Larkin feels her son was meant to be a Hurricane. The family has attended every home game but one this season.

"We had some complications when he went to DePaul, and we did a lot of praying," she said by phone Thursday. "It was a really, really tough time for our family. Barry wanted Shane to stay at DePaul and be a man of his word. But Shane really felt it would be best to move back to Florida. We feel very, very blessed that it worked out the way it did."

ESPN announcers have been gushing over Larkin all season, as have opposing coaches. "I think Shane Larkin is the best point guard in the league," said FSU coach Leonard Hamilton. "He makes very few mistakes, has an unselfish spirit, the ball's safe in his hands, and he plays like a coach on the floor even though he's only a sophomore."

FINDING MOTIVATION

Barry Larkin is enjoying watching his son in the spotlight. He knows it wasn't always easy for his son to live in his shadow. "People put Shane down, said he'd never make it big, said he benefited from my name, and I know how hard that was for him to hear. I told him of my perils in my career, the critics I faced. I told Shane to use it all for motivation."

He heeded his father's advice.

"I had several of the recruiting gurus telling me I couldn't play at this level, that I was a low DI player, so coming out here now and proving them wrong is great," Shane Larkin said. "They said that I wasn't a point guard, all I do is look for my own shot. I was too small. I wasn't athletic enough. I wouldn't be able to defend at this level. I wasn't strong enough. I didn't have the body to play at this level. Everything they could say about somebody who couldn't play at this level, they said it."

But Larranaga always believed in the kid. And his hunch paid off.

Larkin happy to prove 'recruiting gurus' wrong

Sun Sentinel
Michael Casagrande
Feb. 8, 2013

Sitting courtside at an Orlando area AAU tournament, Jim Larranaga was instantly smitten.

There was a high school freshman point guard making moves and the George Mason coach saw potential. So he felt out the competition. What did the other college coaches think of this smallish guard from Orlando with a famous last name?

"It really surprised me the doubts they had," Larranaga said as he began to smile. "And that also motivated me."

Shane Larkin's first scholarship offer came from Larranaga's Patriots. He ultimately blossomed in the Miami program, where Larranaga took over as head coach. The Dr. Phillips High product has been a catalyst for No. 8 Miami's 10-game winning streak and 18-3 record entering the 2 p.m. Saturday visit from North Carolina.

But even as he made the list of 12 finalists for the Bob Cousy Award, it's the doubters that continue to motivate Larkin.

He references "recruiting gurus" who questioned all aspects of his game. They had a long list of reasons he wouldn't make it. Larkin lists them with ease.

"Just that I wasn't a point guard. All I do is look for my own shot," said Larkin, who averages 12.8 points and 4.1 assists a game. "I was too small. I wasn't athletic enough. I wouldn't be able to defend at this level. I wasn't strong enough. I didn't have the body to play at this level. Everything they could say about somebody who couldn't play at this level, they said it."

He grew from 5 feet 8 as a high school junior to a 5-11 college sophomore. Arriving in Coral

Gables in 2011 at 160 pounds, Larkin added about 16 pounds of mostly muscle.

Being the son of Hall of Fame baseball player Barry Larkin also fed the detractors. Shane Larkin can remember everything people said about him.

"Growing up, they said I couldn't do that because of who my dad was," Larkin said. "He bought everything. He bought my success. He did everything. So I always kept that in the back of my mind and made me push hard and now that it's being recognized, it's a great feeling."

It's not, however, like Shane Larkin came out of the clear blue to emerge as one of the country's premier point guards. He was rated 16th nationally among high school point guards by Rivals.com, 10 spots ahead of fellow Cousy Award finalist Trey Burke of Michigan. But he remembers going from a 4-star prospect on Scout.com's board to a low 3-star.

"Ever since I was younger, people always talked about me because of who my father was," Larkin said. "They told me I should be playing baseball, that's the only sport I'd be successful in. I pretty much had to believe in myself and the people close to me believed in me as well."

He still hears the doubters, but there's more and more support standing in their way. Larkin was named Oscar Robertson national player of the week after averaging 19 points, four assists and four steals during road wins at Virginia Tech and N.C. State.

Former Duke point guard and ESPN analyst Jay Williams can't say enough about Larkin's potential.

"The one thing that you have to appreciate about Shane is that he's fearless," Williams said. "And he takes pride on the defensive end. A lot of players allow their offense to dictate

their energy on the defensive end. For him, he's so quick laterally, it's actually a pleasure to watch to him try to lock somebody down."

It was that defensive skill that caught Larranaga's eye that day in Orlando. He remembers the exact play when he knew this young guard was special. On the wrong end of a three-on-one break, Larkin made a move that Larranaga can still picture.

He faked at the dribbler, and then intercepted a no-look pass he anticipated.

"For a kid that just finished the ninth grade to have that defensive understanding, that kind of defensive presence where you not only anticipate what that guy might do, you're actually leading into him what you want him to do," Larranaga said. "You don't see that very often."

He's just glad the other coaches didn't see it, either.

Basketball Buzz: 2/8

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Feb. 8, 2013

The 8th-ranked Miami Hurricanes held practice Thursday in preparation for their game Saturday against North Carolina.

Miami (18-3, 9-0), winners of 10 straight, hosts North Carolina (16-6, 6-3) at 2 p.m., which will be televised on ESPN. The game will be sold out for the third time this season.

"Everybody is hyped," coach Jim Larranaga said. "It's what college basketball is all about. We're gearing up. Everybody is talking about March Madness, that is the most exciting time of the year, but for us, the most important thing is preparing for the next game and there is no greater opponent than North Carolina. They're perennially one of the top teams in the country. They always have tremendous of physical talent—speed, quickness, and jumping ability. And I know our guys from North Carolina (Julian Gamble and Reggie Johnson) are always pumped to play the Heels."

Miami beat North Carolina 68-59 in Chapel Hill on Jan. 10. The Tar Heels are 6-1 since the last meeting. James Michael McAdoo, who leads the team in scoring at 15.3 a game, is averaging 17.5 points during the stretch.

"They were a young team that is getting better (when we played them last time) and they are much-improved," Larranaga said. "They are playing with a great deal of confidence right now. They just blew out Wake Forest. It's going to be great competition."

The Hurricanes have made a meteoric rise in the rankings the past three weeks entering in at No. 25, which was the first time the team had been ranked in three years. Then moving up to No. 14 and then No. 8 to tie their highest ranking ever as they were also eighth in 1960.

"We understand this is going to be a special season for us," Johnson said. "No one is too high right now. Every game can be a trap game from the media outlook so we just continue to deal with (the attention) and play ball.

That's what we came to do and we know what we have to do at the end of the day."

News & Notes

■ SG Trey McKinney-Jones was held out of practice Thursday with a sprained left thumb and was in a walking boot on his left foot. McKinney-Jones played through the injuries on Wednesday, but was just 1 for 7 from the floor. His status is unknown for Saturday although it does not appear the injuries will keep him out unless he sustained further damage.

Erik Swoope

■ SG Rion Brown could receive more playing time with McKinney-Jones' ailments. Brown responded Wednesday with a career-high 22 points on 7-of-11 shooting including 5 of 7 from behind the 3-point line. "It always adds a little extra when you a teammate down who really produces for you and you know you're going to need something so (my performance) definitely had something to do with it," Brown said.

■ PG Shane Larkin has been named one of 12 finalists for the Bob Cousy Collegiate Point Guard of the Year Award. The 5-foot-11 sophomore is averaging 12.8 points, 4.2 rebounds, and 4.1 assists per game while shooting 47 percent from the floor. "I think it's tremendous (for Shane to be named a finalist)," Larranaga said. "I think it's very-well deserved. He's a key player and he's just getting better. His ceiling has not been reached yet. There are some guys they're not going to get much better, but in Shane's case he can still take it up another notch or two."

■ SF Erik Swoope looked sharp in Thursday's practice as he showed off his explosiveness in a number of drills. Then, during a 2-on-2 drill with the post players, Swoope was scoring inside and out as he was paired with Raphael Akpejori on the third team. Minutes have been hard to come by for Swoope this season, but when he's on the court he provides the team with steady defense and does the little things on the court to help the team.

■ SG Durand Scott is 1-5 against the Tar Heels in his career averaging 16.2 points, 4.5 rebounds, and 2.7 assists. He scored a career-high 29 points against North Carolina as a freshman in his first game against the Tar Heels and has scored in double figures each time. "It is always tougher (to beat a team twice in the season) because the other team will always come back for revenge," Scott said. "Knowing that we beat them already we know they're going to come back here and try to leave with a win. So we have to be prepared and use the first game as an example for this upcoming game."

■ The Hurricanes have the 8th-most experienced team in the country according to KenPom.com. Seniors Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, Reggie Johnson, Trey McKinney-Jones and Julian Gamble have accounted for 67.5 percent of the points scored for Miami this season.

■ C Tonye Jekiri still had his left wrist taped during Thursday's practice, but it doesn't seem to bother him as he's played with it for a while now. Jekiri is averaging 0.9 points and 1.5 rebounds in 6.9 minutes this season.

■ North Carolina ranks third in the nation in tempo according to KenPom.com. "They run," Johnson said. "Running teams create a fast-paced game and the thing about our team is we can play slow ball and fast ball so we've got to meet that challenge and we have to box them out because they guard everybody really, really well. ... Just get back and rebound and defend the 3."

■ Former Hurricane Jack McClinton is back in Miami after injuring his knee as he's currently playing in the NBDL with Fort Wayne. McClinton has been paying close attention to the team this season and thinks highly of them. "I can't name five better teams in the country," McClinton said. "They have everything and when the tournament comes around, coach Larragana will have them ready because he's been to the Final Four."

UNC at Miami: What to watch

ESPN.com
Robbi Pickeral
Feb. 8, 2013

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. -- Besides the return of big man Reggie Johnson, who had been sidelined because of a broken thumb, there's not a whole lot different about Miami since North Carolina lost to the Hurricanes on Jan. 10, Tar Heels coach Roy Williams said.

Well, except this: "They're better now than we were when we played them," he said. "I hope we're a heck of a lot better than when we played them the last time."

They'll need to be.

The experienced, deep Hurricanes were still a team in question (how good are they? Can they win without Johnson?) when they dropped the Tar Heels to 0-2 in league play at the Smith Center last month. Since that victory -- UM's third straight at the time -- they've kept on winning, risen to No. 8 in the Associated Press poll, and are the only undefeated team in ACC play.

The Tar Heels, meanwhile, have won six of seven, but even UNC's players concede they haven't quite put all the pieces together yet. Now is the time, though, because after playing at the Hurricanes, they face another top-10 team on the road: No. 4 Duke, on Wednesday.

Williams said there will be "100 things" that will determine his team's success, including "our focus, our sense of urgency, whether the ball goes in the basket. The way I look at it, it's nine games like that. I can't remember what the third game is after that, but that's a game I'll worry about. I don't remember what the fourth game is, but I know it's a game I'm going to worry about. Because we're in the second half of conference play, and it's a pretty good league."

A few things to watch during the game, which tips off at 2 p.m. ET on Saturday:

JOHNSON

The 6-foot-10, 292-pound Miami center hasn't returned to his double-double form since he returned from his injury earlier-than-expected five games ago. But he has made an impact. He scored the game-winning tip-in to keep his team's streak alive at then-No. 19 NC State last weekend, and has been a load to handle on the boards, averaging 7.6 rebounds since he came back.

Former Tar Heels forward Tyler Zeller, now a rookie in the NBA, used to say that Johnson was the most exhausting player to face in the ACC, because of his size and aggression. Thus, he'll be a load for UNC's thinner front line, especially because Miami has so many other big guys (Julian Gamble, Kenny Kadji) to deal with.

JAMES MICHAEL MCADOO

UNC's sophomore forward has been more aggressive and confident of late, and it has showed up on the stat sheet. He's posted four double-doubles over his past four games, is averaging 21.5 points over his past two outings, and Williams wants it to continue.

"I think he is getting better," Williams said. "He's concentrating even better on his shot. ... Most of James Michael's [problems] are when you go too fast, shoot it too quickly. When you make shots, that makes you a little more enthused on the other end, also."

ETC...

The Tar Heels have beaten the Hurricanes five straight times in Miami. One key: UNC has out-rebounded UM in all five games. Entering Saturday, the Tar Heels lead the league in offensive rebounds, at 13 per game. ... Only two other teams other than North Carolina and Duke have ever started ACC play 9-0: Virginia

in 1980-81 and NC State in 1972-73. ... Miami is the eighth-most experienced team in the country, according to KenPom.com. The Hurricanes average 2.39 years of experience per player. They're the most experienced team among Power 6 teams. ... In case you missed it, the Tar Heels will be wearing special Nike Hyper Elite road uniforms, featuring the interlocking N-C on the front of their jerseys.

Larkin One of Nation's Best PGs

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Feb. 8, 2013

Shane Larkin remembers it all.

He wasn't a point guard. All he does is look for his own shot. He's too small. He wasn't athletic enough. He wouldn't be able to defend at this level. He wasn't strong enough. He didn't have the body to play at this level.

"Everything that you could say about somebody at this level, they said it," Larkin recalls.

Larkin remembers one recruiting analyst in particular who told him something at a camp that has stuck with him.

"He said something to me that everybody else was doing, but he singled me out and I really didn't like it," Larkin said. "It's whatever, I don't hold any grudges. That's really one thing that I keep in the back of my mind that really drives me."

Larkin didn't want to call out the analyst, but is fully aware of who he is.

"I have a pretty photographic memory so I know the dude's face, when he said it, what article he said it in, and I can look it up at any time," Larkin said.

The criticisms were partly due to the fact that Larkin was just pushing 5-foot-9 at the time and close to 160 pounds. Larkin had a very successful career at Orlando Dr. Phillips as a two-time Class 6A first-team All-State performer and after growing a couple inches before his senior year, he averaged 18.8 points, 6.4 assists, 6.3 rebounds, and 3.5 steals a game in his final season.

He originally signed with DePaul and attended school there in the summer before transferring to Miami before the start of the 2011-12 season due to a medical issue. Larkin picked Miami over Florida State, Boston College, Clemson, and UCF among others.

Shane Larkin has a PER of 20.32.

It was a big pick-up for Jim Larranaga at the time as he was entering his first season in Coral Gables after 16 seasons at George Mason. While at George Mason, Larranaga offered Larkin a scholarship as a ninth-grader.

Larranaga remembers a play where Larkin was back on defense facing a 3-on-1 fast break when Larkin faked towards the ballhandler, who then threw a no-look pass, but Larkin was anticipating the play and picked it off, which opened the eyes of Larranaga.

And much to Larranaga's delight, other coaches he came across weren't very high on Larkin.

"It really surprised me the doubts they had," Larranaga recalled. "That also motivated me because I thought, 'Wow, if these guys thought that way, maybe there's a shot we could get him at George Mason.'"

After becoming the starting point guard at Miami midway through the season last year, but still deferring to upperclassmen, Larkin has emerged as one of the top point guards in the country.

Earlier this week, Larkin was named as one of 12 finalists for the Bob Cousy Collegiate Point Guard of the Year Award as he's helped lead the Hurricanes to an 18-3 record and a perfect 9-0 in ACC play.

"It means everything," Larkin said of the recognition. "All of the hard work you put in is finally getting recognized. Coming out of high school I wasn't one of the major prospects that people were looking at. I had several of the recruiting gurus telling me I couldn't play at this level. I was a low D-I player so just coming out now and proving them wrong I always got that in the back of my mind just to prove them wrong. Others said I couldn't do this or do that and growing up they said I couldn't do this because of who my dad was—he bought everything and he bought my success. I've always kept that in the back of mind and it just made me push harder. Now that it's being recognized, it's a great feeling."

As good as Larkin has been this season averaging 12.8 points, 4.2 rebounds, and 4.1 assists a game, Larranaga believes he can still get better.

Shane Larkin back in 2010 when he scored 53 points in an AAU game.

"He's a key player and he's just getting better," Larranaga said. "His ceiling has not been reached yet. There are some guys they're not going to get much better, but in Shane's case he can still take it up another notch or two."

Larranaga believes Larkin's improvements can come on the offensive end as a more productive player although Larkin has been highly efficient shooting 47.2 percent from the floor, 41.8 from 3, and 72.1 from the free-throw line.

"He's a very good scorer, a terrific 3-point shooter, a terrific free-throw shooter, terrific lay-up maker, and a terrific passer, but in terms of production he scores between 10 and 15 points a game," Larranaga said. "But his 25 points last week against Virginia Tech, I believe very honestly that he could be doing that or close to that in just about every game. That's how good he is."

Although Larranaga believes Larkin could be scoring more, he has no issues with the way he is playing this season.

"He needs to do what he's been doing—being aggressive when he thinks it's necessary," Larranaga said. "Sometimes a point guard especially has to distribute the ball and get the balance in our defense. Our big guys need to touch the ball a lot too. If Shane is scoring more it's because we need it more and I'm very, very comfortable because he's very smart and chooses his spots very wisely and when he thinks it's time, he goes to work."

Senior center Reggie Johnson has been impressed with Larkin's development into being a key player for the Hurricanes.

"Shane is a pass-first point guard," Johnson said. "He's young, but he plays like he's been in the league four years already. He's a good guy to play with because he makes getting baskets easy for a big man. That's what Chris Paul does well—making easy baskets for his teammates. Shane is a special player, he continues to get better, and will continue to do well in the ACC for upcoming years."

Larkin has also received praise from opposing head coaches, most recently Boston College's Steve Donahue following Larkin's modest 10-point, 5-assist night in a 22-point win for Miami.

"I thought Larkin, once again, did a tremendous job all game long," Donahue said. "He just found open guys. He made the pass to get to the next guy and obviously they made a lot of shots."

Donahue also believes playing with a senior-laden team has helped his development.

"Playing with such a veteran group has given Shane the ability to relax and play his game," Donahue said. "Last year I didn't think he was ready to be the point guard. I think everyone realizes now that he's the guy. We recruited him. He's a very talented kid, he's playing with great confidence, but it's pretty good to have these four (seniors) around you at all times. But to me, he's the key. It's hard to guard them if they're moving the ball and he's making the right decision and they're willing to share it and that's what they're doing right now. It's really snowballing into a positive way for them."

Larkin will look to lead Miami to another win over North Carolina on Saturday after beating the Tar Heels 68-59 in Chapel Hill last month.

"It was huge (to win there)," Larkin said. "You don't regularly go into the Dean Dome and beat North Carolina. It was huge, but that wasn't where we wanted peak. We wanted to strive to get better and I believe that game was a stepping stone of where we wanted to go and that's how we treated it. It was definitely exciting and showed what we're capable of, but we still wanted to keep pushing to do more."

Both teams have played well since their last meeting with Miami going 7-0 and North Carolina 6-1. Although Larkin knows it's tough to beat a team twice in a season, he's confident the team can stick to the game plan and beat UNC again.

"It's definitely tougher beating a team the second time around," Larkin said, "knowing that they know what you're trying to do, but I think if we come with the same game plan we had up there—and we didn't even have Reggie—and with Reggie back we can put the ball inside even more. Pretty much if we do the game plan, stick to it, and play defense the way we've been playing we should do pretty good."

As the Hurricanes continue their quest to their first ACC title, they'll look to Larkin to help lead the way.

And Larkin will remain confident in his abilities regardless of the critics.

"I just always believed in myself," Larkin said. "I pretty much had to because everybody since I was younger talked down to me because of who my father was and telling me that I should be playing baseball and it's the only sport I'd be successful in. I pretty much had to believe in myself and the people close to me believed in me as well. But I've always had people who doubted me and that's driven me to be better and better. I'm going to continue to do that because people still doubt me and that's going to continue to drive me to be a better player."

"Spike Lee" of Cane fans keeps volume turned up

CaneSport.com
Matt Shodell
Feb. 8 2013

Sebastian has some competition.

His name? Neal Heller.

The father of junior walk-on guard Justin Heller, Neal waves his arms frantically up and down to pump up fans, barks at referees and constantly paces around his courtside seats opposite the Hurricane bench.

Center Reggie Johnson calls him the "Spike Lee" of Cane fans.

"He stays on the referee nonstop," Johnson said. "He says things to the ref and I say 'Man, I'm glad he's not a player because he'd be put out right now.'"

The fans ... and students ... love it.

A snapshot of his growing following: More than half his Twitter followers are Cane students, and an hour before the Florida State game the student section began chanting "Mr. Heller."

When he looked over they were waving a Fathead with his oversized face. It was held up throughout the game.

"It was a pretty big one," Neal says. "I had texts from around the country of people watching the game (on TV), saying 'Is that you?'"

Justin provided the students with dad's photo.

"He set me up," Neal says with a laugh.

Larranaga jokes the Fathead is proof Neal is "big-time."

The team could easily splice together a Neal Heller highlight tape after the season - he's constantly showing up on game video.

"We laugh about it when we watch film, see Justin's dad jumping up and down when a play happens," center Julian Gamble said.

Larranaga adds "Every once in a while we'll say something - like Justin got into a game and passed the ball and I said 'Your dad wouldn't have passed that, he would have shot that.'"

Heller is a UM alumni, and players say he's like part of the team.

"He comes and high fives us going through warm-ups," Gamble said. "He's unconditionally there for us."

Soft-spoken off the court, Heller says there's a secret to how he transforms from regular citizen to maniacal ultra-fan.

"When I have to battle traffic from Boca or traffic from Broward where I work, that gets me going," he said. "By the time I get down there I'm stressed out already."

The refs sometimes bear the brunt. He says he's never been kicked out of a game but may have come close once or twice.

"I know the refs not to talk to," Heller said. "The referees know me by now. I don't curse or anything, just ask them about calls."

At the Michigan State game, Heller was talking with Cane players nearby to get them pumped up, and one of the refs approached him.

"He says, 'Oh, I see you're a coach too,'" Heller said. "I said 'Yeah, and I do some reffing as well.' He went down the court and came back and I questioned the call and he said 'You're a much better coach than referee.' It's all in good fun."

Justin says he loves how his father roots for the team.

"It's fun - my teammates love it," Justin said. "In high school he was a little loud, I told him I didn't really like it, he stopped it. Now in the college environment I'm not going to tell him to stop."

"Justin has gotten comfortable seeing my craziness from time to time," Neal adds.

Justin has his own role to play for the team. While he's played only a few minutes in seven blowouts, he and the other walk-ons and bench players prepare the starters in practice every day. They push them so much that there are times the "green" team, as they are called, have beaten the starting "white" team.

"Coach L gets mad (when the green team wins), always wants the starting group to show up," Heller said.

Justin's most memorable moment this season wasn't seeing his father's Fathead.

It was when he scored his first career points against Charlotte with 20 seconds remaining in a 77-46 home victory.

"That was the best moment since I've been here - I got fouled, missed my two free throws, and then I was so mad about that the next time I got the ball I just dribbled up the court and scored.

"The place went crazy, my teammates were jumping up and down, jumped on me after the game. I felt like I was the star that night. It was the best moment."

Neal says when Justin scored "It was one of the great moments of my life. As crazy as that sounds, I know it was a great night for him and what made it great was the reaction of his teammates - they mobbed him.

"And you know who I got a call from at 10:30 the following day? Coach Larranaga called to congratulate me and told me no one deserves that more than Justin because of how hard he works. It was very touching."

Heller played AAU ball in high school but was mostly a backup on a talented high school team. He walked on at Miami after competing with players in pickup games his freshman summer.

"I've always been a Miami fan, and that summer I participated in the open gym, fit in and stuck with the team," Heller said.

Now during games Heller sometimes takes his eyes off the court to watch his father.

"My teammates will be like 'Look at your dad, look at your dad' - then I'll see what he's doing," Heller said.

So which of them is the bigger Miami fan?

"Well I guess he's more loud, verbal - he's a pretty big fan," Justin says.

Entering the halfway point of the ACC season, Justin and dad are looking forward to big things the rest of the way.

"It's become an amazing experience for him," Neal said. "This season could be a very special season. And right now it's turning into a once-in-a-lifetime experience for him and me."

Larkin is making famous father proud

AP
Steven Wine
Feb 7, 2013

Shane Larkin was still in grade school when the Cincinnati Reds began grooming him for the big leagues.

The son of a shortstop, Larkin enjoyed hanging out with the Reds at spring training and receiving tutorials on hitting from such experts as Pete Rose and Tony Perez.

Then one year he returned home to Orlando, Fla., and his Little League coach insisted Larkin's swing was all wrong.

In frustration, Larkin gave up baseball.

"It kind of crushed me," says his father, Hall of Famer Barry Larkin. "I laugh about it now, but I'll tell you, I was bent out of shape about it."

While dad was mad, the Miami Hurricanes are delighted with Larkin's decision to focus on basketball.

A sophomore this season, Larkin has blossomed into perhaps the best point guard in the Atlantic Coast Conference. He's a major reason the Hurricanes are ranked No. 8 and take a 9-0 league record into Saturday's game against North Carolina.

"Shane Larkin is probably the key to the team," Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton says. Following road victories last week over North Carolina State and Virginia Tech, Larkin was chosen the Oscar Robertson national player of the week and the ACC player of the week.

His season statistics are solid, though not dazzling — 12.8 points, 4.1 assists and 2.3 steals per game, plus 41-percent shooting from 3-point range. But coaches rave about the way he plays defense and runs Miami's balanced offense.

"I think he's the best point guard in the league because he makes very few mistakes, he knows his role, he has an unselfish spirit and the ball is safe in his hands," Hamilton says. "He plays like a coach on the floor. He'll defer, but you can't back off of him, and he's confident enough that when he needs to make things happen, he's capable of it."

Larkin contributes in ways big and small. In

back-to-back wins over then-No. 1 Duke and Florida State, the 5-foot-10½ guard totaled 19 rebounds. At Virginia Tech, he blocked consecutive shots. Against North Carolina State, he made five steals. And in Wednesday's victory over Boston College, he had five assists and no turnovers.

Such performances are no surprise to Miami coach Jim Larranaga. He was at George Mason when he started recruiting Larkin, a ninth-grader at the time.

"I loved him then. I love him now," Larranaga says. "He's terrific at everything, and he's having an all-conference-caliber year."

It's a breakthrough year for the entire program. The Hurricanes have already matched the school record for ACC wins in a season, and the last time they were ranked so high was in 1960.

Saturday's game is a sellout, the third this year for a program that historically struggles to attract attention.

"We believe in ourselves, and the rankings have furthered that confidence," Larkin says. "The way we're playing, our confidence is through the roof. Hopefully we can just keep it going."

Miami is a senior-dominated team steered by a 20-year-old sophomore who plays with the poise of someone who grew up around world-class athletes.

As a youngster, Larkin went to spring training with his father every year and attended half a dozen All-Star Games. He visited Cooperstown last year when his dad was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Tiger Woods made fun of his long hair. Deion Sanders gave him the nickname SugaShane.

"I met all these famous people," Larkin says. "It was a humbling experience knowing your dad was one of the most famous people in the game."

These days, Barry Larkin enjoys being a fan, and makes the four-hour trip from Orlando to attend most of the Hurricanes home games. He went to the ACC tournament last year, and to Hawaii in December when the team played there in a holiday tournament.

Larkin is proud of the way his only son has handled success and attention.

"To watch him interact with people who appreciate the way he plays the game, that's the most fun thing," Larkin says. "To see when he walks in someplace on campus after a game and people give him an ovation, and to see people walk up to him and ask him for his autograph, it's so fun to watch that."

In the Larkin family, athletic notoriety is almost a given. Shane's two sisters have both excelled at lacrosse. Three of his dad's brothers played a college sport, including Uncle Byron, the leading scorer in Xavier hoops history.

Shane is grateful for his bloodlines.

"I thank my dad — and my mom," Shane says. "If I don't thank her, she'll get on me."

Barry notes that his wife, Lisa, was indeed an excellent dancer. And he says Shane's success involves more than mere good genes.

"Growing up the son of a major league player, Shane used to get so incredibly upset when people said he was only given opportunities because of who his father was or because he had money or whatever," Barry says. "Those things motivated him, and I think Shane does an incredible job of working really hard."

Barry says he still wonders how good his son might have been at baseball. But Shane says his decision to focus on basketball went beyond frustration with his Little League coach.

"I was a hyper kid, so I didn't want to play baseball and wait for the ball to come to me," Shane says. "I wanted to play a sport where I could go get the ball."

"When I was young, it was fun being in the locker room and shagging balls in the outfield in spring training," he says. "But I couldn't keep my attention on the games for more than 30 minutes. I would sit there with my Game Boy the whole game."

Now the sport has changed, and so have the Larkins' roles. Shane's glad to be playing, and Dad happily does the watching.

Wooden Watch: King's POY ballot

ESPN.com
Jason King
Feb. 7, 2013

With one month remaining in the regular season, it only seems fitting that the leading candidates for the Wooden Award hail from the country's best league.

Michigan's Trey Burke and Indiana's Victor Oladipo have represented their schools and the Big Ten in grand fashion all season. But their reputations have been enhanced even more in recent days thanks to All-American-type performances in mammoth victories that commanded the attention of the nation.

Three days after Oladipo propelled Indiana to an 81-73 victory over Michigan, the Wolverines and Burke bounced back with a 76-74 overtime win against Ohio State. Burke made a handful of key defensive stops down the stretch to help secure the win.

Burke and Oladipo haven't completely separated themselves from the pack, but ranking them No. 1 and 2, respectively, at the moment was a no-brainer. Here is my latest ballot.

Trey Burke, Michigan -- Burke made two huge defensive plays (a strip and a block) on Ohio State standout guard Aaron Craft in the final minute of overtime Tuesday to help preserve a 76-74 victory. He also scored 18 points and dished out six assists.

Victor Oladipo, Indiana -- No one would've thought before the season that Oladipo, a junior, would be on this list. But one of the nation's most well-rounded players (14 points, 5.8 rebounds, 2.3 steals and 2.5 assists) couldn't be more deserving.

Doug McDermott, Creighton -- The one-time leader for the Wooden Award averages 23.3 points, but he was limited to only eight points in Wednesday's 19-point setback against Indiana State. The loss was the third in six games for McDermott's squad.

Mason Plumlee, Duke -- The senior forward is averaging 19.8 points in his past three games

and 17.6 points on the season. He's also snaring 10.8 boards and swatting 1.7 shots per contest. His play in the absence of Ryan Kelly (foot) has been huge.

Kelly Olynyk, Gonzaga -- This could be Mark Few's best team yet at Gonzaga, and Olynyk -- a 7-foot center -- is the main reason. He's averaging a team-high 17.9 points and seven rebounds while shooting 64.3 percent from the field.

On the cusp (listed alphabetically):

Jahii Carson, Arizona State -- The Sun Devils' freshman point guard should be considered for Pac-12 Player of the Year. He's scoring 18.3 points and dishing out 5.3 assists for Arizona State (17-5, 6-3), which was picked to finish 11th in the Pac-12.

Kenny Kadji, Miami -- The 6-foot-11 Florida transfer is one of the main reasons Miami is undefeated in the ACC and hasn't lost since Dec. 25. Kadji ranks second on the team in points (13.4) and rebounds (6.8).

Ben McLemore, Kansas -- The nation's most talented freshman missed all six of his 3-point attempts in Wednesday's shocking loss at TCU. McLemore is too nice at times. He needs to demand the ball.

Nerlens Noel, Kentucky -- The freshman is averaging a pedestrian 10.6 points per a game, but Noel is excelling in other areas. His 9.5 rebounds per contest is clearly a team high and his average of 4.6 blocks leads the nation. No player in the country is better defensively.

Otto Porter, Georgetown -- The Hoyas are on a four-game winning streak, and Porter is the main reason. He's averaging 17.8 points during that span. Not many big men in the country are as versatile as Porter, who brings it every night.

Marcus Smart, Oklahoma State -- The freshman guard had 25 points, nine rebounds and five steals in Saturday's upset of Kansas at

Allen Fieldhouse. He struggled offensively against Baylor two nights later but still had eight rebounds, seven assists and five steals

Russ Smith, Louisville -- The junior guard is averaging 17.1 points during the Cardinals' current three-game win streak. If Smith continues to play at a high level, Louisville still has an excellent opportunity to win the Big East title.

Deshaun Thomas, Ohio State -- Thomas, who has been on his list all season, is averaging 16 points in his past two games and 19.9 points on the season. He has scored 20 or more just once in his past five contests.

Jeff Withey, Kansas -- The 7-foot center averaged 11.5 points, eight rebounds and three blocks in the Jayhawks' last two games -- both of which were losses. He continues to be one of the nation's top defensive threats.

Cody Zeller, Indiana -- The preseason favorite for this award made huge strides last week by averaging 19 points and 10.5 rebounds in victories over Purdue and Michigan. He's playing his best basketball of the season.

Boxed Out: Bill Frieder on Michigan, Miami and more

Dial Global Sports
Bill Frieder
Feb. 6, 2013

A Hurricane on the way:

Miami has won a total of four NCAA Tournament games since the field expanded to 64 in 1985. They might win that many this year on the way to Atlanta. That's right: a program that has won one NCAA Tournament game in the past 12 seasons will be a sleeper Final Four pick this year. And why not? The Hurricanes rank sixth in the nation in assists and 12th in field goal percentage. Miami lost a great player to injury and it didn't phase them. The Canes have won eight straight road games!

Not enough? Here's another one: next time your team loses a November game and you are ready to throw in the towel, remember Florida Gulf Coast beat these guys. By 12, 63-51! Look at their remaining schedule after last night's 72-50 thrashing of Boston College: five home games against North Carolina, Virginia, Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech and Clemson and only four road games at Florida State, Clemson, Wake and Duke. It is very possible the Hurricanes (currently 18-3) could be a 25-win team entering the ACC Tournament. Of those nine remaining opponents, only Duke is ranked!

If you're looking for a Coach of the Year, start your list with Jim Larranaga. Miami is the first team not named Duke or North Carolina to start the ACC 8-0 since Virginia in 1981. And oh by the way, Coach Larranaga was an assistant for the Cavaliers then. With wins over three ranked teams (Michigan State, Duke and NC State) and six seniors on the roster, the Hurricanes should be on your radar to make some noise in March.

Hurricanes roll along towards elite category

College Chalk Talk
Jim Sumner
Feb. 6, 2013

Jim Larranaga says he's having the time of his life. "Every day is a gift. For me to be able to do what I'm doing, in the best basketball conference, is so much fun. If I can keep doing this, I'm happy."

With good reason. Larranaga's Miami Hurricanes are the ACC's big story this season. Full disclosure. I picked Miami 4th in the ACC's preseason poll, ahead of Florida State, Maryland and Virginia but behind the three Triangle schools. So, color me surprised but not stunned.

Some level of caution was justified. Miami has made one NCAA appearance in the last decade, winning a single game back in 2008. This is a school that actually shuttered its basketball program from 1972 through 1985, due to general disinterest.

So, we're not talking historical blueblood here.

But Miami pounded Duke at home back in January, beat North Carolina in Chapel Hill and edged NC State in Raleigh last Saturday, the kind of tense, well-played game that reminded me of why I fell in love with this sport in the first place.

A skeptic might point out that Miami beat a Duke team that was minus Ryan Kelly and an NC State team that was missing Lorenzo Brown. But a counter-argument would note that Miami's three losses came with a key component out. Durand Scott was suspended for the Florida Gulf Coast loss, while Reggie Johnson missed the Arizona and Indiana State losses with a broken thumb.

But Johnson recovered sooner than predicted and seems to be close to 100 percent. It was

Johnson who muscled through Richard Howell for the game-winning tip-in in Miami's 79-78 win over State.

It was a game that a lesser team would have lost. The Wolfpack was playing at home in front of an enthusiastic crowd and got a break-out performance from Brown's back-up, freshman Tyler Lewis. The 5-11, 157-pound freshman looks like he got lost on the way to a high-school cross-country meet. But he matched Miami's Shane Larkin blow-for-blow, helping State to a 10-point lead early in the second half and a 76-71 lead with less than two minutes remaining.

Miami fought back, forcing key turnovers and pounding the glass. Julian Gamble says his team's experience kept them focused.

Credit: HurricaneSports.com

"We've gone through so much. We've seen everything. We stay poised, stay calm, have fun, play in the moment."

Miami might be the oldest team I've ever seen in the ACC. Gamble is a sixth-year senior, finally healthy after chronic knee problems. Florida transfer Kenny Kadji and Trey McKinney-Jones are fifth-year seniors. Durand Scott and Reggie Johnson are conventional seniors. Rion Brown and Erik Swoope are juniors. Larkin, the sophomore point-guard, is the only underclassman in the rotation.

The 5-11 Larkin is the only Miami player likely to give up size to an opponent. Johnson, Kadji and Gamble split time in the post and all are in the 6-10, 250-280 range.

NC State head coach Mark Gottfried cited that size as one of their strengths. "They're so big and long and thick. Someone is always in a mismatch."

Scott, McKinney-Jones, Brown and Swoope handle the wings and all are 6-5, 6-6.

It's not just size and experience, of course. Miami has five players scoring in double figures, led by Scott, a classic NYC I'm-going-to-the-rim, try-to-stop-me-guard. They're holding opponents to 37 percent shooting and are plus in rebounds and turnovers.

Larranaga says this team has earned a pretty long leash. "Our guys make a lot of decisions on their own. You hope your players know what they're doing. I have great confidence. My message was stay calm and play together. We were really challenged and we really delivered."

Miami's 72-50 win over Boston College Tuesday night ran their ACC record to 9-0. Duke, with two losses, is the only ACC team with a realistic chance to catch them and then only if they beat NC State Thursday night. State has four ACC losses by a combined seven points, two on last-second offensive rebounds.

The schedule favors Miami. They have a rematch with Duke at Cameron and have to go to Tallahassee to play struggling Florida State. But they're through with NC State and Maryland and get round two with North Carolina at home. They may have a slip up or two in their future but the trend lines look pretty good.

Gottfried likes Miami's chances. "I've expected them to be good from the beginning," he said after the Saturday loss. "They're a veteran team, mature, strong, every piece of the puzzle. They'll be hard to catch because of their success on the road."

Miami Hurricanes enjoying fruits of stability

Miami Herald
Linda Robertson
Feb. 6, 2013

The University of Miami's senior citizens are defying the one-and-done trend that has turned college basketball into a game dominated by 18-somethings.

The Hurricanes are winning with six seasoned players, including Julian Gamble and Reggie Johnson, both 23, and Kenny Kadji, who turns 25 in May.

Guile, poise and cohesion have been the hallmarks during a seamless run to the top of the Atlantic Coast Conference, which UM extended to 9-0 by teaching Boston College a 72-50 lesson on Tuesday in Coral Gables.

It was a case of age before beauty in the 27-point wipeout of Duke.

Then, sturdy nerves prevailed in a last-second defeat of North Carolina State in Raleigh.

UM sprightly sidestepped the trap door against 10-12 BC by maintaining concentration against a lesser opponent.

Again, UM confirmed it deserves the No. 8 ranking, tying the school's highest spot in the AP poll from March 1, 1960, when Dick Hickox was the star.

It's been a long time, as Gamble can attest. The senior, granted a sixth year of eligibility after he tore up a knee last season, is proof that good things come to those who wait.

"I was a 17-year-old kid when I got here, and now I'm a mature man," Gamble said. "We've been there, done that. There's a lot of non-verbal communication because we know each others' tendencies so well."

With large numbers of underclassmen declaring for the NBA Draft eight months after matriculating, the sport is experiencing turn-over worse than that of a bone factory that employs dogs.

In 2012, 49 underclassmen declared for the NBA Draft. Only one of the first 10 picks played four years in college (Damian Lillard of Weber State), and the top three picks were freshmen.

UM is enjoying the fruits of stability while the glamour programs are forced to start over. Kentucky won the 2012 national title, then said goodbye to Anthony Davis, Michael Kidd-Gilchrist and three others. North Carolina lost four stars, including Harrison Barnes and Kendall Marshall. Duke bid farewell to guard Austin Rivers one year after Kyrie Irving left early. Syracuse, Ohio State and Connecticut hardly got to know key players during their brief layovers in college.

While no coach would trade Davis or Jared Sullinger or Fab Melo for a recruit who guarantees he will stay put for four years, and the top teams will always capitalize on their flowing faucets of talent, UM is demonstrating that there is more than one way to be successful. Butler also relied on experience to get to the Final Four twice as a mid-major. Gonzaga is another example. And George Mason, of course — the ultimate underdog team.

BANKING ON SENIORS

UM coach Jim Larranaga, himself no spring chicken at age 63, relied on three seniors to lead 11th seed George Mason to upsets of Michigan State, North Carolina and Connecticut en route to the 2006 NCAA Final Four.

"The confidence they have in each other — you don't get that overnight," Larranaga said of the six seniors and four juniors on his 13-man roster.

Experience is paying off. During the rout of Duke, UM never paused to pinch itself.

"This team is old," said Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, challenged with another rebuilding project. "Really old and really good."

It shows in crucial moments, like when Johnson tipped in the game winner with 0.8 seconds left at North Carolina State. Being in the right place at the right time isn't usually luck.

It's anticipation.

To get ready for Virginia Tech, senior Garrius Adams impersonated Eric Greene when the scout team played the starters in practice.

"Our preparation was so good, nothing surprised our guys," Larranaga said.

Senior Durand Scott has certainly seen it all, and is passing along his knowledge to Shane Larkin, who will need it next season when UM reverts to a young squad.

STAYING FOCUSED

Gamble said Larranaga will keep UM focused as pressure increases for UM come ACC tournament and March Madness time.

"Sometimes we get a little too tense, but his sense of calm goes through the team," Gamble said. "At N.C. State, he kept telling us to just calm down, we had time. He can be calm and intense at the same time. He's been around game situations so long he knows what to expect."

That sort of savvy should serve UM well as it pursues only its second NCAA appearance in nine years. Already, UM has defeated three top-20 teams. For the first time in school history, UM conquered Tobacco Road in one season, beating UNC, Duke and N.C. State. The Tar Heels visit here Saturday.

Should be a sellout of the BankUnited Center, but, then, Tuesday's game should have been a sellout, too. Instead, 5,149 fans showed up. Not bad for UM, which is headed into new college hoops territory, but too many people are missing out on this once-in-a-lifetime group.

Better catch them now before they are gone.

Barry Larkin's son, Shane, took long route to Miami

Boston Globe
Julian Benbow
Feb. 5, 2013

The route Shane Larkin took to get to the University of Miami wasn't the most direct one, but from the moment he began mapping out all of his college options, every dot was strategic.

Growing up in Orlando, where the sun rarely took a day off, climate was his main consideration.

DePaul was 1,160 miles away in Chicago, and coach Oliver Purnell was trying to rebuild a program, hopefully with Larkin as the centerpiece.

George Mason was more than 800 miles up I-95. The Patriots were only four years removed from a Final Four run that made them the darlings of college basketball, and coach Jim Larranaga had a way with forging strong relationships with his players.

Colorado, nearly 2,000 miles away, was also on his list. The closest school he considered was Florida State.

By no means was he trying to get out of the shadow of his father, Barry, the Cincinnati Reds Hall of Famer who turned Larkin into a brand name for quality at the shortstop position.

He just wanted to get out of the sun.

Which is why it made sense that he gave Boston College a hard look, as well, from 1,300 miles away.

"Living in Orlando, it was always hot," Larkin said. "I wanted to go somewhere where it was actually cold."

The Eagles coaching staff was well aware of Larkin's credentials as both a binge scorer on one end of the floor and a serial pickpocket at the other. Before Joe Jones left BC to become head coach at Boston University, he tried his hardest to get Larkin to come to Heights. Head coach Steve Donahue spent time with Larkin's parents. Larkin made an official visit to Chestnut Hill with Alex Murphy the fall of 2010.

"It was cold," Larkin said. "But I don't think it snowed."

If Larkin was leaning anywhere, it was toward Larranaga and George Mason, but he had so many options that Larranaga couldn't afford to wait for Larkin to make a call.

Larranaga signed another point guard, Corey Edwards. Larkin settled on DePaul but never played a game there.

For all his desire to switch scenery, an undisclosed medical condition required him to leave DePaul just before the start of his freshman year and scramble to look for schools closer to home.

It was coincidence that Larranaga had taken the job as Miami's head coach three months earlier. They hadn't talked since the day after Larkin visited George Mason.

"It just so happened he had a scholarship available, and I was looking for a school to come closer to home to," Larkin said. "It just worked out for the best."

Now, the sophomore guard is arguably the key piece to a 17-3 Miami team that's off to an 8-0 start in the Atlantic Coast Conference (the best start by any team besides Duke or North Carolina since 1981).

Boston College (10-11, 2-6) faces the Hurricanes Tuesday night at the BankUnited Center.

Larkin had an 18-point, five-assist performance in a stunning 90-63 rout of Duke on Jan. 23 that helped the Hurricanes shoot up to No. 14 from No. 25 in the Associated Press poll.

Coming off a 25-point effort at Virginia Tech and a 13-point, 5-assist, 5-steal game at North Carolina State, the ACC's preseason favorite, Larkin was tapped as the conference player of the week. The wins also shot Miami up to No. 8, a height the program hadn't seen since 1960.

And for all the deliberating that went into deciding on a school, his pick couldn't have been a more perfect fit.

"It didn't work out [at BC], but it's obviously worked out well for Shane," Donahue said. "He's got a great situation. I just told our guys, I think he's the key to their team. I don't think they necessarily had a point guard last year that really got everybody involved and Shane wasn't really ready for that."

"But right now, if you make any mistake on him, everybody else is so dangerous and that's what happens. He drives it, he kicks it, you go under a ball screen he hits it. What other things he does, he creates so much on the defensive end, getting steals and easy baskets. Just real impressed with his development and confidence. I think he's ideal for that team. It's worked out for him."

Larkin had other options close by. South Florida had shown the most interest, but the relationship he had built with Larranaga early in the recruiting process was important.

"I think just sometimes you connect with a young man or a family," Larranaga said. "They feel like they know you. They listen to your approach to coaching, and they listen to how you develop your players and your program. In Shane's case, prob-

ably the biggest thing was he is very, very close to his mom and dad, and when he went to DePaul, he was very far away from home. And I think he was just uncomfortable with that.

"Coming back then, trying to decide, OK, where should I go, coming back to Florida, he had familiarity with us. He might have looked at a couple of other schools in the state, but I think we were probably the one he was most interested in. It kind of just worked out for both of us, I think. It's a great fit for him and definitely a great fit for us."

So far, it's been the kind of season that no one outside of the Hurricanes' locker room saw coming. They fell short of the NCAA Tournament a year ago, in Larranaga's first season, but brought back a veteran team that took a Tournament-or-bust attitude toward this year.

Larkin said he could see how much Larranaga was investing in the program.

"I knew Coach L was a great motivator," said Larkin, who had 7 points and five assists in Miami's 60-59 win at BC on Jan. 16. "He's like a politician. On campus, he's always recruiting people to come to games. He's doing everything he needs to do, going out there giving speeches in dorms or going to community service events just trying to get people to come to games."

Perched atop the conference, with signature wins already under their belt, Larranaga said, the last thing he wants is for the Hurricanes to become complacent.

"We want to enjoy the journey, but we also want to stay focused on our next opponent," Larranaga said. "And that's what the guys have been able to do. If you win a game, enjoy that, celebrate that for a short while, but the very next day, you're back to the office doing your job."

But there's an energy around the program that it hasn't experienced in years.

When the team bus rolled back to campus after beating North Carolina State, there was a crowd there to greet them. At restaurants, he'll get the better tables. More than that, when the waiters get there, he's starting to get top billing over his dad.

"I'm used to everyone being like, 'Hi, Barry! Oh, and is your son doing well at the university?'"

"We beat Duke and it was, 'Aw, Shane, you're a great player, can we get your autograph. Oh, Barry? You're a great player, too. No disrespect.'"

"That's just a great feeling knowing people are taking notice."

Larranaga lands in dream job with Miami Hurricanes

Miami Herald

Greg Cote

Feb. 5, 2013

The University of Miami men's basketball team climbed as high as it ever has Monday — to a No. 8 national ranking in The Associated Press poll — and the man who made that magic ladder appear, Jim Larranaga, had just heard the news when we spoke.

"It feels great. I'm excited," the coach said. "It represents a major step forward."

I asked Larranaga if he planned to break the news to his team. He smiled.

"Those guys know everything before I do," he said. "By now someone has texted it, tweeted it, Facebooked it or instant messaged it."

Nothing stays a secret for long anymore, and so these Hurricanes haven't.

Less than a month ago they were off the national grid, and barely making South Florida pay attention. Now they are one of the sweet stories in all of college basketball, rocketing up in the polls from nowhere to 25th to 14th to eighth in three heady weeks.

A signature 90-63 pasting of No. 1 Duke on Jan. 23 in Coral Gables made America take notice. Reggie Johnson's miracle last-second tip-in to win at No. 19 North Carolina State on Saturday made you wonder if this team wasn't charmed.

Football is done now. You ready to pay attention to something besides the Heat?

This is your team. This is the time.

Larranaga's guys have won nine in a row entering Tuesday night's home game vs. Boston College. They are 17-3. They are 8-0 in the mighty Atlantic Coast Conference — the first ACC team other than Duke or North Carolina to do that since 1981.

The only other time the UM men ranked No. 8 was in March 1960, even before Rick Barry arrived. The Canes have never finished a season ranked higher than 10th.

This year, though, you get the idea anything is possible. You get the feeling March Madness will very much include this team as a major player.

A couple of weeks ago there was speculation about this being a Sweet 16 team. Then came the stunning whipping of Duke. Then came the top 10. Now if you're talking Sweet 16 you seem to under-sell UM's potential.

Elite Eight, anyone? Final Four, even?

This is Larranaga's problem at the moment. Well, his challenge, at least. The excitement of possibility nourishing this program is all good, but it also raises the stakes on the coach making sure his players keep their focus.

"Our point of view is to get ready for Boston College," he said Monday. "At any time, circumstances can change. We are not looking two weeks or a month down the road. The only thing [being ranked No. 8] does is fire up your opponent. The whole reason we are enjoying success is that we have prepared one day at a time. We do not get too full of ourselves just because somebody else has decided we're good."

The even keel is easier because five of UM's top six scorers are seniors — Johnson, Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, Trey McKinney Jones and Julian Gamble — itself unusual (and pleasantly so) in the one-and-done NCAA.

That is also why this season figures to be Miami's best opportunity, although Larranaga, 63, in his second season here, has earned the faith that he can recruit and win with his own guys, not just with the talent inherited.

This coach took a long time to get to his dream job, but he has arrived at it.

He is best known for coaching mid-major George Mason to the Final Four in 2006, but that was just part of the climb.

"I'm very goal-oriented. I was an assistant in the ACC at Virginia [1979-86], and when I left I wrote down that one of my goals was to become a head coach in the ACC," Larranaga said. "So when the Miami job opened up I was very interested."

He did his research. He always loved the talent pool in Florida, and he found more than half the teams in the ACC had changed coaches recently.

"I saw a league going through a transition period," he said. "If we were able to recruit well, we could do some damage in this conference. It seemed like an opportunity to come in and succeed very

quickly."

Larranaga had a very small inner circle of family and friends he consulted about the Miami job: his wife, two adult sons, Celtics coach Doc Rivers and sports psychologist Bob Rotella.

The conduit for Larranaga coming here was Jose Mas, whom he had met while coaching at a Michael Jordan fantasy camp. Mas, the son of Jorge Mas Canosa, the former Miami business leader and Cuban exile fixture, called Larranaga and invited him to forward his résumé to UM.

Larranaga was traveling and had no access to his résumé so, at a son's suggestion, he copy-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and sent it to UM. An interview was set up. His hiring didn't take long thereafter.

(Speaking of Mas Canosa, it happens that Larranaga is part Cuban. His father's father was Cuban, emigrating to Key West in the early 1900s.)

Larranaga knew he was coming here to not just coach a team, but to grow a program in a city that hardly is a college hoops hotbed.

"I want everyone in this community to be dying to get a ticket to watch us play," he said. "At Bowling Green and George Mason everybody also told me we couldn't draw, but by the time I left the place was packed every night."

Coaching in the ACC had been Larranaga's "ultimate goal to really test yourself." Now he is finding out the league isn't too big for him. He's big enough for the league.

I asked him if the satisfaction he feels is different now.

"Don't know yet. We are still in the process of competing," he said. Then he added something that should make Canes fans smile as much as that No. 8 ranking: "My career here at Miami has really just begun."

Hurricanes storming through ACC

News & Observer

Luke DeCock

Feb. 5, 2013

For years, Miami's basketball program was often thrilled to draw more than a handful of fans to watch some of the Hurricanes' biggest ACC games. When the team returned to the BankUnited Center from Saturday's last-second win over N.C. State, late into the evening, there were fans at the arena to celebrate a game played somewhere else.

"As the bus pulled in, there was a group of students there to greet us," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said Monday. "There are a lot of people pulling for our team, a lot of enthusiasm on campus and in the community."

The Hurricanes have sold out their past two home games, against Duke and Florida State, and have already sold out Saturday's game against North Carolina (they play Boston College on Tuesday first). That's what happens when a team picked to finish fifth in the ACC by the media and fourth by the coaches is leading the league in February, although even in that preseason voting, there was a general acknowledgement that the ceiling for the Hurricanes – with five returning starters, four of them seniors – was higher.

At 8-0 in the ACC, 17-3 overall, Miami has a two-game lead on Duke atop the ACC standings. The Hurricanes have one glaring loss – at Florida Gulf Coast without Durand Scott, who was suspended – and two others, to Arizona and Indiana State, the latter in overtime, at a tournament in Hawaii. They've been perfect in ACC play, including a blowout home win over Duke as well as wins at North Carolina and N.C. State.

That's no small consideration. In a year when wins on the road in ACC play have proven historically hard to come by, the Hurricanes account for a full third of the ACC's 15 road wins. No one else has more than two.

"We have an older group," Larranaga said. "We do have four seniors in our starting lineup. They've been through the ACC battles for the last several years. They know how challenging it is. They've done a very good job of preparing themselves to play well."

Miami has also benefited from playing to its strengths, while the flaws of the other would-be contenders have been all too apparent.

N.C. State has been as erratic and inconsistent as feared, losing four very winnable games to make it all but impossible for the Wolfpack to win the title they were picked to win in the preseason. North Carolina's inexperience has been telling, whether it's Marcus Paige at point guard or the lack of a proven go-to player on offense. Florida State has been perhaps the ACC's most disappointing team, and is two Michael Snaer buzzer-beaters away from being 2-6 instead of 4-4.

And Duke, which is still probably the most talented team in the ACC and maintains at least a good chance to unseat Miami, saw its one real weakness – a lack of depth – exposed when Ryan Kelly went down indefinitely. The Blue Devils, undefeated on the day Kelly was injured, are 4-2 since then, including that shocking 27-point loss at Miami.

While those teams have fallen apart, relatively speaking, the Hurricanes have picked up the pieces. Even when the Hurricanes lost center Reggie Johnson for a month with a broken thumb, they stayed on task – and Johnson returned just in time to tip in the winning basket against N.C. State.

It's only February, but the Hurricanes have taken care of business. Miami's basketball team is doing what the football team was expected to do when the school joined the ACC (and still hasn't done): filling seats and leading the league.

Read more here: http://www.newsobserver.com/2013/02/05/2655917/decock-hurricanes-storming-through.html?tab=gallery&gallery=/2013/02/02/2651960/first-look-miami-nc-state-020213.html&gid_index=2#storylink=cpy

PF Kadji a Key for the Canes

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Feb. 4, 2013

At 6-foot-11, Kenny Kadji possess a match-up problem with his versatility.

Kadji has the ability to stretch the defense with his outside shooting ability and isn't afraid to put the ball on the floor at times.

He's scored in double figures in 11 consecutive games leading the team with a 15.2 average during the stretch.

"I feel good," Kadji said. "I feel comfortable with my teammates. I think everybody knows that I'm pretty versatile and can score different ways. My teammates do a great job of finding me, trying to get me open, and establish me in the game. So I feel great and I think I am playing great."

Kadji has knocked down 24 of 68 (35.3 percent) of his 3-point attempts this season and is shooting 48 percent overall with a .564 true shooting percentage.

He credits his outside shooting ability to the coaches at IMG Academy.

"I went to IMG Academy and it is really about skills, workouts, you practice at least twice a day, do a lot of drills, shooting, and you have a gym available 24/7 and I think the coaches did a great job working with me," Kadji said. "Starting my junior year I was able to make shots and shoot the ball pretty well."

Kadji was a top 35 recruit coming out of IMG and signed with Florida. After two unproductive seasons in Gainesville where he averaged 3.7 points in 42 games, Kadji transferred to Miami.

Kadji sat out the 2010-11 season and then averaged 11.7 points and 5.3 rebounds in his first season at UM. He's continued his development

and has become even more consistent in his senior year averaging 13.3 points and 6.8 rebounds for the eighth-ranked Miami Hurricanes (17-3, 8-0).

Kenny Kadji has scored in double figures in 17 of 20 games this season.

"At Florida I just think I had a smaller role and there were other people there so I couldn't really show my game and what I could do," Kadji said. "Coming here the first year with (Frank) Haith, I think I surprised people at practice and then coach L just did a great job of letting me play and letting me show all my skills."

Kadji is the only Hurricane projected to be selected in the 2013 NBA Draft as NBADraft.net projects Kadji being picked by Atlanta with the No. 46 pick.

Kadji, who will turn 25 in May, says he's not focusing too much on the future and his draft prospects.

"Those things are flattering and you have people sending you text messages and things like that, but you can't look at that stuff," Kadji said. "I have had stuff and things talking about me since high school so all I want to do is play well and help this team win. We can accomplish something special here at the University of Miami and that would mean more than having my name on NBA Draft things. I want to play after we're done, but I think I can trust my coaches and everybody else to handle that after the season."

Miami is coming off a thrilling 79-78 win over N.C. State on a last-second shot by Reggie Johnson.

"It's always fun when you're the winning team and you get a buzzer beater," Kadji said. "It brings your team together. All of our players played so hard and we deserved to win."

The Hurricanes host Boston College (10-11, 2-6) on Tuesday at 7 p.m. after beating the Eagles 60-59 on Jan. 16 in Chestnut Hill.

"It's a smaller, quicker team so we have to be aware that they shoot the ball very well," Kadji said. "We escaped one there with a mistake so we are going to have to come ready to play better than we did up there."

Basketball Buzz: 2/4

Inside The U Christopher Stock Feb. 3, 2013

The 8th-ranked Miami Hurricanes are riding a nine-game winning streak and have their highest ranking since 1960.

Miami (17-3, 8-0) is coming off a thrilling 79-78 win over N.C. State on Saturday in Raleigh as Reggie Johnson's tip-in with 0.8 seconds left lifted the Hurricanes to a victory after trailing by as many as 12 in the second half.

"It's a great win for our team, our program, and for it to be televised on CBS, I don't know when the last time that's happened (2008 in the NCAA tournament) so it's nice to get that kind of exposure for our program," head coach Jim Larranaga said.

It was the second straight game the Hurricanes trailed by 12 on the road and won as they beat Virginia Tech 73-64 on Wednesday.

"One of the things that has happened is the team has developed some trust in each other and a good understanding of what's expected," Larranaga said. "There was a time (Saturday), very much like at North Carolina, that we were so pumped up and a little bit anxious that we played a little bit out of character. Part of it was the incredible shooting and scoring ability of North Carolina State where we felt we have to match them. The faster the game got, the more it was in their favor because they didn't have to face our set defense. As these games unwind the more you win, the more you find ways to win because your team is preserving and your team realizes the game is not over, we have a chance, we have to keep playing whether we're down 12 with 12 minutes to go in the game or five with a minute to go in the game--in basketball, that's only two possessions. I thought our defense in those last few minutes was very good."

Miami has two home games this week against Boston College (10-11, 2-6) on Tuesday at 7 p.m. and North Carolina on Saturday at 2 p.m.

Miami beat Boston College 60-59 on Jan. 16 as Olivier Hanlan missed a free throw at the end of the game after Durand Scott fouled him a 3-point attempt. Scott led the team with 15 points.

News & Notes

- C Reggie Johnson came into Saturday's game shooting 2 for 14 from the floor in three games since returning from a broken left thumb. He started off slow against N.C. State, but finished 6 for 10 and scored 15 points, the most since scoring 16 against UCF on Dec. 18. "It's been a while since he's been in that competitive position with the ball

in his hands in the second half," Larranaga said. "You don't get back into your natural rhythm just because you're back playing. You have to get used to your teammates and your teammates have to get used to you again."

Reggie Johnson

- PF Kenny Kadji has scored in double figures in 11 consecutive games averaging a team-best 15.2 points during that span. "I feel good," Kadji said. "I feel comfortable with my teammates. I think everybody knows that I'm pretty versatile and can score different ways. My teammates do a great job of finding me, trying to get me open, and establish me in the game. So I feel great and I think I am playing great."

- PG Shane Larkin was named ACC Player of the Week as he averaged 19.0 points, 4.0 assists, 3.0 rebounds, and 3.0 steals while shooting 60.9 percent (14 for 23) in the two games. Larkin commented on what it's like playing for Larranaga. "He instills that confidence in you. He's a great motivator, a great encourager. He's never negative, he's always upbeat. He's just a great person to play for. He loves all of his players and he cares about you more as a person than as a player. He's a great motivator and a great overall person and I'm glad I made the decision to come here and play for him."

- Larranaga's message to the team during a timeout in the second half against N.C. State when the team trailed by 10 was something that stood out to a number of players. He told the team to relax, have fun, and that he loved them. "Before the game at the shootaround, the level of energy was at an all-time high and although you want energy, you want it to be channeled in the right direction because that energy can quickly become anxiety if things do not go right," Larranaga said. "What I was trying to express to them during the game was it was not about the crowd and it really wasn't about North Carolina State, it was about us being us. We don't want to play out of character, do things that we haven't practiced, or try things so quickly that it leads to better things for N.C. State than it actually does us. And to control your emotions in your environment, the place was bisserk, it's easy to get caught in the hype. I just thought those guys needed to know the coaches are here with you, we're excited too, but we must remain calm. During that time in the game, if you're observing me, I'm trying to set the example of calm that I'm not getting emotional. I'm not worried about the referees, the crowd, the opponent, but what do we need to do to play a little bit better. We're playing okay, but still not totally in sync and so I don't know why I said that, just the way I was feeling at the time."

- The Hurricanes feature five seniors among their top six scorers with PF Kenny Kadji as the oldest as he'll turn 25 in May. C Reggie Johnson and PF/C Julian Gamble are both 23 while SG Durand Scott will turn 23 later this month. SG Trey McKinney-Jones is 22.

- When the team returned to the BankUnited Center from Raleigh they were greeted by a number of students. "Of course I think that's very, very special," Larranaga said. "You've got to remember our players are students and to have the support of the students is very important to them. To have the students show up and greet us basically congratulate us on the win and basically let our players know that they are behind us 100 percent. My message to the team was to appreciate this and don't just run by them and go to the locker room--take pictures, shake hands, high-five them, and thank them for coming out."

- C Reggie Johnson, who is in his fourth year at Miami, is enjoying the recognition the team has been receiving in the media and with fans due to their success. "We've waited a long time for it so we definitely appreciate it, but we are still level-headed at the same time," Johnson said. "We're not just content with beating N.C. State, it was definitely a big-time game for us, but we definitely want to focus on Boston College and take it one game at a time, just stay focused, and we can make this a real special season."

- SG Trey McKinney-Jones had his UM career-best streak of five games scoring in double figures snapped as he scored four points against N.C. State on 2-for-11 shooting. It was also the first time in nine games in which he did make a 3-pointer as he went 0-for-7. His struggles led him to playing just 23 minutes, which is his second-lowest of the season.

- C Tonye Jekiri only played six minutes against N.C. State, but down with two offensive rebounds and recorded an assist. Jekiri is the lone freshman on the team and earning valuable experience playing in 18 games averaging close to seven minutes a contest. He doesn't have a big role on offense, but is providing the team with depth in the frontcourt and is improving on defense.

- With the recent success of the Hurricanes, the coaching staff has seen an increase in recruiting interest. "Any time you're ranked 14th, people see you on TV, you win games and people like your style of play, you get more recruiting interest and that's where we are right now," said assistant coach Michael Huger. UM has five spots still open in the 2013 class.

Miami's Johnson no longer overlooked

Examiner.com

Paul Borden

Feb. 3, 2013

The University of Miami's 79-78 victory over North Carolina State Saturday held special meaning for senior center Reggie Johnson, and not just because he scored the deciding basket on a tip-in with less than a second left in the game.

Johnson is a North Carolina native from Winston-Salem who pretty much got short shrift from the North Carolina schools when he came out of high school.

"To go in and get a win at N.C. State means more than winning at home against those teams," Johnson said Sunday. "You've got 20,000 cheering against you. Sometimes they say, 'Why didn't you come here?' I heard that a lot. So it means a lot to me."

Johnson had a good reason not to wind up at one of the Tobacco Road schools.

Nobody really was that interested in a 6-10 center who weighed over 320 pounds and barely could get off the floor, which was the case with him coming out of high school.

Johnson, who has trimmed probably in the neighborhood of 40 pounds from his 6-10 frame since he arrived in Coral Gables, said his hometown school Wake Forest was going to recruit him, but then coach Skip Prosser died in the summer of 2007 and the Demon Deacons didn't follow up.

"North Carolina was going to offer me, but basically they flat out told me that if Tyler Zeller doesn't commit to us, then we're going to take you," Johnson said. "I thought, 'Wow. That was real blunt.' That's pretty much it."

Johnson sat out his first year at Miami as a redshirt but appeared in 32 games in the 2009-10 season, starting six. He became a

full-time starter as a sophomore the next year, but played in only 22 games his junior year while recovering from an off-season knee injury.

He started this season healthy, but the injury bug bit him again when he broke his thumb in practice the day before the Hurricanes played host Hawaii in the Diamond Head Classic in late December.

The early prognosis was he would miss six-to-eight weeks, but he was back in four after missing eight games. He made his first appearance since Dec. 18 in the win over Duke, playing 16 minutes and scoring two points on free throws.

His most productive game since his return was against N.C. State, when he scored 15 points and grabbed eight rebounds, and he had 10 rebounds in Miami's win at Virginia in the previous game.

The two wins extended the Hurricanes overall winning streak to nine games and gave them an 8-0 record and first place by two games over Duke in the Atlantic Coast Conference standings.

But it isn't time for the Hurricanes to celebrate.

"We still have 10 conference games remaining so we're not even through the halfway mark of the conference race," coach Jim Larranaga said as the Hurricanes began preparations for Tuesday night's home game against Boston College. "It's still way too early to tell what it's going to be like at the end of February and the first of March."

Johnson keeps Canes unbeaten in ACC

ESPN.com
Robbi Rickeral
Feb. 2, 2013

Two years ago, Miami senior Reggie Johnson said, his team wouldn't have been able to win this game.

Two weeks ago, he wouldn't have been able to win it for them.

It's another sign that something special is going on with the mostly unheralded Hurricanes, who remained the lone undefeated team in ACC play (8-0) after the big man's tip-back with 0.8 seconds left stunned No. 19 NC State 79-78 at PNC Arena on Saturday.

"I'm really, really happy," said the 6-foot-10, 292-pound Johnson, who grew up in Winston-Salem, N.C., and finished with 15 points and eight rebounds for the 14th-ranked Canes. "I could never have imagined this. We beat Duke, we beat North Carolina, we now beat NC State, and that's something most teams won't do."

It was fitting that Johnson tipped back teammate Shane Larkin's miss with his left hand because mere weeks ago, it was still swaddled in a cast, protecting the thumb he fractured during a late-December practice.

Early projections were that the big man -- who was averaging a double-double at the time of his injury -- wouldn't return until mid-February. While many folks, perhaps, underestimated upperclassman-laden Miami's ability to win without him, they also underestimated his quick ability to heal.

Johnson actually ended up returning weeks ahead of schedule -- Jan. 23, for the Hurricanes' blowout victory over then-No. 1 Duke. He admits his rhythm was slow to return, as he averaged a somewhat-frustrating 4.3 points and seven rebounds in his first three games.

But then came Saturday.

With his team struggling to connect from the outside and trailing 60-52 to a perseverant Wolfpack team that was playing without starting point guard Lorenzo Brown (sprained ankle), Johnson accounted for six points during a 16-2 run that put Miami back in the lead.

Trailing by five points, again, with 2 minutes, 30 seconds left, Johnson's layup jump-started another late-game push that brought it down to the wire.

And then, with 0.8 seconds left, he gained position in traffic and tipped back Larkin's miss over NC State widebody Richard Howell, one of the best rebounders in the league.

"I knew Shane was going to shoot it," Johnson said. "My whole mindset was: if he misses, offensive rebound. And I did it."

He, and the rest of his teammates, had a slight moment of panic when NCSU freshman Rodney Purvis' desperation shot from three-quarters court almost connected.

Instead, the celebration began, with Johnson saying he yelled to the stunned State fans: 'Appreciate it, y'all! Thanks for coming out! You can go back home now.'

Said Hurricanes senior Julian Gamble, who hails from nearby Durham, N.C.: "It was an incredible feeling to know that we battled back from double figures, [from] them basically having us on the ropes. We have no quit in us, we're never going to stop until the clock is all zeroes."

C.J. Leslie led NC State with 18 points and 10 rebounds, and freshman point guard Tyler Lewis scored a career-high 16 points, playing a career-high 36 minutes in place of Brown.

But credit the Hurricanes' experience. Miami boasts a plethora of seniors, including

Johnson, Gamble (16 points), Durand Scott (18 points) and Trey McKinney Jones, who have learned from tough games, and seasons, and say they are now the better for it. It showed by their ability to avoid getting frazzled, to feed their big men late, to come up victors in the clutch.

The Hurricanes have now won nine games in a row and are one of only two schools left in the "power six" conferences who have a perfect league record (along with Florida).

"To come in here and win on the road, at NC State, that shows perseverance," Johnson said. "A couple of years ago, we would have lost this game."

Instead, the Hurricanes made a statement: Johnson's groove is returning, and Miami isn't going away any time soon.

"We're having a special, special season," Johnson said. "And me being back, I think that just makes us stronger."

Johnson's tip-in helps Miami edge N.C. State

USA TODAY

Nicole Auerbach

Feb. 2, 2013

Only one player and one number stood between senior Reggie Johnson and celebrating Miami's 8-0 start to conference play: Rodney Purvis and 0.8.

Yes, ultimately Johnson's tip-in with less than a second left in the game would prove to be the game-winner. Indeed, the Winston-Salem, N.C., native would be the Hurricanes' hero in a game played in front of his family and friends.

But in those eight tenths of a second, Johnson wasn't sure. Purvis launched a hail mary that went nearly three-quarters the length of the court as the buzzer sounded. The ball hit the rim twice before bouncing out. Final score: No. 15 Miami 79, No. 19 North Carolina State 78.

"(Purvis) almost hit that," a relieved Johnson said later. "My heart almost dropped, but when it went out, I was overjoyed."

Johnson and his Miami teammates celebrated by jumping around and embracing, while the stunned PNC Arena crowd sat in silence. N.C. State had been one second away from a win that would have righted its ship in the absence of point guard Lorenzo Brown, who was out with an ankle injury.

Instead, the Wolfpack lost their second Atlantic Coast Conference game in a row, bringing them to 5-4 in league play and fifth in the standings. Freshman backup point guard Tyler Lewis did not become the instant legend he seemed destined to be after a 16-point performance.

No, the evening belonged to the Hurricanes, just as the ACC does.

Miami coach Jim Larranaga was asked after the game if he felt he had a "charmed team." His squad has already beaten perennial ACC heavyweights Duke and North Carolina, and it hasn't lost a game since Dec. 25. Even when Johnson was out with an injury, Miami kept winning ACC games. So, charmed seems like a valid adjective, right?

"Charmed doesn't come across my mind," Larranaga said before switching the subject to his opponent. "If Purvis' shot had gone in at the end, I would say that he was charmed. That almost went in."

Larranaga wouldn't compliment his team too much, but he did speak of the poise of his players. His players talked about the advantage they have over many of their opponents, especially with so many teams depleted due to early entry to the NBA draft. Miami has a roster of experience. Johnson and Durand Scott (Saturday's leading scorer with 18) are both seniors. Julian Gamble, who added 16, is a redshirt senior. Ten of Miami's players are upperclassmen.

Rapid Reaction: Miami 79, NC State 78

ESPN.com
Robbi Pickeral
Feb. 2, 2013

"This is our State," proclaims the montage before every NC State home game.

But it's still Miami's ACC.

The 14th-ranked Hurricanes came back from a 10-point second-half deficit at PNC Arena on Saturday to top 19th-ranked NC State, winning it on a tip-back by forward Reggie Johnson with 0.8 seconds left.

The victory further solidified Miami's lead in the ACC standings -- ahead of Duke and Virginia, each with two league losses, and the Wolfpack, who now have four. And it extended the Hurricanes' winning streak to nine.

Turning point: NC State -- playing without starting point guard and ACC leading assist man Lorenzo Brown -- was leading by eight points midway through the second half when Miami, chock full of juniors and seniors, showed its experience by calmly putting together a 16-2 run to take a 68-62 lead.

But the Wolfpack raced back, putting together a 12-1 run of their own that included five points from freshman Rodney Purvis, four from C.J. Leslie and a 3-pointer from Scott Wood to take a 74-69 advantage before Miami scored again.

Miami wasn't done, though, stealing the ball on an inbound pass and cutting it to 76-75 on a Durand Scott layup with a little more than a minute left. NC State freshman Tyler Lewis made two layups, and Scott countered by hitting 2 of 4 free throws on Miami's next two possessions to cut it to 78-77. After Lewis missed on the other end, Larkin missed on a leaner, but Johnson tipped it back in with 0.8 seconds to win it.

Key player(s): Scott finished with 18 points for Miami, and Johnson had 15. NC State's Lewis, a little-used McDonald's All-American because he was backing up Brown, entered the game averaging only 5.4 minutes and 1 point per game. With Brown watching from the bench, Lewis didn't start -- but he finished with 16 points and five assists. Leslie had 18 points and 12 rebounds.

Etc.: Johnson's game winner was, of course, the most replay-worthy moment of the game. But if you haven't seen this dunk yet, go look it up: With 2:40 left in the first half, NC State's Purvis took off from the 3-point arc, ran through the lane and skied waaaaay above the rim to throw down a Leslie missed jumper. It's worth a replay. Or three. ... Leslie did not start, but he entered the game less than three minutes in; a team spokesman said coach Mark Gottfried would explain the move in his postgame comments.

Next up: Miami faces Boston College at home on Tuesday night; NC State plays at Duke on Thursday night.

Johnson's tip-in keeps Miami unbeaten in ACC play

Yahoo Sports
Jeff Eisenberg
Feb. 2, 2013

Whether it was hedging on a top-of-the-key ball screen to keep Shane Larkin from driving to the rim or sending two defenders at him to contest his shot after he reversed course, NC State did everything possible to keep the Miami point guard from beating them.

The only thing the Wolfpack didn't do right on the Hurricanes' final possession was secure the rebound of Larkin's miss.

When Larkin's off-balance 12-footer caromed off the glass and the rim, mammoth center Reggie Johnson was in the best position in the paint to collect the rebound. Johnson's deft left-handed tip-in with less than a second remaining in the game gave 14th-ranked Miami a 79-78 victory, enabling the Hurricanes to tighten their grip further on first place in the ACC.

At 17-3 overall and 8-0 in league play, Miami has at least a two-game lead on everyone else in the ACC. NC State, the preseason favorite to win the ACC, is now only 5-4 in league play after losses to Wake Forest, Maryland, Virginia and now the Hurricanes, likely leaving the Wolfpack too far back to be considered a realistic contender.

NC State can't be faulted for its effort against the Hurricanes. Even with standout point guard Lorenzo Brown sidelined with an ankle injury, the Wolfpack got enough production from other sources to match Miami shot-for-shot much of the game.

Forwards C.J. Leslie and Richard Howell combined for 33 points and 20 rebounds. Freshman Rodney Purvis chipped in 13 points, two on an extraordinary tip dunk late in the first

half. And freshman point guard Tyler Lewis who hadn't scored more than six in a game all season, finished with 16 points and five assists in 36 minutes.

Lewis had a chance to all but finish off the Hurricanes, but he missed a contested jumper with about 15 seconds left. And when Miami grabbed the rebound and called timeout, it meant that an NC State team that has been suspect defensively much of the season was going to have to come up with a defensive stop to remain undefeated at home.

Credit Johnson for putting an end to that streak.

The 6-foot-10 senior, who had struggled since returning from a thumb injury against Duke on Jan. 23, showed signs of shaking off the rust and regaining his all-conference form. He scored 15 points and grabbed eight rebounds against NC State after scoring 11 points on 2 of 14 shooting the previous three games.

If Johnson is going to return to top form, that's scary news for the rest of the ACC. A Miami team that already features a strong guard tandem in Larkin and Durand Scott and several versatile big men would only get better.

Hurricanes top Wolfpack in thrilling finish

Florida Today
Feb. 2, 2013

Reggie Johnson saw the ball go up, bounce off the backboard and then the rim before heading his way. The big man muscled his way up to tip in a shot that extended No. 14 Miami's surprise run through the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Johnson's left-handed tip with 0.8 seconds left helped the Hurricanes beat No. 19 North Carolina State 79-78 on Saturday, capping a back-and-forth second half with a thrilling finish that kept the Hurricanes unbeaten in the league.

Johnson finished with 15 points for the Hurricanes (17-3, 8-0) in his best performance since returning from a broken left thumb four games ago. Durand Scott led Miami with 18 points and Julian Gamble added 16 to help the Hurricanes win their ninth straight game, a run that included a blowout of then-No. 1 Duke last week.

The Hurricanes, picked to finish fifth in the ACC in preseason, were only the ninth team to start 7-0 in ACC play since the 1996-97 season. Now they're off to the best league start since Duke went 10-0 five years ago, according to STATS LLC.

"No pressure on us," Gamble said. "We're having as much fun as possible. We know teams are going to gun at us and play their absolute best every night."

After a timeout with 10.9 seconds remaining to set up a final play, Shane Larkin missed a shot on the right side. But Johnson tipped the ball up and in over Richard Howell to stun a home crowd that had been as loud as it was for rivalry wins against Duke and North Carolina in the past month.

N.C. State (16-6, 5-4) nearly topped Johnson's tip when freshman Rodney Purvis launched a heave from well beyond halfcourt at the horn, a shot that hit the rim and rattled out to end it.

"I got inside and went up with the left hand and tipped it in," Johnson said. "I had the position. But when I saw their shot go in and out, my heart was in my throat."

C.J. Leslie had 18 points and 12 rebounds despite coming off the bench for an undisclosed disciplinary reason for the Wolfpack, who played without starting point guard Lorenzo Brown due to an ankle injury. Purvis and fellow freshman Tyler Lewis played well in Brown's place but the Wolfpack ultimately watched this one slip away in painfully familiar fashion.

N.C. State, the preseason ACC favorite, lost at Maryland 51-50 on a last-second putback on Jan. 16. Its four league losses have come by a combined seven points.

"I think we're getting better all the time," N.C. State coach Mark Gottfried said. "The frustrating thing is you've got four league losses to show for it."

Lewis, who hadn't scored more than six in a game all season, finished with 16 points and five assists in 36 minutes. But he missed a contested jumper with about 15 seconds left to set up Miami's winning score.

"I wasn't too nervous because I've been playing this game for a long time," Lewis said. "Can't ever be nervous when you're out on the court, so just tried to go out and play my game."

The game lived up to its status as a matchup of ranked league teams, with Miami leading by nine in the first half and N.C. State leading by 10 midway through the second. Behind Johnson and Gamble inside, Miami scored 28 points in the paint after halftime and 50 points for the game to gain a needed edge.

The 6-foot-10, 292-pound Johnson — a home-state native of Winston-Salem — had scored just 11 points in three games since his return, but went 6 for 10 from the field with eight rebounds.

"Once we threw it inside and Reggie got it going, (the players) knew we should keep going to him," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said.

That helped offset a shaky outside shooting day, with Miami missing 18 of 21 3-point tries yet still finishing at 49 percent for the afternoon.

Miami ran off a 16-2 run — much of the damage coming from Johnson and Gamble inside — while holding the Wolfpack to one field goal over a 5-minute span to take a 68-62 lead. The Wolfpack fought back to tie it then take a 74-69 lead on a 3-pointer from Scott Wood with 3:10 left, only to see Miami chip away at the lead until getting Johnson's winner.

It was also Miami's first win in five tries at PNC Arena. The Hurricanes were the only league team that had never won here.

N.C. State lost despite shooting nearly 54 percent for the game.

Gamble's path to success continues to pay off for Canes

Durham Herald
Steve Wiseman
Feb. 2, 2013

Having endured three surgeries on his left leg, which helps carry his 6-10, 250-pound body, Julian Gamble long ago could have given in to pain and discomfort.

The thought of 9-year-old Cameron Powell, his nephew who is more like a brother, makes any such thoughts silly.

Back home in Durham, Powell lives in a wheelchair. Because of Cerebral Palsy and a rare kidney condition called Barter disease, he has undergone 10 surgeries and endured numerous seizures.

"He's a really strong kid," Gamble said. "He's been my inspiration. He's kept me grounded."

Strength and perseverance have helped Gamble, a Southern High School graduate, become a valuable member of the University of Miami men's basketball team, which is ranked No. 14 in the country and leads the ACC.

He sat out two entire college seasons, including the 2011-12 campaign after he suffered a torn ACL. Now 23 years old, he received a sixth year of eligibility from the NCAA that allowed him to play this season.

When Miami center Reggie Johnson suffered a broken thumb in December, Gamble stepped into the starting lineup and has helped carry the Hurricanes (16-3, 7-0 ACC).

A year ago, Miami coach Jim Larranaga wouldn't have considered such a thing possible. But Gamble rehabilitated his knee, got into better shape and arrived for the start of practice fit and healthy.

"I thought it was going to be very difficult for him to contribute with that injury, but he worked so hard to rehabilitate the injury and to lose weight," Larranaga said. "He went from 265 to 245 during the summer."

"When I saw him in September, he was like a different human being. I just thought this guy was going to have a huge impact this year."

Lessons learned on, off the court

Gamble's impact is immense for the Hurricanes, a program that hasn't played in the NCAA Tournament since 2008. His interior scoring and rebounding are only part of what he does.

"In team meetings, I ask a lot of questions and invariably Julian is the one raising his hand and answering all the questions," Larranaga said. "I tell the rest of the guys, 'I'm tired of Julian answering all the questions.' But what it tells me is he's very smart and very confident. He's willing to put himself on the line because he listens and he learns." Gamble learned long ago the importance of giving to others. His mother, Sarah, showed him firsthand.

When Julian's sister, Raquel, gave birth to Cameron, their mother agreed to take over his care when he was 4 months old.

"It was really a lot for her, so I wanted to do that,"

Sarah Gamble said. "I really wanted her to finish school. I didn't finish college. I felt it was important for her to do that."

That allowed Raquel Gamble, who started college at Norfolk State, to get her criminal justice degree at N.C. Central in 2010. She now is at Florida Gulf Coast University, where she is on track to earn her master's degree in forensic science after this semester.

Julian, who was a student at Southern when Cameron became his mother's responsibility, had to adjust to having a special needs child in the house. He saw how his mother juggled Cameron's care and her full-time job, and he knew he had more responsibility, too.

"It mostly evolved from wanting to help my Mom," Julian Gamble said. "I wanted to ease her stress and workload. I know what it takes to take care of him now. All of that stuff, I do on my own. I do it for my Mom and for him. They are the two most important people in my life."

David Pyper, who was on Southern's basketball staff during Gamble's career there, remains close. He has seen how life's challenges, particularly Cameron's, have matured Julian into a solid citizen as well as a basketball player.

"That's what's helped him understand that life is bigger than basketball," said Pyper, an assistant at Southern who was Gamble's head coach his junior and senior seasons.

Finding a home

Gamble's injuries complicated his playing career at Miami, a school he didn't know was interested in him until the summer before his senior year at Southern. Until then, smaller schools such as Virginia Commonwealth, Richmond and Virginia Military were recruiting him the hardest.

But Frank Haith, Miami's head coach at the time, saw Gamble play well against J.J. Hixson, the former N.C. State star now with the Portland Trail Blazers, in an AAU game. He pursued Gamble and offered a scholarship.

"He was a really good guy," Gamble said. "The overall school atmosphere, it wasn't too big. Coming out of high school, I wanted to go somewhere different. I wanted to get out of my comfort zone to improve myself as a person on and off the basketball court."

It's not like Gamble had time to get very comfortable as a youngster when he moved from school to school. His parents divorced when he was 7 years old and living in Richmond. Sarah Gamble returned to North Carolina to find a job, living in Charlotte before moving to the Triangle.

Julian said he went to three middle schools before entering Southern High.

But he finally found a home in Miami, even if his playing career was slow to blossom. His scoring averages over his first three seasons were 2.4, 3.5 and 4.0 points.

Just before his sophomore season, another hurdle was placed in front of Gamble. His father, Julius, died of liver failure on Sept. 10, 2009, in a

Connecticut hospital.

Julius Gamble was on a transplant list, just six days away from receiving a new liver when he died. Julian's birthday is Sept. 15, and he had planned to visit his father. But Julius died before he could get there.

"It was an unfortunate situation," Julian Gamble said. "It was difficult on me, but my teammates and my coaches really helped me at that time and definitely my faith. Everything happens for a reason."

Gamble moved forward with basketball and his studies as he grieved.

College decision, Part II

Because he already had been on campus for four years, Gamble finished his undergraduate degree in sports administration, with a business minor, in 2011. Around that time, Haith left Miami to become Missouri's head coach.

Larranaga was hired from George Mason to take over the Hurricanes. Gamble was getting feelers from other schools where he could transfer and play one year immediately under NCAA graduate transfer rules.

Larranaga hadn't seen Gamble play, so he told him the truth about his new program.

"He was being courted," Larranaga said. "Since I had not seen Julian play, I didn't really know how to advise him, except to tell him what direction we were going and (that) we would like him to be a part of it."

But Gamble, after all that moving around as a younger student, didn't want to go anywhere.

"This is where my heart is," Gamble said.

Before he could play for Larranaga, Gamble tore his ACL in the summer of 2011. But the NCAA gave him the extra year and Gamble put in the work to be ready to help the Hurricanes.

Because of that, he will be in Raleigh today when Miami plays N.C. State at 4 p.m. at PNC Arena. On Thursday night, he was in Durham spending time with his mother and with Cameron.

Today, Sarah and Cameron will be courtside at PNC Arena watching Julian play in person. David Pyper, who now teaches and coaches at Leesville Road High School in Raleigh, will be there, too, as will Michael Fuga, a former Southern assistant coach who is now principal at Durham's Rogers-Herr Middle School.

They represent Julian Gamble's trusted circle. The best thing, Julian Gamble said, is seeing Cameron smile, like when Cameron plays like he's hitting Julian and the big center overreacts and falls over.

Or when they sit and watch "The Price is Right" — Cameron's favorite show.

"We have a really good time together," Julian said. "I spend most of the time trying to make him laugh."

After all the pain they've both gone through, that feels pretty good.

Durham's Julian Gamble has Miami on top of ACC

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Feb. 1, 2013

University of Miami center Julian Gamble grew up in Durham, N.C., and starred at Southern High School, just minutes from Duke.

Nobody needed to tell him how big last week's blowout victory over the Blue Devils was.

That game was so big that UM students camped out for tickets on the grass alongside BankUnited Center, affectionately being dubbed "Larranaga Lawn." It isn't quite Krzyzewskiville. But by UM standards, that hype was as big as it gets.

How big? Warren Sapp, one of the biggest, baddest Canes ever, was in the building.

Gamble didn't shoot particularly well against Duke, but he controlled the paint, grabbing 10 rebounds and blocking four shots as the Hurricanes posted a program-changing victory.

Two weeks earlier, Gamble, a 23-year-old, sixth-year senior who grew up a North Carolina Tar Heels fan, scored 14 points in the Canes' 68-59 victory at the Smith Center.

Saturday, Gamble returns to the Triangle, leading the first-place Hurricanes against N.C. State.

Gamble deserves some of the credit for the Canes' rise. His scoring picked up during Reggie Johnson's absence, but his touch and tenacity around the rim also are key reasons the Canes are 16-3 and ranked No. 14.

ESPN commentators joked that in the win against North Carolina, Gamble backed into the paint like an older guy backing down a young guy in a YMCA league. Miami coach Jim Larranaga said that is exactly how he wants Gamble to play.

When they say old man, they should really describe it as fundamental basketball in the low post," Larranaga said. "Because a low-post player's job is to attack the rim and get inside buckets for you, and he does it with his left-hand jump hook, his offensive rebounding and running the floor. Those are three fundamental things we ask him to do, and he is doing them very, very well."

Gamble is extra motivated against teams from North Carolina because they didn't recruit him heavily out of high school. Though he averaged 18 points, 10 rebounds and five blocks as a senior at Durham Southern, he flew under the radar until a phenomenal showing at the AAU Breakdown Hoops Festival in Miami in the summer of 2006.

Then-UM coach Frank Haith immediately took notice, as did coaches from Tennessee, Kentucky, St. John's and Georgetown. Gamble fell in love with Miami and never visited another school.

"That was kind of my coming-out party," Gamble said. "I didn't have anything to lose, so I was really aggressive and had a great week. I really liked Coach Haith and the laid-back family atmosphere on the team, so that sealed the deal for me."

It also helped that Anthony King, another Durham Southern grad, was on the UM team at the time. But Gamble's college career hasn't gone as he anticipated. He sat out his freshman year, averaged 7.5 minutes and 2.4 points as a redshirt freshman, 13.3 minutes and 3.5 points as a sophomore, and 15.2 minutes and four points as a junior. He tore his ACL in the summer of 2011, and sat out the 2011-12 season. He was granted a clock extension by the NCAA, allowing him to play a sixth season.

In the meantime, he earned a degree in sports administration with a minor in business administration. Larranaga calls Gamble "one of our smartest players on the court, almost like

another coach."

Midway through the second half of a recent game against Boston College, Gamble approached Larranaga with a suggestion. "We're behind, and Julian comes over and says, 'We need to go small,' " Larranaga said. " 'Kenny [Kadji] and I don't match up well with those 3-point shooters.' He was right."

Watching the Duke game from back home was his proud mother, Sarah, a 6-1 executive assistant at a pharmaceutical company who played some basketball in her younger years. Gamble calls her "my rock," and honored her with his first tattoo in 2007. Since then, much of his upper body has been covered in tattoos. He got his latest on the eve of this season. It is the word "Perseverance" on his left leg, which has withstood three surgeries.

On his wrist, he often wears a watch that belonged to his late father, Julius, who died of liver failure in his early 50s on Sept. 10, 2009. The alarm on the watch is set to 2:25 p.m., and when it buzzes every day, he thinks of his father. The Gambles separated when Julian was 7, but they remained close.

"His father's passing was very hard for Julian, but his faith and his teammates kept him going," Sarah Gamble said. "Coach Larranaga has been amazing, too, keeping Julian's confidence up even when he wasn't playing. It's so exciting to see his perseverance pay off."

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Canes Bringing Style to the Court

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 1, 2013

When you watch the Miami Hurricanes basketball team play, there's one thing that stands out.

Their shoes.

As one of the nation's hottest teams at 16-3 and a perfect 7-0 in ACC competition, the 14th-ranked Hurricanes are also one of the most stylish teams.

Each player brings a unique style to the court with them as the UM coaching staff doesn't restrict the players from only wearing team shoes or even team colors.

Lately, two players—Shane Larkin and Durand Scott—have been rocking a bright neon yellow pair of shoes with Larkin in the Nike Air Zoom Huarache 2K4 and Scott in the Nike Zoom Hyperdunk 2011.

Larkin and Scott first broke out the pair of highlighters two weeks ago in their win over No. 1 Duke.

"I didn't even know coach was going to let them do it, but it looked good out there," McKinney-Jones said.

Larkin spotted his shoes at nearby Sole Fly, a sneaker boutique store specializing in unique shoes and the latest designs. The shoes immediately caught his eye and he took a picture of them to send to assistant coach Michael Huger, who has to approve each shoe. Huger gave the Larkin the go-ahead and Larkin got the bright pair of shoes.

"A lot of people like the bright shoe," Sole Fly store manager Tony Perez said. "So the guys have got them to wear in the games. There's a lot of stuff in here and the guys come in saying they need a shoe for game day." Not only did Larkin and Scott look good on the court, the backcourt duo combined for 43 points, 16 rebounds, and nine assists in Miami's first ever win over a No. 1 Duke as the Hurricanes blew out the Blue Devils, 90-63.

As Mars Blackmon would say, "It's gotta be the shoes."

Scott was planning on wearing his bright yellow shoes last season in a game against Memphis, but head coach Jim Larranaga, who was in his first year at UM, wasn't comfortable with the idea so the staff had Scott change into a different pair before the game.

"We were coming from George Mason so we weren't used to that," Huger said.

Since then, Larranaga put Huger in charge of which shoes can and cannot be worn. Huger receives plenty of requests and suggestions from the creative group of players looking to lead Miami to its first NCAA tournament appearance in five years.

"I use it as an incentive and say, 'Hey, if we win this game, you guys are allowed to wear the lime green shoe that's how they came into play (against Duke),' " Huger said. "We were at Boston College and the guys weren't as sharp in our practice and shoot-around so I gave them a little extra motivation and said, 'Hey if we win this game you guys can wear those lime green shoes that you want to wear so badly. We wound up winning by one point.' "

Larkin and Scott had the brightest shoes on the court that day against Duke, but the other Hurricanes deserve high marks for their style as well.

Most notably, Julian Gamble. While the highlighter shoes might stand out the most, devoted sneakerheads will be proud of Gamble's shoes. Gamble has been wearing a special-edition Solefly x Jordan Spizike shoe. There are only about 60 pairs in the world of the impressive orange, green, black and grey shoe.

Trey McKinney-Jones wore the Air Jordan 11 "Cool Grey" and Kenny Kadji was in a pair of the Nike LeBron X id shoes to round out Miami's starting five against Duke. Then there's Rion Brown, who has been wearing a Nike Kevin Durant orange shoe throughout the season and Erik Swoope has had a unique mix including seen in Kobe's "Christmas" shoe although Huger wouldn't let him wear a "Gym Green" pair of Foamposites.

"Everybody has pretty good style," Larkin said.

McKinney-Jones led the shoe charge in Miami's next game against Florida State wearing a pair of Nike KD 5 "DMV" shoes that pays

tribute to Kevin Durant's hometown. McKinney-Jones scored game-high 15 points in the win over the Seminoles in his orange and blue colorways with a neon logo, which were released in December.

"Me, Shane and a few other guys on the team are real big shoe fanatics so we like to stay up on what is in with Jordans, Nikes, and switch it up for the games, especially the big games that are on TV," McKinney-Jones said. "We like to pull something nice out of our closets."

Larkin switched it up against Florida State as he put on a pair of Nike Air Foamposite One "Polarized Pink" shoes and had the socks to match.

"I like wearing shoes that nobody has and it catches my eye," Larkin said. "Hopefully I keep window shopping and I find some more crazy stuff."

For the majority of the season, Larkin has been wearing a pair of orange Chris Paul's CP3 VI shoes, but has been switching it up lately. He has a pair of highlighter orange shoes in his locker that he'd like to wear at some point, but says he needs time to break them in.

As far as other plans for the future, Larkin has ideas in mind.

"I have tricks up my sleeve that I already have," Larkin said. "I don't want to spoil the secret of the shoes I'm going to wear, but I'm definitely going to be pulling out some crazy stuff down the road."

The players are enjoying being able to show their creative side on the court.

"They're having a lot of fun," Huger said. "Winning solves everything and when you win, the team, coach L, everybody is happy about the program, the university, the students, and everyone is showing up to the games. We just have to continue winning and playing together, that's the key. And then the shoes speak on their personalities on the court and I want to continue with that. I give them some freedom with the shoes and colors. I won't let them go over-the-top, but when we win, I'll give them a little more freedom."

Johnson predicted UM's big season in October

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Feb. 1, 2013

All eyes were on football when Miami's basketball team opened practice back on Oct. 10.

A few players met with reporters in the BankUnited Center lobby early that afternoon. You could feel the excitement oozing from senior center Reggie Johnson.

He saw something in this team. Eventually everyone else did to, but the 16-3 record, eight-game winning streak and two-game ACC lead might even have exceeded his expectations. But read the transcript of important moments from the interview.

Are you guys being overlooked?

"I definitely do. We're getting recognition, but I still us getting overlooked a lot."

Do you like that?

"I love it. I love it."

Why?

"It just makes us play harder. And once we do win, because we expect it and nobody else does, it will make it even better."

Why do people overlook you?

"I mean, we're Miami. If we wore North Carolina or Florida State, we'd be a top 25 team without a doubt. But we're Miami and that's that."

What kind of goals are you looking at?

"Taking small steps. Our goal right now is to win the ACC. That's something we want to do, but we have to take small steps at a time. You have to do non-conference, then conference. It's a big challenge within itself."

What's the outlook?

"We're gonna win big. I'm sorry if I sound cocky, but I think we're going to win big. That's my mind set. I think practices are harder than

the game right now. Practice is actually hard. Kenny Kadji is a guy I'm riding right now because he's going to be vital to this team with his attitude to approach the practice. Julius is going to be big for us. Shane gotta step up this year and I think he will, so we're going to win big."

How do you define win big?

"Tournament and make noise. Tournament and make noise. I definitely want to make the tournament. There are no ifs ands or buts about the tournament. Forget about the NIT. Forget about all of that. Some of you probably think this is crazy, but I'm telling you how it's going to be for this upcoming season."

How is this year's team different from last year?

"Well, barring injuries, we're going to be a heckuva team. I think we're a top-3 team in this league. That's just my opinion. NC State is the favorite, but that's going to be a game that I'm really looking forward to. Don't get me wrong, I'm looking forward to any game, but NC State is going to be a great matchup for us because they've got some top guys in the league and they went to the Sweet 16, I believe, last year. It's going to be a great matchup."

How about the schedule?

"Michigan State, that's going to be a big win for us if we can pull that out. That will help us get even more recognition as far as with the fans just believing in us as a team." [Miami won 67-59]

How do you get basketball more hype on campus?

"I've been here four years, man. I'm not sure, man. I'm still trying to figure that out, but at the end of the day, we just have to do our job. Whether it's an empty arena or a packed arena, we still have to come out and play. Hopefully if we win, the fans will come. If not, I don't know."

Miami, NC State ready for important ACC battle

FOX Sports Florida
Charlie McCarthy
Feb. 1, 2013

Miami and North Carolina State have traded places in the past 3½ months.

The Hurricanes, picked to finish fourth in preseason voting by Atlantic Coast Conference coaches, currently own a perfect league mark and hold a two-game lead atop the standings.

The Wolfpack, No. 1 in the preseason poll, are in fourth place and 2.5 games behind Miami.

So much for preseason rankings ... at least to this point.

"I don't agree with people saying NC State is going to win the ACC flat out," Canes center Reggie Johnson said Friday on the phone from Raleigh, N.C. "You still have to battle."

The two teams will do just that on Saturday afternoon, when Miami visits NC State in a regionally televised game at PNC Arena.

"That's definitely motivation, knowing everybody expected them to be the best team in the ACC," Miami point guard Shane Larkin said. "They definitely are one of the better teams in the ACC, just like we are one of the best teams in the ACC."

The 14th-ranked Hurricanes (16-3) are the first ACC team not named Duke or North Carolina to begin conference play 7-0 since Virginia in 1981, when Miami coach Jim Larranaga was a Cavaliers assistant.

Miami, however, is 0-6 all-time at NC State. The Canes dropped both meetings with the Wolfpack last season.

No. 19 NC State (16-5, 5-3) has lost three league road games by a total of six points. The Wolfpack are 12-0 overall at home this season.

Saturday's game could be determined by which team controls the tempo. The Wolfpack's offense has averaged 73.9 points in league games and likes to get up the floor. The Hurricanes defense has held ACC foes to 55.4 points per game.

NC State might be without point guard Lorenzo Brown, a member of the All-ACC preseason team. The junior suffered a left-ankle sprain during Tuesday night's 58-55 loss at Virginia.

"We'll see how he feels (Saturday)," NC State coach Mark Gottfried said. "The probability in my mind for him to be able to cut and move and spring and jump is pretty slim. We have to prepare as if he is not going to play, and then we will see."

Larkin, whom Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton called the best point guard in the ACC, said he hopes Brown plays.

"You always look forward to games like that, when you're going to be up against one of the better players in the country," Larkin said. "If he doesn't play, I'm still going to go out there and play my hardest."

"At the end of the day, you always want to play against the best players. And on top of that, you don't people saying, 'Yeah, Miami beat them, but Lorenzo Brown didn't play.'"

Johnson will be playing his fourth game since returning from a fractured thumb that forced him to miss eight games. A starter before the injury, the senior has come off the bench in victories against Duke, Florida State and at Virginia Tech.

"We're winning right now, that's the only thing that matters," Johnson said. "I don't want to change anything."

So it really is all about the W?

"Yeah man, that's the way it is. If people don't understand that about us by now, I don't think they're ever going to get it," said Johnson, who grew up in Winston-Salem, N.C., about 90 minutes from Raleigh.

Johnson, Julian Gamble and the other Miami big men will oppose a frontline led by junior forward C.J. Leslie (15.6 points, 7.3 rebounds) and senior forward Richard Howell (12.7 points, 11 rebounds). Leslie joined Brown on the preseason All-ACC team.

Miami's lack of preseason honors means little to Gottfried.

"The thing that stands out with Miami is that they play like a veteran team," the coach said. "They understand exactly offensively what they are trying to do and how they want to score and who needs to do what. They have size inside, three legitimate big, strong, capable post players."

"This is a team that is built for a lot of success."

Streaking Canes face another tough ACC road test

Palm Beach Post

Jorge Milian

Feb. 1, 2013

Everything seems to be going right for the University of Miami these days.

The No. 14 Hurricanes (16-3, 7-0 ACC) have won eight consecutive games and enter Saturday's showdown (CBS, 4 p.m.) against No. 19 North Carolina State (16-5, 5-3) in Raleigh, N.C. with a two-game lead in the conference standings.

That winning streak figured to be in jeopardy against N.C. State, the preseason pick to win the ACC and an unbeaten host in its first 12 home games.

But UM may be catching a break. The Wolf-pack could be without junior point guard Lorenzo Brown, the ACC's leader in assists, who sprained his left ankle on Tuesday in a loss to Virginia and might not play. Brown, averaging 12.7 points, is also second among ACC players in steals.

"The probability, in my mind, for him to be recovered enough to cut and move and sprint and jump is pretty slim," N.C. State coach Mark Gottfried told the Raleigh News and Observer. "We have to prepare as if he's not going to play and then we'll go from there."

Brown's absence would spoil his expected matchup with Miami's Shane Larkin in a battle of the ACC's best point guards.

Larkin, a sophomore, is coming off a sensational effort in UM's 73-64 victory against Virginia Tech in Blacksburg on Wednesday. Larkin scored 25 points and hit five three-pointers, including a long one with 1:47 to play after the Hokies had crept within four points, 60-56. "He did everything for us," forward Kenny Kadji said after the game.

The Hurricanes have been on fire since the start of the new year, posting an 8-0 record in January. UM is the first team other than North Carolina or Duke to open with a 7-0 ACC record since Virginia in 1981. Coincidentally, Miami coach Jim Larranaga was an assistant on that Virginia team that was led by center Ralph Sampson.

In a two-week stretch that included a dominating victory over then-No. 1 Duke, the Hurricanes have gone from unranked to a projected No. 2 seed in the NCAA tournament according to various bracket predictions. A win today could move UM closer its first Top 10 ranking since March, 1999.

Coach Jim Larranaga preaches poise

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Feb. 1, 2013

If the University of Miami men's basketball team is feeling any pressure with a No. 14 national ranking, a perfect 7-0 record in the Atlantic Coast Conference and an eight-game win streak heading into Saturday's game at No. 19 North Carolina State, it sure isn't letting on.

The seemingly unflappable Hurricanes rolled into Raleigh, N.C., by bus on Thursday from Blacksburg, Va., where they overcame a 12-point deficit and the nation's leading scorer to beat Virginia Tech. Nothing seems to rattle this bunch, which boasts six seniors and cool-as-a-cucumber sophomore point guard Shane Larkin, who poured in 25 points against the Hokies.

Top-ranked Duke came to town, students camped out, sold-out arena, Dick Vitale and a national TV audience. No worries. The Hurricanes humiliated the Blue Devils by 27.

Rival Florida State shows up a few days later, champing at the bit and with former UM coach Leonard Hamilton determined to shut down the multifaceted Miami offense. Not a chance. Canes by 24.

UM coach Jim Larranaga and his staff have managed to keep the Hurricanes (16-3) focused on their task despite the team's growing list of accolades.

Larranaga was particularly proud of the win at Virginia Tech.

"I had told the team on Monday that Virginia Tech would be a perfect test for us because they are very, very good at home, they had the nation's top scorer in Erick Green, and they play both man and zone defense," Larranaga said by phone Friday. "I knew we'd be tested to the ultimate. It was a gut check, and

we handled it. I expect a similar type of test against N.C. State."

He pointed out that the Wolfpack (16-5, 5-3) leads the nation in transition baskets, boasts six players in double figures and ranks in the top 10 nationally in field-goal percentage. The key, he said, will be Miami's defense in transition and the half court.

"They have a lot of weapons and share the ball as well as anybody," Larranaga said. "We will need the kind of poise we had against Virginia Tech. That was the kind of road win you really appreciate as a coach."

One of the most anticipated matchups of Saturday's game — the point guard battle between Larkin and N.C. State's Lorenzo Brown — might not happen. Brown, who averaged 14.7 points and a league-leading 8.7 assists in the past seven games, injured his ankle during Tuesday's 58-55 loss to Virginia. He was still in a walking boot on Friday, and coach Mark Gottfried said his status was questionable for the game.

If Brown doesn't play, the ball will be in the care of freshman guard Rodney Purvis and backup Tyler Lewis.

Larranaga said he has no doubt his players will be ready for the Wolfpack.

"This league is so good, that your next opponent is always very, very good, so you have no choice but to stay focused," Larranaga said. "If we worry about our win streak or rankings, or gloat on our last victories, our minds won't be focused on the present task. So far, we've been very focused no matter if we've been home or away, and that makes coaches very happy."

Hurricanes bucking history of woes in league play

Examiner.com

Paul Borden

Feb. 1, 2013

The University of Miami will put its 7-0 Atlantic Coast Conference record and eight-game winning streak on the line Saturday at North Carolina State, a team many picked to win the league title this season (4 p.m. EST, CBS).

In fact, the Wolfpack earned 26 of 53 first-place votes in media polling last October to edge out perennial contenders Duke and North Carolina for the honor.

The Wolfpack also was the choice of the coaches in preseason prognostications.

And Miami?

The media relegated the Hurricanes to fifth place. The coaches were more generous with a No. 4 spot.

Now, with the teams approaching the midpoint of the 18-game ACC schedule, the Hurricanes have a two-game advantage in the standings over Duke and Virginia, which are tied for second with 5-2 marks. No other ACC team has fewer than three losses in conference play, including N.C. State, which is 5-3.

It already has been documented that the 7-0 start is the best for the Hurricanes since they first began competing in a conference in the 1991-92 season, when they joined the Big East.

Their previous best start was in 1998-99, when they won their first five league games.

To put things even more in perspective, in the 22 seasons the Hurricanes have competed in a conference, they have had winning records only nine times at this stage of the season with their best efforts 5-2 marks in four consecutive seasons over the last half of the 1990s.

Since starting play in the ACC in the 2004-05 season, they have had a winning record after seven games only four times, including this season.

Here is a look at how the Hurricanes have stood after seven games and how they went on to finish in conference play:

Big East:

1991-92: 1-6, 1-17
1992-93: 2-5, 7-11
1993-94: 0-7, 0-18
1994-95: 3-4, 9-9
1995-96: 3-4, 8-10
1996-97: 5-2, 9-9
1997-98: 5-2, 11-7
1998-99: 5-2, 15-3
1999-00: 5-2, 13-3
2000-01: 2-5, 8-8
2001-02: 4-3, 10-6
2002-03: 2-5, 4-12
2003-04: 3-5, 4-12

ACC:

2004-05: 4-3, 7-9
2005-06: 4-3, 7-9
2006-07: 2-5, 4-12
2007-08: 2-5, 9-9
2008-09: 3-4, 7-9
2009-10: 2-5, 4-12
2010-11: 1-6, 6-10
2011-12: 4-3, 9-7
2012-13: 7-0, ?-?

What's even more remarkable is that the Hurricanes have compiled their record this season despite being on the road four times in conference play.

Admittedly, the game at N.C. State looks to be their toughest road test yet, but their record does include a win at North Carolina. Despite the Tar Heels' up-and-down play, that remains their only loss in 10 home games for the season.

One other item of note: Miami is the first team other than Duke or North Carolina to start ACC play with a 7-0 mark since Virginia did it in 1981. Current Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga was an assistant on the Virginia staff, and the Cavaliers' roster included a center named Ralph Sampson.

Larkin sparks Miami to comeback victory over Hokies

NewsAdvance.com

Chris Lang

Jan. 30, 2013

BLACKSBURG — When anyone talks about Miami's hot start in ACC play, they point to the Hurricanes' experience, and understandably so. They start four seniors and have one of the deepest, most seasoned teams in the league.

But it's a sophomore that makes the No. 14 Hurricanes go, and that second-year player was the big reason why Miami rallied from a 12-point first-half deficit to beat the Hokies, 73-64, Thursday night at Cassell Coliseum and move to 7-0 in the ACC.

Shane Larkin, the son of baseball Hall of Famer Barry Larkin, has been as much of a facilitator as he has been a scorer this season. But the point guard put his team on back when it needed him the most, scoring the final seven points of the first half and the first two of the second to help Miami dig out of that double-digit hole.

Larkin finished with 25 points, the most he's scored in an ACC game this season.

Erick Green, the nation's leading scorer, tried to will Tech (11-9, 2-5 ACC) back into the game multiple times in the second half, but the Hokies simply couldn't slow the Hurricanes (16-3) in the second half. After Cadarian Raines hit a leaner in the lane with 11:43 left to put the Hokies up 45-44, Larkin struck again, drilling a 3-pointer to spark a 10-0 run that gave the Hurricanes the lead for good.

The Hokies pulled within four with 2:14 left on three Jarell Eddie free throws, but Larkin again knocked down a clutch basket, draining a deep 3 with 1:47 left to put the game away. Green broke the 20-point mark for the 19th time this season, finishing with 30 points on 11 for 20 shooting.

For Miami, the win was a key proving point for a team trying to show last week's home humiliations of Duke and Florida State were no fluke. On a dreary night, the student section came out in force, but the rest of Cassell was half full at best. Before the game, officials

were concerned that a wet spot near center court had something to do with the torrential rain outside. The roof wasn't leaking, though, and the game started as scheduled.

The Hokies fed off the energy of the crowd early to build a 28-16 lead. Green buried a jumper from just inside the 3-point line with 5:56 left in the first half, sending the crowd into a frenzy and forcing Miami coach Jim Larranaga into a quick timeout.

The Hurricanes quickly stopped the bleeding, going inside to Kenny Kadji for a quick basket, the start of a 13-4 run to end the half. Larkin scored the final seven points, including a 3-pointer with 1:01 left that cut the lead to 32-29 and sucked the life out of the crowd.

Miami, which at No. 14 has its highest ranking since joining the ACC, could have been caught looking forward to a nationally televised showdown Saturday in Raleigh with No. 19 North Carolina State. Instead, they settled down and rallied for the victory.

Raines, who came off the bench for the first time this season, finished with 10 points and eight rebounds for Tech. Kadji finished with 18 points and McKinney-Jones added 12 for the Hurricanes.

The Hokies return to action Saturday when they travel to Chapel Hill for a noon matchup with North Carolina.

DRIBBLES: Tech's Robert Brown came off the bench for the second straight game and had one of his most productive outings in weeks, finishing with eight points and four assists on 3-of-5 shooting. ... Miami scored 16 points off 17 Virginia Tech turnovers. ... Thursday marked the Hokies' second game this season against a ranked opponent. They beat then-No. 15 Oklahoma State here on Dec. 1.

Hurricanes men assume the role as target

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 30, 2013

The surging University of Miami men's basketball team, which jumped to No. 14 in the Associated Press poll this week, is about to find out what it's like to be the hunted.

After years of being a middle-of-the-pack team hoping to win Atlantic Coast Conference games, the Hurricanes are 15-3 and have sole possession of the league lead with a 6-0 record heading into Wednesday night's game at Virginia Tech.

UM raised its national profile last week with a 90-63 thumping of then-top-ranked Duke and a 71-47 rout of Florida State. Only once since 1990 had a team leaped 11 spots in the rankings in one week.

Although Hurricanes fans are giddy about seeing Miami ahead of Duke and North Carolina in the ACC standings for a change, UM players realize it means every opponent will now give them their best.

"I've explained to our guys that we're not flying under the radar screen anymore," UM coach Jim Larranaga said. "We've got people's attention. We have a target on our backs. That excitement we felt before we played Duke, that's how excited our opponents are going to be to play us."

The Canes are on a seven-game win streak and have won their ACC games by an average of 13.5 points. Their veteran roster — six seniors, including four of the starters — has been winning with poise, confidence and tenacious defense. They are holding opponents to an average of 54 points and a conference-low 34.3 percent shooting. Duke shot a season-low 29.7 percent against UM, as did FSU (30.8 percent).

Virginia Tech coach James Johnson, a former assistant of Larranaga's at George Mason, conceded it will be a very tough matchup for his Hokies (11-8, 2-4), who have lost eight of their past 12 games.

"We're coming off two tough losses and now face a tough test against a team playing what I think is some of the best basketball in the country right now," Johnson said. "For them, it all starts with the little general, Shane Larkin. He is one of the better point guards in the league, running the show, distributing the ball, rebounding. He almost had a triple-double the other night."

Johnson went on to praise the Hurricanes' front court, as well.

"Kenny Kadji is an inside-outside threat. [Julian] Gamble is physical, a great defender, a sixth-year guy playing really good basketball. Then you've got [Reggie] Johnson, Trey McKinney Jones, Durand Scott, an all-league type of player. They are very talented at every position, have a very good coach, and are playing with a lot of confidence."

UM's biggest challenge will be stopping Hokies guard Erick Green, whose 25.2-point average leads the nation.

"The guy is a scoring machine," Larranaga said. "He is tremendous in the open court. He's good at getting fouled and cashing in at the free-throw line. He has scored 20 points every game, but one. He's a handful for anybody."

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/01/30/3207350/miami-hurricanes-men-assume-the.html#storylink=cpy>

FSU looks for cracks exposed by 'Canes

FSUNews.com

David Walker

Jan. 30, 2013

If you were a Miami fan and/or Duke hater you probably could not have envisioned a better scenario for the Blue Devils' demise than what went down last Wednesday in Miami. The 90-63 absolute lambasting that Miami put on Duke was made possible by a combination of all the familiar things you usually see in these big upset games.

A veteran underdog playing at home (Miami) physically controls the tempo of the game, the young favored team (Duke) fails to take the opponent seriously and starts missing shots they usually make. Once behind, they can't find it in themselves to battle back against the team with such veteran guile and eventually crumble under the deafening noise from 8,000 crazy fans, all screaming bloody murder. However, after re-watching the game, several nuances in Miami's game plan and execution stood out that Florida State is going to have to pay attention to if they have a prayer of upsetting Duke.

Duke's biggest weakness is their rebounding (sound familiar?), and the fact that their front-court is rather undersized. They rely almost entirely on Mason Plumlee to keep them afloat most nights on the glass. He is more than up to the task by posting excellent offensive and defensive rebounding rates (10.3 percent and 24.6 percent respectively), however, nobody else on the team is averaging more than 5.5 rebounds a game. Miami took advantage of this by playing him extremely physically and at times using two and even three players to box him out the second a Blue Devil player's shot went up. Both Julian Gamble and Reggie Johnson (who, by the way, is a massive human being) gave Plumlee fits on both ends of the court by constantly bodying him up and keeping an arm permanently positioned in his back. Montay Brandon and Keil Turpin are going to have mimic that style of play when go-

ing up against Plumlee. The 'Noles should also consider throwing a wall of players to box out Plumlee and force the other Duke players to rebound, much like Miami did.

Miami also slowed down Duke offensively, cutting off almost all dribble penetration and frustrating them into rushing shots. Duke is a team that likes to push the pace on offense (69.5, No. 61 in the country) and they love spreading the floor with three point shooting. Duke No. 4 in the country in three point shooting at 41.1 percent and nearly 30 percent of their shots on offense are three pointers. When the game was still in question (up till the end of the first half), Miami did a great job of closing out on shooters, forcing them to take that dreaded extra dribble inside the three point line, making them take an out of rhythm, and much less efficient, shot. The 'Canes also excelled at corralling the ball handler off the pick and roll, forcing him to go too deep into the paint and usually forced him to turn the ball over.

Florida State would be wise to watch film of this game and study what Miami did to Plumlee and how they slowed down the elite Blue Devil's defense. Using all these small techniques Miami used to win could add up into a huge upset for Florida State.

That being said, as good as Miami played, they were helped out by the poor showing Duke gave. Lazy turnovers, inconsistent effort and having an inexplicably bad shooting night helped Duke lose this game as much as Miami's defense and energy did. For FSU to truly have a chance in this game they are going to need Duke to have another game where their focus is lacking. On the bright side this is something that tends to happen with a young team like Duke and the 'Noles are hoping to take advantage of the breezy and self-assured overconfidence that Duke will most likely approach this game with.

VT's Johnson seeks upper hand on friend Jim Larranaga

Daily Press
By Norm Wood
Jan.29, 2013

Though Wednesday night's meeting in Blacksburg could be a triumphant reunion of coaching buddies, it won't be — not with Virginia Tech's James Johnson trying to get his team back on track and Miami's Jim Larranaga getting some of the best basketball in the nation out of his players.

Johnson was an assistant coach at George Mason on Larranaga's staff in 2006, when the Patriots made their improbable run to the Final Four. Larranaga stayed at George Mason for another five seasons, but Johnson left after the Final Four appearance to become an assistant coach at Virginia Tech under former coach Seth Greenberg.

Still, Johnson has fond memories of his time working with Larranaga for two seasons — even though those are thoughts for another time.

"I've got a great relationship with him," said Johnson, who was named Tech's coach in May. "At the end of the day, he's coaching his team and I'm coaching my team."

Johnson is wise to deflect attention from the Larranaga connection for now. With No. 14 Miami (15-3 overall, 6-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) in the midst of a seven-game winning streak that included a 27-point victory last Wednesday against then-No. 1 Duke, Johnson's efforts are best placed on trying to find a way to disrupt Larranaga's success.

Tech (11-8, 2-4) has lost two straight and six of its past eight games, including a 77-70 loss Sunday at Clemson. Now, Tech faces one of the most experienced teams in the nation in a Miami program that features six seniors, five of whom are averaging 20 or more minutes per game.

Senior guard Durand Scott leads the Hurricanes with 14.3 points per game, while senior forward Kenny Kadji is adding 13 points and seven rebounds per game. Five Miami players are averaging double figures in scoring.

"Every position, they're deep," Johnson said. "They've got veterans. They've got talent at every position — very, very good basketball team, and they're playing with a lot of confidence, as they should be, right now."

Daily Press Eyewitness: Submit photos and videos from your mobile device. Your picture could be featured on Page 2 of the Daily Press.

Tech continues to get ridiculous scoring numbers from guard Erick Green, who leads the nation with an average of 25.2 points per game, but he's not getting much consistent support. Jarell Eddie scored 19 points against Clemson, but he's scored nine points or fewer in half of Tech's ACC games this season.

"(Green) is a scoring machine, and he scores in so many different ways," Larranaga said. "He's tremendous in the open court. He's terrific at getting fouled and cashing in at the foul line. He can shoot the three. They set a lot of ball screens, which he's very good at utilizing the screen to free himself."

While Johnson has had his hands full prepping his team to play Miami, Larranaga was far more willing to reflect on his relationship with Johnson.

"J.J. was just an instrumental part of our George Mason program for the two years," Larranaga said. "He was great at every aspect. He was a terrific recruiter, terrific coach on the floor, but most importantly he was a great friend and continues to be. I think he's done a very, very good job with his team. A lot of things when I watch them on tape remind me of us. They're a little bit younger than us, but they do a lot of the things that we like to do."

Sophomore guard Robert Brown is one of those younger players Johnson needs to get more out of if he has hopes of getting an unexpected victory that could jump-start a season headed downhill. Brown, who is averaging 9.6 points per game, has missed 28 of his last 29 shots from 3-point range.

Johnson brought Brown off the bench against Clemson, and Brown had nine points in 26 minutes. Marquis Rankin started in Brown's place against Clemson. Johnson said he isn't sure if he'll start Brown against Miami.

"(Brown has) still got to get better, but I thought he took a step forward (against Clemson), and hopefully we can keep getting him better the rest of the season," Johnson said.

Miami's Larkin moves out of his dad's shadow

Examiner.com
Paul Borden
Jan. 29, 2013

When he arrived at the University of Miami, Shane Larkin was known as the son of Barry Larkin, former Cincinnati Reds shortstop and baseball Hall-of-Famer.

Less than two years later, it's rapidly turning around.

Barry Larkin?

Oh, yeah. He's the father of Shane Larkin, star guard for the Hurricanes.

For on a team that starts four seniors and brings another off the bench along with a couple of juniors, Larkin, just a sophomore, has become the catalyst that has sparked the Hurricanes to the top of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

He's the one that even senior guard Durand Scott, a four-year starter, defers to in handling responsibilities at the point, a crucial role in college basketball today.

"He has that look, that thing you call 'it,'" Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton said after the Hurricanes had beaten his Seminoles 71-47 Sunday evening to go to 15-3 overall and 6-0 in the Atlantic Coast Conference. "Sometimes you can't describe it. Sometimes there's not words in the dictionary to describe what they're giving you. But he has it."

And this was after Larkin had posted rather mild (for him) numbers, just nine points on 2-of-9 shooting from the field. He had only two 3-pointers in six attempts and actually missed one of three free throws.

Four nights earlier, he had scored 18 points and was 8-of-14 from the field in Miami's 27-point thrashing of then-No. 1 Duke.

But the value of a player like Larkin isn't always measured in numbers, which, by the way, included 10 rebounds and five assists against Duke and nine rebounds and six assists against Florida State. He had only five turnovers in the two games combined despite playing 70 minutes.

"He has that 'it' -- the confidence, skill, talent, and the ability all wrapped up in one person," Hamilton continued. "Sometimes you can be physically gifted and sometimes you can be gifted mentality, but the emotional part, the ability to stay cool, calm and collected, and have vision to make a decision is something that is a gift that you have that is not really taught."

"It's a savvy that you have."

Even with Miami's impressive front court, Hamilton thinks Larkin has been the key to the stunning run that not only has the Hurricanes a two-game cushion in the lost column in the ACC standings but also has earned them their highest ranking -- No. 14 in the Associated Press poll, No. 15 in the USA Today/coaches poll -- in 11 years going into Wednesday night's game at Virginia Tech.

"You've got to take your hat off to him," the Seminoles' coach said. "You have a guy like that and surround him with pretty good players, they're a dangerous weapon."

He's not the first to make that observation.

After his team lost 54-47 to the Hurricanes, Maryland coach Mark Turgeon was effusive in his praise of the 5-11 guard. Larkin scored 10 points, handed out six assists, and came up with three steals against the Terrapins in making up for his teammate Scott's rare off night (six points, less than half his average coming into the game).

"Shane Larkin is off the charts," Turgeon said. "He makes the whole key. I know Scott really wasn't himself tonight, but Larkin -- six assists, no turnovers, and I don't know how many more assists he could have had. He's just spoon-feeding guys."

When the Terrapins cut a 10-point deficit in half late in the game and seemed ready to make a move, Larkin got the ball to Julian Gamble for a key basket to get the Hurricanes going again.

"He made the play of the game when it was five and Gamble got the dunk with one second on the shot clock," Turgeon said. "That was all Larkin. And he hit the jumper the possession before that."

"The kid's good. He's really good. I haven't seen the whole league yet as far as point guards go, but I can't imagine a better one than him."

Larkin said the key to his success has been the work he put in during the offseason improve his game. In particular, he worked on his shot and studied game tapes to learn when to shoot and when not to.

"Last year I didn't have great shot selection," he said "I shot like 33 percent from the field (33.6 to be precise and 32.3 on 3s) and this year I'm up in the 40s, something like that (44.8 overall, 39.7 on 3s)."

Among the areas of emphasis: "Being in the lane and using the floater and pull-up jump shot instead of going in there up against all the trees and trying to make a crazy layup. Shooting better 3s, just knowing what you need to do and when to do it has definitely made me a better player this year."

Oh, yeah. He also is getting the job done on defense. He has had at least one steal in 17 consecutive games, getting shut out only in the opener, and leads the ACC in steals per game (2.2 in all games, 2.0 in the seven conference contests).

For a while, he also was leading the conference in minutes on the court but has since dropped to second overall (36.0) and seventh in league play (35.9). That's still quite a load, but his teammate Scott, who is averaging 34.5 minutes a game himself, doesn't see that as a potential problem as the season wears on.

"He's a basketball player," Scott said. "He loves to play basketball. I don't think that will really affect him at all."

Larkin said it's just a matter of being mentally tough and staying in top physical shape.

"I love playing," he said. "I would play 40 minutes if coach wanted me to. I love playing basketball."

Just as his father obviously loved playing baseball. It may be a different sport, but, as they say, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

The ACC finally has a race worth watching

ESPN.com
Robbi Pickeral
Jan. 27, 2013

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Time was tight. Roads were still melting. But just after 5 p.m. ET Saturday, on Interstate 40 near Exit 285 between Durham and Raleigh, one task seemed more necessary than usual: scanning the XM stations, searching for the Boston College-Virginia and Wake Forest-Georgia Tech scores.

After watching Duke throttle Maryland, and en route to an NC State-North Carolina showdown, there was already plenty of notable hoops action to absorb. And during most ACC seasons of late, those "other games" probably would have been an afterthought, what with Duke and/or UNC mostly dominating the top of the standings for the past decade and a half.

[+] Enlarge
Brian Spurlock/US Presswire
Roy Williams is used to being near the top of the ACC, but this year is different. But something feels different so far this season.

Upperclassman-heavy Miami -- still considered more of a "football" or "baseball" school -- is the only undefeated team in ACC play, at 5-0. Four teams, including top-ranked Duke and No. 18 NC State, already have two league losses. UNC has three.

Four upsets -- Miami and NC State over Duke, Maryland and Wake Forest over NC State -- have led to court-rushing celebrations. And it's only late January.

Even Georgia Tech and Boston College (both 1-5) had given conference foes fits.

Call it parity, call it mediocrity -- realistically, it's some combination of the two -- but there's finally a reason to pay early attention to what's going on throughout the ACC and to teams that don't play their home games near Tobacco Road.

"If you take somebody lightly in this league right now, you're going to lose," UNC coach Roy Williams said before his team blew out Maryland and Georgia Tech last week, only to be dominated by the Wolfpack. "I don't care who you are or who you're playing."

Williams said he thinks there's more balance in the league, from top to bottom, than any other time in his 10 seasons as the Tar Heels' coach.

A few of the wild swings:

- Virginia opened its ACC season by beating UNC, only to lose on the road versus Wake Forest and Clemson, only to then come home and win three straight by double figures. The Cavs are currently

tied for third place in the league.

- Wake followed a two-point upset of 18th-ranked NC State with a 20-point loss at Georgia Tech (which had been the final winless team in the league, until Saturday). Predicted to finish near the bottom of the league, the Deacons are tied for fifth place, with four losses.

- Duke beat three top-five teams during a three-week stretch in nonconference play, only to go 2-2 in its past four games without starting forward Ryan Kelly. The Devils, like NC State, are trailing the No. 25 Hurricanes by two defeats.

There are multiple reasons for the trickle down of balance: New coaches (nine in the league since 2009-10) have finally had a chance to cultivate their teams and game plans, adding some new traction. Meanwhile, early (and earlier) entry into the NBA has left other squads, such as UNC, scrambling to fill holes they weren't expecting.

The traditional top teams -- especially now that Duke is rejiggering without Kelly -- aren't as good, and only three squads are ranked.

Meanwhile, Nos. 10, 11 and 12 in the ACC standings aren't quite as bad.

"The parity in the league -- it's early in the conference season, guys are still feeling guys out," Virginia Tech first-year coach James Johnson said earlier this week. "I think it's young. You put a lot of young players out there on the floor, the inconsistency with certain guys, you can see that."

Plus, the league is in the first year of a new 18-game schedule, meaning more contests and more opportunities for upsets -- and, the coaches hope, growth.

"I think North Carolina's pretty good," Maryland coach Mark Turgeon said last week. "They weren't that good earlier in the year, but they were [against the Terps last weekend]. Florida State's pretty darn good. They struggled early, they're athletic, gave us some problems. I think Virginia can potentially be better than they were last year."

"You can go through all the teams, see a lot more consistency. Wake Forest, Georgia Tech, we know are better. I do think it's a much deeper and better league than it was last year."

With the potential to be very different a month from now.

It will be curious to see, over the next few weeks, when separation in the standings starts to occur. Is Duke finally starting to mesh again, sans Kelly? Will clutch shooter Michael Snaer put Florida State on his back once again? Can Maryland and Virginia, who have the potential to be NCAA tournament teams, make a push? Which way will UNC

go after losing to rival NC State for the first time since 2007?

From top to bottom, it's finally worth tuning in.

[+] Enlarge
Bob Donnan/US Presswire
Mark Gottfried's Wolfpack have a chance to shift the league's balance of power. Five things I learned about the ACC on Saturday:

1. NC State has oodles of potential. Three guys recorded a double-double and two others scored in double figures to break the Pack's 13-game losing streak to rival UNC. If they can stretch Saturday's first 20 minutes of defense over entire games, as well -- wow.

2. Duke is still vulnerable. It was great to watch freshmen Rasheed Sulaimon (25 points) and Amile Jefferson (11 points, nine rebounds) stand out during a bounce-back win after Wednesday's debacle in Miami, but the team is still adapting while Kelly's right foot heals.

3. Virginia is a really, really good defensive team. So, duh, we already knew this. But considering only one ACC foe has scored more than 60 points (and one, FSU, managed only 36), it bears repeating.

4. UNC is confusing. What is this team good at, consistently? (Besides being inconsistent?)

5. Wake Forest is still Wake Forest. Following a two-point upset of the Wolfpack with a 20-point meltdown at Georgia Tech? Road games are always tough in this league, but that's not the way to bolster Jeff Bzdelik's job security.

Three things I still want to know about the ACC:

1. How long can the Hurricanes stay undefeated in the conference? They've got a home game against FSU today and road games at Virginia Tech and NC State this week. Predictions, anyone?

2. When does Erick Green get 40 this season? The Virginia Tech guard, who leads the nation in scoring, scored 35 in a loss to Virginia earlier this week, and it doesn't appear he'll be slowing down anytime soon. His season low is 12.

3. How many ACC teams ultimately make the NCAA tournament? ESPN's Joe Lunardi has fluctuated between four and five thus far in his Bracketology, including Duke, NC State, Miami, UNC and Maryland. But Virginia and FSU could still be factors.

Miami's Jim Larranaga: From Wikipedia To Final Four?

Sun Sentinel

Dave Hyde

Jan. 28, 2013

This run to the top of the ACC all started for Jim Larranaga a couple of years ago in Erie, Pa., where he was visiting his son, Jay, who was coaching a NBA developmental team there.

A phone call came from a Miami friend and businessman, Jose Mas. The week before Larranaga called Mas to inquire about the Miami coaching job. He was told Frank Martin was considered the frontrunner.

Only now Mas was saying Martin wasn't the choice, and if Larranaga was interested he should send in his resume. Larranaga didn't have a resume made up. He certainly didn't have one in Erie.

"Copy your Wikipedia page and send it to them," Jay said to his dad.

Larranaga stops now and smiles in telling the story from a couch in his office, a few minutes after beating Florida State, 71-47.

"So that's what I did," he said. "I sent my Wikipedia page to them. And an hour later I got a call for an interview."

He's 63 now, on the back end of a good basketball life, and you're seeing exactly why he came to Miami. This year. This chance. What his team showed in beating Duke by 27 points they continued in beating Florida State by 24.

Miami maintains momentum, throttles rival Florida State

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 28, 2013

In what is becoming the new normal at the University of Miami, orange-clad students snaked around the BankUnited Center on Sunday afternoon for a seat in the sold-out arena, and basketball coach Jim Larranaga brought them doughnuts. They then rocked the building as the Atlantic Coast Conference-leading Hurricanes, coming off a historic 27-point win over top-ranked Duke, displayed no signs of a letdown as they dominated Florida State University, 71-47.

UM improved to 15-3 overall, and remains alone atop the ACC with a 6-0 record. It was the Canes' seventh win in a row, and extended their home record to a perfect 9-0.

Canes fans are apparently getting so blasé about winning that they didn't storm the floor, as they had after the Duke game and after beating the Seminoles last spring.

The question now: How high will the 25th-ranked Hurricanes move up in Monday's polls?

UM had the nation's top-ranked non-conference strength of schedule, and heading into Sunday's game, their Ratings Percentage Index ranged from No. 3 to No. 5 depending on which computer ranking is used. Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton certainly considers the Hurricanes one of the better teams in the nation, and said they will earn their "rightful place" as the season progresses.

"This is a top team in America, a hot team," said Hamilton, who coached at UM from 1990 to 2000 and led the Canes to the Sweet 16 in his final year. "They play with the maturity of a team on a mission. They make the extra pass. They could do great things. I think Shane

Larkin is the best point guard in the league. He makes very few mistakes, has an unselfish spirit, the ball's safe in his hands, and he plays like a coach on the floor."

Larkin, the shortest guy on the team at 5-11, led the Canes in rebounding for the second night in a row. He grabbed 10 rebounds against Duke, and on Sunday had nine defensive rebounds against the Seminoles, who boast the fourth-tallest team in the nation with three players 7-foot and taller. Larkin also had six assists and eight points.

Trey McKinney Jones was UM's leading scorer with 15 points. Durand Scott and Kenny Kadji, both of whom spent significant time on the bench in foul trouble, finished with 11 points each.

Once again, the Hurricanes' maturity and unselfishness were on display. They connected on perfectly-timed passes time and again, wowed the capacity crowd of 7,972 with textbook alley-oops, and had 19 assists to FSU's six. They also outscored the Seminoles 34-18 in the paint, and held FSU to a season-low 31 percent shooting.

The Seminoles (11-8, 3-3) closed the gap to 28-26 late in the first half on a three-pointer by Terry Whisnant, but UM finished the half with a 9-2 run and went on a 17-5 run after intermission to put the game out of reach at 54-33. By the end, for the second game in a row, all the UM starters were on the bench and the walk-ons were on the court.

"I'm not very surprised (to be 6-0 in the ACC)," said Kadji, who played only 18 minutes. "With all the work we did over the summer, I expected us to be good. We have great chemistry, and everything is clicking on the court."

Added McKinney Jones: "We're a veteran team, we're playing together and having fun, and when we do that, we're hard to beat."

ESPN commentator Jay Williams said during the broadcast that UM looked "like a Final Four team."

Hamilton, who fought for a decade to get people to notice the Hurricanes, was pleased to see the buzz around the team.

"This UM team deserves that type of recognition," said Hamilton. "This is the Hurricanes' time. But they need this kind of support all the time. When you look up and down Tobacco Road, it doesn't matter to those fans who the opponent is. Their team doesn't have to be 25th ranked for them to show up. People here need to keep this thing going."

UM now heads on the road for games Wednesday at Virginia Tech and Saturday at North Carolina State.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/01/28/3204094/university-of-miami-mens-basketball.html#storylink=cpy>

Canes Ranked 14th In Country In AP Top 25

CBS Miami

Jan. 28, 2013

It looks like back-to-back blowout wins over then-top-ranked Duke and Florida State weren't enough to get the Miami Hurricanes into the Top 10 of either the AP Top 25 or USA Today Coaches poll.

The Canes jumped from 25th in the AP poll to 14th in the country based on their victories over the last week. But, Miami still trails Michigan State, who the Canes beat earlier this season. Miami is just three points behind Michigan State.

In the coaches' poll, Miami jumped up to 15th in the country and trailed 14th ranked Wichita State by just 14 points in the poll.

But even though Miami jumped around 10 spots in both polls, Duke, who Miami destroyed on the court last week, only fell to number five in the country with its second loss.

Michigan was ranked number one in the AP Top 25, while Kansas took the top spot in the coaches poll. The highest ranked Florida team was the Gators which checked in at number four in both polls.

In the most important ranking for the NCAA Tournament, the Hurricanes are currently ranked third in the country in RPI or Rating Percentage Index. The NCAA Tournament selection committee uses the RPI when determining seeding and selections for the tournament.

Miami is 15-3 on the season with the losses coming against Florida Gulf Coast, Arizona, and Indiana State. The Canes have five wins against teams in the top 50 of the RPI, one loss against teams in the RPI top 150.

The Heat have one loss against a team ranked below 100 in RPI, which was Florida Gulf Coast in one of the first games of the season.

ACC Honor Roll: Larranaga garnering attention

FOX Sports Carolinas

Andrew Jones
Jan. 28, 2013

Miami was without a doubt the toast of the ACC this past week. The Hurricanes exploded on the national scene by destroying Duke and then taking apart Florida State and should rocket in the polls.

So naturally, the Hurricanes had a lot of players post big-time performances.

Miami leads the ACC with a 6-0 record and everyone else has at least two losses. Duke and N.C. State had strange weeks with both closing strong. Georgia Tech finally won a league game, Clemson continues to compete, and Erick Green is on an island.

So, with respect to Virginia's Joe Harris, Evan Nolte and Justin Anderson, N.C. State's Rodney Purvis, T.J. Warren and C.J. Leslie, Wake Forest's Devin Thomas, Codi Miller-McIntyre and Travis McKie, Clemson's K.J. McDaniels and Milton Jennings, Maryland's Alex Len, Georgia Tech's Robert Carter, Duke's Rasheed Sulaimon, North Carolinas P.J. Hairston, Boston College's Ryan Anderson and Miami's Trey McKinney-Jones, here are this week's Big Men on Campus:

Big Men On Campus

Erick Green, Virginia Tech: The nation's leading scorer raised his average by scoring 60 points in a pair of losses. He had 35 of the Hokies' 58 points in a home loss to Virginia and then 25 points in a loss at Georgia Tech. He's certainly doing his part.

Lorenzo Brown, N.C. State: He just keeps on moving forward, improving his game and leading the Wolfpack. Brown totaled 33 points and handed out 21 assists last week -- 20 and 11 in a win over North Carolina.

Durand Scott, Miami: The senior guard scored 25 points, grabbed six rebounds and handed out four assists in blasting Duke by 27 points and then had 11 points and four assists in an easy win over FSU. Scott hit 3-of-4 shot attempts from beyond the arc against the Blue Devils and had two steals.

Richard Howell, N.C. State: The bruising senior forward totaled 29 points and 30 rebounds in two games for the Wolfpack. They lost at Wake Forest and then beat UNC. Howell had 16 points and 14 boards versus the Tar Heels.

Kenny Kadji, Miami: The long-armed senior forward put up 22 points and snared six rebounds versus top-ranked Duke and for the week totaled 33 points, as the Canes also blew out rival Florida State on Sunday night. Miami is now 6-0 for the first time in any conference it has ever played in.

Disappointment of the Week

Maryland: The Terrapins just got by a struggling Boston College team and then, after a competitive first half, totally mishandled the second half in a 20-point loss at Duke. Maryland is a well-coached team, but didn't look it in Durham.

Player of the Week

Shane Larkin, Miami: The sophomore point guard had a terrific week leading the Hurricanes to a pair of huge wins. He scored 18 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and handed out five assists in a 27-point win over Duke and then totaled eight points, nine rebounds and six assists in a 71-47 rout of Florida State. Larkin also defended very well and led a group of mostly older players.

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Coach of the Week

Jim Larranaga: Not only did his team clobber Duke by 27 points, but they followed that up with a 24-point rout of rival Florida State, making this one of the best weeks in the program's history. But this wasn't a flare up. Larranaga and his team are 100 percent legitimate.

Coach L Tells The Junkies What It Really Takes To Win

CBS - Washington DC

Jan. 26, 2013

Fresh off the heels of Miami defeating number one-ranked Duke, Jim Larranaga caught up with his old friends, the Sports Junkies on 106.7 The Fan Friday to celebrate his successes.

"I thought you guys forgot about me," Larranaga said. "We had to beat Duke – the number one ranked team in the country – to get a phone call."

Larranaga said he trains his players not to get caught in social media traps like Manti Te'o.

"I think my guys would all be interested in having a fantasy girlfriend like he did for a while," Larranaga said. "We talk about the social media but I don't think I'd ever imagine that any of my guys would have an imaginary girlfriend – actually a guy friend, who talked like a girl – that they fell in love – it's kind of a weird story. Let's talk about hoops."

Coach L said although Miami has had a historically prestigious football team, the campus' awareness for basketball was very much like it was at George Mason we he first arrived, and he had to go grassroots to make students care.

"We were drawing about 2,5000 fans a game and the place seats 8,000," Larranaga said. "My staff and I, the players, we went dorm hopping. We brought Buffalo Wild Wings, pizza to the students trying to drum up interest in our program and get them out to the games. And the student interest has grown and grown over these first two years."

20-13 in his first year, and 13-3 to start the 2012-13 campaign, the first two years haven't been as easy for Coach L as his record would indicate.

"A year ago, we had Reggie Johnson – with a knee surgery – out for six months. Julian Gamble, out for a year with a torn ACL. That's really the kind of mash unit you want to inherit."

According to Coach L, who posted a 273-164 record in fourteen seasons at George Mason, despite the jump from mid-major to the ACC, recruiting hasn't been nearly as easy for the 63-year-old coach.

"Here I can't get in a car and drive over to D.C. and catch a great high school game at O'Connell or DeMatha," Larranaga said. "I have to get on a plane and fly. On Monday after practice, I flew on a private jet to Cleveland to catch a high school game. I was back home at 3 o'clock in the morning."

Luckily, after putting feet to the pavement in all these things needed to build the foundation for success at Miami, Coach L is impressed with how it's all come together.

"We've won six games in a row now, and we're in the top 25, and we just knocked off Duke, the number one team in the country," Larranaga said. "I'd imagine the rest of the games for the season will be sold out."

Warren Sapp requests Miami court slap

Sun Sentinel
Michael Casagrande
Jan. 25, 2013

Update 3:20 p.m. Friday: Miami players said they weren't sending any kind of message with the floor slap.

"We didn't do it out of disrespect," Miami guard Shane Larkin said. "They're the No. 1 team in the nation and we didn't mean to disrespect them in any way. We respect them. We respect Coach K. We respect every one of their players because they have to go out and play just like us.

"But if they try to use that to motivate them, they can because we're going to go in there just as motivated as we were last night."

Larkin is referring to the March 2 visit to Cameron Indoor Stadium.

Larkin and other Miami teammates said they weren't aware of Duke's traditional use of the slap. Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga said the team does it every day as part of the defensive drills in practice.

CORAL GABLES — If you were watching closely in the second half of Miami's 90-63 whipping of Duke, you saw a subtle gesture of defiance.

The Blue Devils were bringing the ball up the floor when a few Hurricanes went for it.

They slapped the floor.

Why's does that matter? Well Duke is famous for the move to fire up the crowd in big moments. Miami flipped it on them and it wasn't by mistake.

And that's were it gets a little crazier.

UM sophomore guard Shane Larkin was shooting free throws immediately before the slapping.

"I just heard somebody scream my name," he said. "It was Warren Sapp. He was like like 'slap the floor on D.'"

It worked, too.

"I think we got the stop," he said with a smile.

Sapp, the 7-time Pro Bowl product of UM, was sitting a few rows behind the broadcasting table of ESPN's Dick Vitale.

Miami basks in post-Duke glory, hoping for bright future

SportsIllustrated.com

Brian Hamilton

Jan. 25, 2013

First everyone had to wait for the stragglers, the Miami players bobbing in the flume of students on the court. Once they extracted themselves, these Hurricanes caught in the storm, the coach entered the locker room for a postgame chat that was anything but standard. The No. 1 team in the land had been reduced to cinders over the previous couple hours, and Jim Larranaga told his club to enjoy it before turning their attention to the work ahead. Then he left. Then sophomore guard Shane Larkin arranged a circle of chairs, center Kenny Kadji ratcheted up his African music, and one by one they jumped in the middle to dance. The celebration was just getting started. By Thursday morning, campus hummed with Miami's ascent to the top of the ACC and the program's newborn relevancy, underwritten by the previous night's mauling of Duke. Larkin walked to a 9:30 a.m. sports management class and fellow students stopped him, repeatedly, for chest bumps. As he made his way to his next class, Larkin estimated a group of 20 to 30 students followed along, talking about the game and asking for pictures all the way. The fans finally showed up. But that required Miami to arrive.

"Every program has to start somewhere," Larkin said. "People are saying it was the biggest game in school history and it could be a program-changing game. Hopefully, with what we did, it put us on the map."

Everything seems on the upswing for the basketball team with the best winning percentage in south Florida. One year after notching its first-ever winning record in ACC play, Miami is 5-0 in the league and thus two games clear of everyone else in the standings after its first victory over a No. 1 team in program history. And the Hurricanes are in position to defend that lead because the Hurricanes generally are in position to defend everything.

Duke scored 63 points on Wednesday night -- itself a manageable total -- and that was the most points Miami had allowed in a game since two days before Christmas. No one has scored 70 points on the Hurricanes since the season opener. Miami is eighth in the country in adjusted defensive efficiency (85.2 points per 100 possessions), one slot behind the Blue Devils team it just vanquished. Opponents shoot just 36.2 percent, the seventh best figure nationally and a "high-priority" number in the staff's mind. The effective field goal percentage defense of 42.4 is still bested by only 13 teams. In Miami's first team meeting after the Final Four last April, Larranaga asked his team a question: Where did all four participants' defenses rank nationally? Not shockingly, his players were clueless. So the coach who just finished his first year on the job gave them one: None of the four clubs

finished lower than ninth.

"It's definitely the biggest reason why we've continued to play well," Larranaga said. "We've gotten better at helping each other. We've gotten better at rebounding at the defensive end of the floor. We've gotten better at communicating, at talking to each other and switching when it's appropriate, showing when it's appropriate, trapping the ball screen when that's called for. Those subtle adjustments, to the common observer, don't really mean much. But to a coach and to a player, when you see the impact it has on your opponent, you recognize it as a key to the game."

Some of it was just a matter of time. Larranaga arrived after directing George Mason to five NCAA tournaments, including the 2006 Final Four run, and found a group of players making what he called "a major adjustment" to their thinking, especially on the defensive end. The result was acceptable enough in 2011-12 -- 20 wins, that 9-7 finish in the ACC -- but the Hurricanes don't believe they came to grips fully with Larranaga's philosophy until this year.

"Having another year under coach L has helped, just knowing exactly what he wants," said senior guard Durand Scott, the team's leading scorer. "When he came in, he came with a plan and a vision. He didn't come with the intent of just getting by. We did so-so our first year, and the second year, we came to an understanding of what he wants and what he needs us to do. We just put everything together."

The Hurricanes help each other now, but they are instinctive and aggressive enough to help themselves, too. Early in the second half, Larkin jumped on a simple Duke exchange after a made basket to produce a score that further buried the Blue Devils. He had taken note that, for most of the game, Duke's primary ball-handlers managed inbound duties. After this particular score, he saw point guard Quinn Cook inbound the ball to center Mason Plumlee -- and, in a fraction of a moment, deduced that Plumlee inevitably would return the pass to Cook. In a flash, Miami had the ball back, and after Larkin missed a three-pointer, the ball came back to him for a layup and a 30-point lead.

"I'm always watching, trying to catch a routine or a habit they're doing," Larkin said. "I just saw it, and I knew Mason Plumlee was going to have to pass it back to Quinn. When I saw him catch it, I just made a run for it. And he threw a pretty soft bounce pass, and I was able to pick it up."

Every program needs a moment to compose itself. For Miami, that was Wednesday. The Hurricanes had cracked the top 25 and Warren Sapp and Jimmy Graham were among those in attendance for the showdown with Duke. Larranaga even had 20 guests fly into town for the event. The win over the Blue Devils means little if the Hurricanes lose their sense of purpose and thus their place near the apex of the ACC ... but the point is they actually have that problem.

"Experiencing this together has given them a lot of confidence and quite frankly had given them a lot of joy," Larranaga said. "To go through a winning streak like the one we're on right now to start conference play, for the first time in school's history, is very special to these players. They know they're blazing a trail that's never been blazed before."

The Hurricanes' second-year coach had dinner with his phalanx of friends and relatives as Wednesday's delirium became Thursday's, returning home after midnight. He had 96 text messages and 50 emails and responded to those until 1:30 a.m. He then re-watched the Duke game. He went to sleep at 3 a.m., then awoke 75 minutes later to drive his son to the airport.

In a matter of hours after what he deemed the biggest regular-season win of his coaching career, though, Larranaga dispatched a text message to the team that arrived on Larkin's phone precisely at 7:41 a.m. It read: Great job last night. Enjoy the day, be ready for practice tomorrow. We must prepare for Florida State. Coach L.

"Right to the point," Larkin said.

Memo delivered, but it was impossible to ignore the deliverance that preceded it. Scott, the 6-foot-5-inch senior from the Bronx, was stopped for pictures as he walked to his car. He received congratulatory text messages, about 15 he guessed, from numbers he didn't recognize. He thanked them, then added: Who is this? After the senders identified themselves, Scott still didn't know who they were.

He pulled up for a late-night meal at The Cheese-cake Factory and continued to hear echoes of applause dissolve into the late-night air. Cars stopped and honked their horns at him as he crossed the street. He was steps away from the restaurant when he passed by a police officer, sitting outside another eatery, who had but one question for him.

"How'd the 'Canes do tonight?" the officer asked, plainly oblivious. "Did they win?"

For the first time in a night of revelation, and maybe for the last time in a while, somebody had no idea who Durand Scott was or what Miami basketball had just done.

"The 'Canes won tonight," Scott assured the officer. "They did a good job."

Amid win revelry, Miami has challenges ahead

Miami Herald
Walter Villa
Jan. 25, 2013

Recruiting likely got a little easier for the University of Miami men's basketball program.

Then again, help is needed.

The team's victory against Duke on Wednesday had to impress recruits. The Hurricanes beat a No. 1 team for the first time in program history. And they improved to 5-0 in the Atlantic Coast Conference for the first time.

But five Hurricanes will have exhausted their college eligibility at season's end, and all of them rank among the Canes' top six scorers.

That does not bode well for next season, especially because UM's Jim Larranaga, an early front-runner for ACC Coach of the Year, signed only two recruits in November, when most of the nation's top prospects pick their schools.

That means the Canes will sign most of their recruits — five roster spots are available — in the April "late" period, when highly ranked prospects are not as abundant. Of the top 150 prospects on Rival.com's list, only nine have yet to sign with a school.

"We wanted to sign a few more [in November]," Larranaga said, "but some decided to wait [until April], and some decided to go elsewhere."

Larranaga acknowledged that the expected NCAA sanctions against the Canes' basketball and football programs scared away some potential signees.

Still, Larranaga is excited about bringing in new recruits in April. NCAA rules forbid

coaches from talking about specific recruits until they have signed, but Larranaga did speak in general terms about what Canes fans can expect:

- On junior college players, he said he rarely went that route during his long tenure at George Mason but is looking that way now because they might provide a more immediate lift. "There is a possibility we may recruit a junior college player or two," he said.

- On whether most of the good players have already been signed: "There are plenty of good players out there," he said. "We just have to find the ones who fit our program best."

- On international players: "We are investigating some kids from Europe and putting out feelers in South America," he said. "We expect those efforts will bear fruit, if not this year, in the future."

With only point guard Shane Larkin set to return to next season's starting lineup, key roles will be readily available.

One could envision current roster members Rion Brown and Garrius Adams — who is injured and redshirting this season — capably filling starting jobs on the perimeter.

But the falloff might be steepest in the front-court, where the Canes will lose Kenny Kadji, Reggie Johnson and Julian Gamble. Hold-overs Tonye Jekiri, Raphael Akpejiori and Erik Swoope have done little so far.

Then there are the two recruits who signed in November: 6-1, 190-pound combo guard Deandre Burnett and 6-6, 195-pound wing Davon Reed.

According to Rivals.com, the Canes are in the running for four-star recruit Demetrius Henry, a 6-9 center from Brandon; three-star recruit Harold Givens, a 6-7 forward from Winston Salem, N.C.; and three-star recruit

Junior Etou, a 6-8 forward from Arlington, Va. But Etou has seven other schools he is considering, Henry has 11 and Givens has 13.

Floor slap 'no disrespect' at Duke; other hoop notes

Palm Beach Post

Jorge Milian

Jan. 25, 2013

In the delirium of Wednesday's blowout victory against Duke, did UM provide the Blue Devils with some extra motivation for the teams' rematch at Cameron Indoor Stadium on March 2?

With 6:25 left in the game and Miami up by 28 points, the five Hurricanes on the floor slapped the hardwood with both hands as they got back on defense.

Point guard Shane Larkin said after the game that UM's players were prodded into the act by former UM football great Warren Sapp, who was sitting near courtside at the BankUnited Center.

There's no shortage of Duke fans on social media that felt their school was being mocked. The Blue Devils have a tradition under coach Mike Krzyzewski of slapping the floor on defensive possessions.

No mockery intended, Larkin insisted on Friday.

"It was just a spur of the moment type of thing," Larkin said. "Warren Sapp said something to me and I just wanted to make one of the alumni happy to be at the game. He told me to do it so I did it. It was no disrespect or anything."

"I guess they could put that aside and Coach K can say something about it like, 'They slapped the floor' or something. But we didn't do it out of disrespect for Duke. Duke is a great team. They're the No. 1 team in the nation and we didn't mean to disrespect them in any type of way. We respect them, we respect Coach K, we respect every single one of their players because they have to go out and play just like us.

"It was no disrespect but if they try to use that as something to motivate them, they can't because we're going to go in there just as motivated as we were [Wednesday] night to go in there and get the win."

Coach Jim Larranaga said he wasn't concerned that Duke would use the floor slapping as bulletin board-type material.

"I think we all as coaches try to use different ways to motivate our players whether it's something somebody said or did," Larranaga said. "I really don't concern myself with that. I didn't tell them to do it. They didn't come up with it on their own. Warren Sapp, one of the great football players here at the 'U', he's sitting courtside going crazy and he yells to Shane Larkin, 'Slap the floor. Play some defense.' Basically the message is, 'The game's never over. You got to keep playing.'"

A few other notes from UM basketball:

....Larranaga said that Reggie Johnson, who played his first game Wednesday since Dec. 18 will continue to come off the bench. "We're not going to change anything," Larranaga said. "We're going to keep doing what we're doing. Whether we make any changes in the future will be based on circumstances. Right now, we're just comfortable with the way we're playing."

....Garrius Adams has been dominating recent practices, but Larranaga said the 6-foot-6 senior guard won't play again this season and will redshirt. Adams has not played all year after undergoing knee surgery. "Even though he's 100 percent in practice he still has a lot of rehab to do on the knee and not till he has a whole spring and summer of lifting, conditioning will he be in the type of shape to go full out for a full season," Larranaga said.

....Duke has denied a report by radio host Dan Patrick that Krzyzewski forced his team to practice from 1:30 to 4:15 a.m. on Thursday following the Blue Devils' loss to Miami.

Bandwagon growing for long-overlooked Miami

AP
Jan. 24, 2013

A burly man with a big grin hollered in support of the Miami Hurricanes, his voice standing out even amid the crowd's clamor.

"I heard somebody scream my name when I was shooting a free throw," guard Shane Larkin said. "I looked, and it was Warren Sapp. I was like, that's crazy."

Even for a 300-pound former NFL star, there's still room on the Miami bandwagon. But it's growing fast.

The No. 25-ranked Hurricanes (14-3, 5-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) are alone atop the league standings at 5-0, their best ACC start. A rare capacity crowd of 7,972, including Sapp, turned out for Miami's latest victory, a 90-63 drubbing of No. 1 Duke on Wednesday night.

"This is my fifth year here, and I've never ever seen the gym like that before," center Reggie Johnson said. "It was special. Hopefully we can keep it going."

The sellout was only the 10th in the Hurricanes' 10-year-old on-campus arena, and another full house is expected Sunday when they play rival Florida State.

"That's our goal — to get people excited about our program," coach Jim Larranaga said. "It's the first time in the university's basketball history that we've been able to create that kind of buzz. This school is not necessarily known as a basketball school."

Larranaga has the Hurricanes on the rise in only his second season with the school, and their success is welcome tonic as the athletic department awaits the results of an NCAA investigation that began more than a year ago.

The Hurricanes cracked the ranking this week for the first time in three years. The victory over a No. 1 team was their first ever.

"It's something that has never been done before, and the guys are very excited about it," guard Durand Scott said. "But we know this is just now. We've got more to work on, and more that's ahead of us. Now everybody is going to see Miami as 'that team.' We've got to come out every game like it's the last."

The Hurricanes' schedule ranks among the toughest in the nation. Their six-game winning streak includes three road league victories, and they beat No. 13 Michigan State at home in November. They appear likely to make the NCAA tournament for only the second time since 2002, thanks to a team that is deep, big and experienced.

Larranaga, who led George Mason to a Final Four berth in 2006, preaches aggressiveness on defense and balance on offense. Scott, Larkin and Trey McKinney Jones are solid perimeter players, while 6-10 Johnson, 6-10 Julian Gamble and 6-11 Kenny Kadji are forces inside.

Gamble is a sixth-year senior; Scott, Johnson, Kadji and McKinney Jones are also seniors. The five have started 282 games for the Hurricanes.

"They've got some great fifth- and sixth-year players, old guys who are really good and accustomed to playing together," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said.

The 292-pound Johnson, an intriguing NBA prospect, gave the Hurricanes a lift when he came off the bench against Duke after being sidelined since Dec. 18 with a broken left thumb. He hadn't been able to practice but called Larranaga on Wednesday morning with the surprising news he was ready to return.

"He basically was jumping through the phone," Larranaga said. "He was so excited that the

doctors cleared him to play. I didn't think he was going to be back until some time in February."

Johnson gives the Hurricanes extra heft as they head into the heart of their ACC schedule. With Duke and No. 18 North Carolina State the league's only other ranked teams, this might be the year to shake up the conference's traditional hierarchy.

And so the bandwagon grows, in South Florida at least. But the perennially overlooked Hurricanes aren't certain how much the win over Duke helped their national reputation.

"Who knows, man," Johnson said. "Some people probably still don't believe. But we believe in ourselves. As long as we believe in each other, we're fine."

Miami (Fla.) destroys No.1 Duke to climb atop ACC

USA TODAY
Scott Gleeson
Jan. 24, 2013

Duke looked nothing like the best team in the country on Wednesday night, and Miami (Fla.) put on an onslaught to knock off the No. 1 Blue Devils 90-63, causing fans to storm the court on Duke for the second time this season.

It was the third-worst loss for a No. 1 team and Duke's worst in nearly five years.

BOX SCORE: Miami (Fla.) 90, No. 1 Duke 63

MORE: Dick Vitale rips Duke on loss

The Hurricanes (14-3) improved to 5-0 in the ACC and beat a No. 1 team for the first time in program history.

"We played a complete game, we did everything we planned on doing, and did it to the highest level," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said after the game on ESPN. "(Duke) didn't play well. The result is the score. This is one of many games we have to play well in."

"I think our guys were very ready," added Larranaga, who came to Miami last season after a coaching tenure at giant-killer George Mason, which included a Cinderella trip to the Final Four in 2006.

Durand Scott scored a season-high 25 points to pace the Hurricanes, and Kenny Kadji added a season-high 22. Shane Larkin had 18 points, 10 rebounds and five assists, and Durham, N.C. native Julian Gamble had 10 rebounds and four blocked shots.

"Some teams come out in the second half flat and think they have the game won," Larkin said. "But we stayed with it with the same energy in the second half. We played great the whole game."

Miami's Shane Larkin (0) celebrates after Durand Scott (1) scored against Duke during the first half of Miami's win on Wednesday. (Photo: Alan Diaz, AP)

Duke had its coldest shooting performance of the season with a season-low 30 % from the field, going more than 8 minutes without a field goal. Miami took full advantage with a 25-1 run midway through the first half.

The Blue Devils, playing without injured starter Ryan Kelly, missed 13 consecutive shots despite numerous good looks, while four Hurricanes hit three-pointers during the stunning run that transformed a 14-13 deficit into a 38-15 lead.

"Warm up the bus, this game is over," ESPN analyst Dick Vitale said before the final horn even sounded. "They have no one to blame but themselves."

Duke's backcourt was nonexistent offensively. Seth Curry went scoreless and finished 0-for-10 from the field, while Quinn Cook was 1-for-12 to finish with five points.

"It wasn't demoralizing; they played better," Blue Devils guard Rasheed Sulaimon said. "I believe we have them on the schedule again."

For the fourth time this year, the No. 1 team has fallen. And this is the Blue Devils second time crumbling. Duke, which moved to No. 1 this week after falling back to No. 3 following a court-storming loss to N.C. State, will surely fall in the national polls, thus paving the way for another new top team. No. 2 Kansas is the top candidate, while No. 3 Michigan and No. 4 Syracuse are also in position.

Miami senior center Reggie Johnson came off the bench in his first action since being sidelined with a broken left thumb Dec. 18. He had two points and five rebounds in 16 minutes.

"Overrated," a sellout crowd chanted with three minutes left. When the game ended, fans

poured onto the court and mobbed their team.

"The crowd I'm sure helped them some," Krzyzewski said. "But they didn't need much help."

"We expected them to be terrific, and we have to match terrific, and then you have a terrific game. ...We didn't hold our end of the bargain."

Miami's upset of Duke spurs long night of celebration

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 24, 2013

Here are some things University of Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga learned in the aftermath of the Hurricanes' historic 27-point win over top-ranked Duke Wednesday night:

It's impossible to sleep after such a win, so he didn't. Not even one wink.

Larranaga, 20 friends and some team members celebrated at Sports Grill in South Miami, and were greeted by a standing ovation. Larranaga walked around the restaurant shaking hands with every table. When he got home, he turned on the DVR and watched the ESPN broadcast of the game with his wife, Liz. "I wanted to listen to what people were saying about us," he said.

His son, Jon, who was staying with them, asked for a 4:15 a.m. wakeup call to make his early morning flight. "After Jon left for the airport, I tried to sleep, but couldn't, so I started working on FSU," Larranaga said.

The 25th-ranked Hurricanes (14-3, 5-0 ACC) play the Seminoles at home on Sunday at 6 p.m., and the game was sold out less than 12 hours after the students stormed the floor following the Duke win. It is the first time in school history they get back-to-back sellouts.

Larranaga had 12 interview requests Thursday, local and national, and by 6 p.m., he was running on fumes.

He was thrilled to hear that the Heat had flashed the UM-Duke scores on the AmericanAirlines Arena Jumbotron during its overtime win over the Toronto Raptors on Wednesday night. They showed footage of UM students storming the floor, and Heat fans roared and flashed the "U" symbol.

He also was delighted to see replays of the Canes' highlights on ESPN's SportsCenter all day Thursday. For a school that has a hard time luring top basketball recruits, there is no greater publicity.

"All of this means we're headed in the right direction," Larranaga said. "It's very exciting. That kind of enthusiasm can keep growing, which is what I was hoping for when I took this job."

The coach was also let in on a little secret after the game. He learned that when his players slapped the floor in the second half, a longtime Duke tradition used to pump up the team, it was at the request of UM alum and NFL great Warren Sapp, who was seated behind the ESPN broadcasters in the stands. UM guard Shane Larkin said Sapp called his name out, and yelled, "Slap the floor on D!" Who's going to argue with Sapp?

"I just heard somebody scream my name, and I look over and it's Warren Sapp, which is crazy," Larkin said, smiling. "He told me to slap the floor on D, so we did. And it worked. I think we got a stop on the next play."

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/01/24/3199430/miami-hurricanes-upset-of-duke.html#storylink=cpy>

Miami Hurricanes revel in post-Duke victory admiration

Palm Beach Post
Jorge Milian
Jan. 24, 2013

Accompanied by his family, Barry Larkin walked into a restaurant across from the University of Miami on Wednesday night and was greeted by a standing ovation.

But the cheers weren't for Larkin, a 12-time Major League Baseball all-star with the Cincinnati Reds who was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in July.

Instead, they were directed at Barry's son, Shane, the Hurricanes' sophomore point guard who had led No. 25 Miami to a 90-63 demolition of top-ranked Duke a couple of hours earlier at the BankUnited Center.

"He received a hero's welcome," said Barry Larkin, who attended Wednesday's game with his wife and two daughters. "I remember when I was playing and Shane was a kid, we'd go somewhere to eat after we won a ballgame or won the World Series and it was like, applause. Now being able to watch that happen for him is an absolutely awesome thing."

The buzz from UM's first victory ever against a top-ranked team was still in the air on Thursday at the AllCanes sporting goods store, a few blocks away from the Hurricanes' basketball arena.

Normally, the conversation at the store is centered on football, even in the heart of basketball season. But on Thursday, the talk was about Larkin's double-double, Reggie Johnson's unexpected return from a thumb injury and the frenzied capacity crowd that lifted UM to "the greatest night in Miami basketball," according to AllCanes general manager Harry Rothwell.

"It's beyond words," said Rothwell, a longtime booster. "Everybody that walks into the store today has a smile on their face and there's a

little bit of giddy-up in everybody's step because we beat the No. 1 team."

The win was popular not only with UM fans. It also captured the attention of the college basketball world. USA Today ran the story on the front page of its sports section while ESPN.com displayed a story of the upset as its centerpiece for much of Thursday morning, accompanied by the headline "Blown Away."

Meanwhile, UM coach Jim Larranaga was getting more interview requests than Manti Te'o. By Thursday afternoon, Larranaga had conducted around a dozen radio interviews, answered hundreds of emails and texts and watched a replay of Wednesday's game.

"I saw him today, and he didn't look like he had slept at all," said Amy Woodruff, UM's assistant director of communications.

UM's victory, its sixth in a row, was not entirely unexpected. The Hurricanes (14-3, 5-0 ACC) beat Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium last season and entered Wednesday's game first in the conference standings.

But few could have imagined the game's one-sidedness. Miami went on a 25-1 run to build a 42-19 halftime lead and was ahead by as many as 32 points in the second half.

"It was the margin that was surprising," ESPN analyst Jay Bilas said by phone. "I've seen Miami play a lot. They're very good. They're Top 20 good. They have good players at every position, which not every team has. But the margin was surprising. That doesn't happen very often to a Top 5 team."

Duke's loss was the third worst for a No. 1 team. The last time Duke lost a regular-season game by a larger spread was January 1984. UM always has had trouble drawing good crowds, but the Duke win may be making Hurricanes basketball a tough ticket to get. The university announced Thursday that Sunday's

game against Florida State at the 7,972-seat BankUnited Center is sold out. That's two sell-outs in a span of five days. Prior to that, UM had sold out only one game since 2009.

"This team deserves that type of environment, that type of atmosphere because they're a really good team," said ESPN analyst and former Virginia Tech coach Seth Greenberg. "Really good. And I'm not talking just for Miami. They're just really good."

Warren Sapp gets Miami to mock Duke by slapping floor

USA TODAY
Scott Gleeson
Jan. 24, 2013

A massive wave of Duke haters took joy in watching the Blue Devils get demolished by Miami (Fla.) in Wednesday's 90-63 rout, most notably North Carolina fans.

The only thing better than beating the Blue Devils by 27 points when they're the top team in the country is doing so while mocking them.

MAILBAG: How long can Duke tread water without Kelly?

MORE: Dick Vitale rips Duke

Duke, one of the most decorated programs in college basketball, is known for its tradition of slapping the floor on defense prior to defensive possessions. It's been a something to expect from Mike Krzyzewski-coached teams, although we never saw Kobe Bryant do it in the Olympics.

So, with 6:45 remaining in the game and Miami coasting with a 28-point cushion, all five Hurricane players slapped the floor on defense at the same time. Now, this moment seemed to symbolize the Hurricanes were showing they didn't plan to let up against a top team. But it's also clearly a direct mocking of the program.

As it turns out, the Miami players had a little help with their clever jab. Point guard Shane Larkin said after the game former NFL star Warren Sapp shouted his name while sitting courtside during a free throw to provide some Warren Sapp-like advice.

"He was like, 'slap the floor on D,'" Larkin told the Florida Sun-Sentinel.

Credit Sapp, a prolific trash talker in the NFL. It was a genius move to disrespect a storied

program.

But it might not seem like such a great idea come March 2 when Miami travels to Durham to face the Blue Devils.

"I believe we have them on the schedule again," Blue Devils guard Rasheed Sulaimon said.

Mark your calendars for some floor slapping.

Larranaga doesn't sleep after 'Canes crushed Duke

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Jan. 24, 2013

The night seemed to move in slow motion for Miami.

Everything went right. Literally, almost everything was perfect. The 90-63 win over No. 1 Duke on Wednesday was more than a program-defining moment for the Hurricanes.

It was historic.

The 27-point losing margin was the largest for a No. 1 team since 1968 and the third-largest in history. No. 25 Miami (14-3, 5-0 ACC) led by as many as 34 points in winning its sixth straight game.

"It's something that's never been done before," senior guard Durand Scott said. "This is the moment for us to enjoy this, not just as a team, but as a university and a program."

The party continued on into Thursday as the program rode the momentum. Before noon, the school announced all tickets for the 6 p.m. Sunday visit from rival Florida State were sold. It's believed to be the first back-to-back sellouts in program history.

Coach Jim Larranaga never went to bed after the court-storming night.

He went out for a victory dinner with players, then went back to watch game film. By 8:30 a.m. Thursday, Larranaga had the first of his roughly 15 broadcast interviews scheduled.

It's been a whirlwind that was special right from the beginning.

Larranaga thanked the supporters and students who turned out like never before. The BankUnited Center capacity crowd of 7,972 spilled onto the court as the final seconds

ticked down. It was the second time that happened this year. The Nov. 28 victory over then-No. 13 Michigan State was the other.

"I'd like to see students rush the floor after every win," Larranaga said. "Part of being in college is being in an exciting environment. Do you remember when you were in college how much stress you felt about earning good grades and trying to pass a class? So to be able to come out here and enjoy an athletic event and rush the court with their friends, those are memories. Those are things you remember for a lifetime."

The good will continued after leaving the arena.

Larranaga was greeted by a standing ovation when he walked into a local restaurant afterward. His iPhone blew up with more than 100 text messages and 100 emails.

The margin of victory made it one of the top national headlines Thursday morning. It gained speed when national radio talk show host Dan Patrick told his audience he heard Duke players practiced from 1:30 a.m. Thursday until 4:45 a.m. CBSSports.com later quoted Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski saying the report was completely inaccurate.

Back in Coral Gables, the campus was still wrapping its collective head around the magnitude of the victory. Nobody in the Hurricanes' locker room was too startled by the scoreboard.

Vitale rips Duke after blowout loss to Miami

USA TODAY
Scott Gleeson
Jan. 24, 2013

Unlike LeBron James, the Duke Blue Devils didn't take their talents to South Beach.

Coach Mike Krzyzewski's top-ranked team seemed to leave it all back in Durham, getting blown out by 27 points by Miami (Fla.) and looking like the Hurricanes' punching bag for much of the night.

One way to tell that the Blue Devils were getting freakishly embarrassed came when TV's most Duke-biased personality completely bashed them.

Early in the second half, ESPN analyst Dick Vitale ripped Duke without any remorse, paying ultimate compliments to Miami.

"This is the poorest performance I have witnessed from a Duke team in all my years sitting courtside," Vitale said passionately on the live ESPN broadcast.

He later added, "Warm up the bus, this game is over. ...(The Blue Devils) have no one to blame but themselves."

With Duke reeling and left searching for answers (and a shooting touch), Miami is looking more and more like a legitimate contender to win the Atlantic Coast Conference after routing Duke and with challenger N.C. State losing to Wake Forest on Tuesday night.

Ah, cue the Will Smith. If this team advances far in the NCAA tournament, you know "Welcome to Miami" will be playing on TV as the team's anthem.

CMR - Kadji shines for the Hurricanes

FIBA.com
Jan. 24, 2013

When Cameroon's players gather this summer to start preparing for the Afrobasket, don't be surprised if a newcomer who goes by the name Kenny Kadji is among them.

The 2.11m Kadji, a senior at the University of Miami, would bring much-needed size to a national side whose tallest player at Afrobasket 2011 was 2.05m Joseph Owona.

Now 36, Owona averaged just over 11 minutes per game for a Cameroon team that came in a disappointing seventh in Madagascar.

The 24-year-old Kadji, who hails from Douala and played at Pendleton/IMG Academy for coach Mike Moreau before embarking on his collegiate career, would bring more than height.

He would add quality.

After a couple of disappointing seasons with the Florida Gators, Kadji transferred to Miami and has not only blossomed into one of the Hurricanes' top players, but one of the finest in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Known before the start of the season as a skilled jump-shooting big man, Kadji on Wednesday night showed against top-ranked Duke University he can do a lot more in pouring in 22 points, corralling six rebounds and swatting two shots.

On one play late in the first half, Kadji caught a pass behind the three-point arc, blew past Duke's Mason Plumlee and after one dribble, floated to his left and banked in a left-handed lay-up.

Duke showed up at Miami led by Team USA coach Mike Krzyzewski and trying to bolster their reputation as the best team in the country, but Kadji and Miami rolled to a 90-63 win.

The defeat was the third worst for a No. 1 team.

Kadji and Miami have now claimed the scalps of two of college basketball's most famous teams because they also won at the University of North Carolina two weeks ago, 68-59.

The Cameroonian had 18 points, nine rebounds and four blocks against the Tar Heels.

Kadji said after the win at Carolina that he was intent on becoming a more complete player.

"I came in (to the 2012-13 season) working on ball-handling, defense," Kadji said.

"I'm trying to stay aggressive, get to the basket and shoot the ball and I'm trying to rebound."

There are a lot more games for Kadji this season.

He and Miami are trying to reach the NCAA Tournament and once there, to make an impact.

Kadji is also looking to enhance his status before the NBA Draft.

Don't be surprised if he plays for Cameroon at the Afrobasket this summer.

Kadji would only be a positive as they attempt to qualify for the 2014 FIBA Basketball World Cup.

A shocker in South Beach

ESPN.com

Dick Vitale

Jan. 23, 2013

There was a major celebration on South Beach after Wednesday night's game between Duke and Miami.

If you had asked me before the game which team would win in a blowout, I would have said odds are Duke would win that type of game.

Instead, it was Miami that rolled to an absolute blowout.

Miami entered Wednesday night 0-6 all-time against No. 1 ranked teams. The Hurricanes did not care about that stat as Jim Larranaga's team outplayed the No. 1 Blue Devils.

In all of my years of calling games, I cannot remember seeing Duke struggle like that. Miami was able to penetrate and get so many easy baskets. It was layup after layup, dunk after dunk. It was a true mismatch, pretty much over late in the first half.

I thought Duke could make it interesting if it cut the lead to 10 or so early in the second half. Instead, it got worse.

Give Miami credit for this win. Defense led to plenty of fast-break points. Duke had a horrible night shooting, with Seth Curry, Quinn Cook and Tyler Thornton really having a tough time.

Early on, the Blue Devils had a number of open looks but missed. The Hurricanes ended up taking advantage of the poor shooting.

Miami fans were excited going into the game, and for good reason. It was the first sellout of the season. The team got a lift with the return of big man Reggie Johnson, who was supposed to miss a few more weeks with a thumb injury. Durand Scott, Shane Larkin and Kenny Kadji were outstanding.

In the end, Duke will use this loss as a teaching moment. Thursday's practice should be pretty intense, my friends.

Give credit to Miami on a job well done.

Miami's Gamble Pays Off Big

ACC Sports Journal
Jan. 23, 2013

CORAL GABLES –When Julian Gamble tore his left knee about a year-and-a-half ago, it's hard to tell who had more doubts about his future – Gamble or Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga.

The questions went from "Can he get a sixth season from the NCAA so can he rehab himself well enough to play?" to "Can he get in good enough shape to contribute?"

The answers have turned out to be yes and yes.

The 6-10, 250-pound Gamble has gone from unknown impact to unexpected bonus. With forward Reggie Johnson missing double-digit games with a broken thumb, Gamble's fill-in performance has been integral to the Hurricanes' fastest ACC start ever.

"When he started practicing in September, we didn't recognize him," Larranaga said. "When he was running, jumping, we said, 'Wow, he's gonna be a factor.'"

In a season in which injuries and departures have chipped away at Miami's depth and made Larranaga feel like there was a cloud over his team, Gamble has been a ray of sunshine.

The Hurricanes have had to change their style because of personnel. It's hard to imagine Larranaga, who prefers an up-tempo approach, envisioned his team winning league games 62-49, 68-59, 54-47 and 60-59 when he took the job here, but that's what's happening. 4-0 in the ACC is 4-0. Duke and N.C. State can't say that. Neither can North Carolina, because Miami beat the Tar Heels in Chapel Hill.

"You learn about your players' strengths and weaknesses," Larranaga said. "I'd like to press full court for 40 minutes, but we're playing a lot of half-court basketball. The personnel lends itself towards a certain style. To become a man-to-man team, it took months to get guys comfortable, comfortable to guard."

A little more than two months after Larranaga took the job, Gamble suffered his knee injury in the offseason. It was another in a list of maladies that had kept stalling his college career.

"The injury obviously was devastating," said Jim Krumpas, Miami's strength and conditioning coach for men's basketball. "Your last year of basketball. He struggled with that. He already had so many injuries and surgeries before. It took him awhile to go through this whole process again."

Last season was the longest of Gamble's life, as he watched his team fall short in its run

for the NCAA Tournament. Also galling was the knowledge that he could've contributed when Johnson missed playing time last year with a knee injury.

"There were maybe times his focus was not as good as we wanted to be," Krumpas said. The uncertainty ate at Gamble. It wasn't just if he'd play at Miami again.

"There were days when I'd want to do things I can't do, and I'd go through a lot of pain," Gamble said. "Through the soreness, I thought, 'Am I ever gonna be the player I used to be?' When you suffer that kind of injury – and it being the first time it happens in your life – you realize, 'This is a really long time to be out.' Not being able to play, you think, 'Am I ever gonna be what I used to be?'"

"That first hurdle is all mental."

Gamble started jumping those hurdles after last season when he was first cleared by the NCAA, then started to make progress in his rehab. He also helped himself by losing weight; eating less fast food and carbs in the summer and having more – but smaller – meals.

"He looks the part," Krumpas said. "You see him on the court, and he's moving so much better. In the past he wasn't as quick and agile."

While Gamble never wanted Johnson's injury to happen, it gave him more playing time. In the eight games that he's replaced Johnson, he has averaged almost nine points, 7.5 rebounds and 2.3 blocks in 27 minutes. He has more than doubled his point production and almost quadrupled his rebounds since he became a starter.

In those games, Miami has gone 6-2. With Gamble, the Hurricanes not only have kept their heads above water, but they're swimming at high tide. At this point, if they went .500 in their next 16 games – 14 regular-season games, two ACC Tournament games – they'd go 21-11 and be in the NCAA Tournament. Miami already has played one of the toughest schedules in the country and has a winning record against top-100 foes. If the Hurricanes play better than .500, they'd have a shot at a top-six seed in the NCAA Tournament, their first appearance since 2008.

Gamble has had a lot of highlights in the past eight games, including a 16-point, 13-rebound effort vs. Hawaii and a 14-point, six-rebound game against a North Carolina team that once had recruited the Durham native.

"It was kind of euphoric, being a Carolina fan, playing in the Dean Dome and coming back with teammates," said Gamble, who scrambled to get 25 tickets for friends and family.

Contributing However He Can

But if there was a game that symbolized Gamble's journey, it was Maryland. Facing a tall Terrapins team that included 7-1 Alex Len, Gamble either couldn't get his left-handed shot to go or had it being blocked in the early going.

But Gamble was equal to the task on the defensive end, with four blocks and good face-up D.

"Just running, being relentless, never stopping," Gamble said in describing his play. "I knew I didn't make a shot, so I had to make up for it on the defensive end. The focus was on my defense and guarding Alex Len. I was kind of buckling down and guarding to the best of my ability."

The game was ugly with a capital U. Maryland got a taste of what a Big Ten game would be like when it played Miami. Open looks were hard to come by. It was a man's game inside. Listening to teammates who encouraged him to attack the basket, Gamble had three dunks in a 3:08 stretch that kept Miami comfortably ahead.

After the game, Maryland coach Mark Turgeon said Gamble helps the Hurricanes protect the rim. He added, "I think they may be a better defensive team without the big man (Johnson)."

Krumpas said it's a good story about a good dude who did good work in his rehab. Gamble constantly has to stretch to stay limber while he works out for 45 minutes two or three times a week. Now, he relishes those workouts because he's seeing the positive results. "Adversity has made us better and a stronger and deeper team," Gamble said. "Once Reggie comes back, people are going to have a lot more confidence."

"We didn't set goals of just making the NCAA Tournament. We want to make noise and be one of the top teams. Our goals are high. Our bigs are mobile. Coach L doesn't have to go completely small. We can take advantage of our size and length."

Larranaga said Gamble has put himself in this position by working hard. And Gamble's hard work has helped put Miami in position for a special season. It's been almost 15 years since the Hurricanes have gotten off to this kind of start in conference play. An ACC title – unthinkable after Johnson's injury in late December – is not off the table.

"It's just the beginning," Larranaga said.

Miami becoming an ACC force

ESPN.com

John Gasaway

Jan. 23, 2013

Does Canes' elite D give them a shot at an ACC title and deep tourney run?

As a rule, it's best to be suspicious of familiar sports narratives, the kind you hear imposed without any alteration on very different situations. Take the one about the new coaching staff. Tell me if you've heard this one before ...

The new staff arrives and implements its new scheme on offense, defense or both. Not only that, but the incoming coaches instill a new attitude in the program. (Often it is said this new attitude revolves around "accountability.") On-court improvement isn't immediate, but in the head coach's second season, the players "buy in" to the system and the team goes on a tear.

Certainly there's no shortage of second-year head coaches in the ACC. Brian Gregory (Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets), Mark Gottfried (NC State Wolfpack) and Mark Turgeon (Maryland Terrapins) are all entering their second seasons in their current positions. But if you had to pick one ACC coach who exemplifies this standard "Year 2" narrative, I nominate Miami Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga.

Keep in mind the Hurricanes have won just four NCAA tournament games in the program's entire history, or one fewer than Kansas won in the span of a few weeks last spring. Indeed Miami hasn't even appeared in the NCAA tournament since 2008. So it's not as if Larranaga was inheriting a ready-made contender when he took the job in April 2011. But if current performance is any indication, the program's numbers for NCAA tournament appearances and wins may be improving in a few weeks. (Miami gets a good chance to prove itself at home tonight against Duke -- 7 ET, ESPN.)

Here's why the conventional second-year narrative describes Miami very well and, more importantly, what that will mean for the Hurricanes in the ACC race and NCAA tournament.

Outside Durham and Chapel Hill, winning in the ACC is exceptionally difficult

It's still early in the season, but to this point Miami is outscoring its ACC opponents by a healthy 0.12 points per possession. If the Canes are able to sustain that level of performance, it should mark them as not only a team that will receive an at-large bid for the tournament but also one with serious second-weekend potential.

Saddle Up: Welcome to Miami

ESPN.com
Eamonn Brennan
Jan. 23, 2013

Thank goodness for basketball, and thank goodness for an inept NCAA.

If I am a Miami basketball partisan, or a player, or coach Jim Larranaga, or -- actually, especially -- former coach Frank Haith, those are the two things you have to be thankful for. You're thankful for basketball, because in the midst of all the Nevin Shapiro investigation/notice of allegations worries you have the games to fall back on, and in Miami's case you have the best team and season in recent memory. You're thankful for the NCAA's ineptitude, because its long-rumored notice of allegations, the one that would reportedly accuse Haith of unethical conduct during his tenure at Miami and would surely have some effect on the Hurricanes' revived basketball program, has been delayed by the most Kafkaesque of developments: The NCAA is investigating itself.

No, seriously. True story:

The NCAA has found what it calls "a very severe case of improper conduct" committed by former members of its own enforcement program during the Miami investigation, and will not deliver the long-awaited notice of allegations against the Hurricanes until an external review is completed.

NCAA president Mark Emmert announced the findings Wednesday. The sports governing body said former enforcement staff members worked with the criminal defense attorney for former Miami booster and convicted Ponzi scheme architect Nevin Shapiro "to improperly obtain information ... through a bankruptcy proceeding that did not involve the NCAA." Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?

While you wrangle with that one, Haith and everyone at Miami -- both the former regime and the current athletics department, including the basketball staff -- can breathe a rath-

er deep sigh of relief. Imagine if Haith avoids a potential show-cause penalty on a procedural technicality! Insane!

Anyway, all of that could have obscured the basketball game on offer Wednesday night, and it will surely warrant plenty of discussion on the broadcast from Coral Gables. But it would obviously be silly to ignore the game itself, particularly how important it is for Miami. Not that the Hurricanes "need" a big win for NCAA tournament purposes, though it never hurts. Really, though, Miami is good enough to not only get to the NCAA tournament, but to seriously contend at the top of the ACC. Larranaga's team plays top-15 efficiency defense; its .85 points per trip allowed are the lowest in ACC play to date. The Hurricanes guard and rebound well, but avoid fouls (and thus don't force many turnovers). On offense, they take care of the ball, use the versatility of face-up forward Kenny Kadji and guard Durand Scott and, when Reggie Johnson is healthy, pound it down low. Johnson won't be back for another few weeks but the Hurricanes have kept winning without him.* (*Update: Johnson returned Wednesday night.) They can certainly win this game Wednesday night. In their own building, I'm not even sure we could call it an upset.

Whatever Miami's odds are, they are definitely shorter than "NCAA pauses Miami enforcement to investigate its own investigation." Strange days.

3s the key for Duke vs. Miami

ESPN Stats and Info
Jan. 23, 2013

The top-ranked Duke Blue Devils hit the road for the second time this season to take on the Miami Hurricanes in an Atlantic Coast Conference contest on Wednesday (ESPN, 7 ET).

The Blue Devils are 16-1 this season, but lost their only previous road game against North Carolina State on January 12.

Miami is ranked for the first time since January 2010, when the Hurricanes reached No. 23 in the AP poll after starting the season 15-1.

Key to the game
Duke is shooting 42.2 percent on 3-pointers this season, best in the ACC and fourth in the nation. The Blue Devils have won 77 straight games when making at least 44 percent of their shots from behind the arc.

The last time Duke shot better than 40 percent from 3-point range for an entire season was in 1991-92, when it won its second of back-to-back national championships.

The Hurricanes are holding their opponents to 31.1 percent on 3-point shots and have held five of their past six opponents under 40 percent from long range.

Despite Miami's solid defense against the 3-point shot, the Hurricanes give up a large percentage of their points from beyond the arc. Miami's opponents have scored 33.0 percent of their points on 3-pointers, which is the second-highest percentage in the conference. **Lowest Turnover Percentage**

ACC This Season	
Duke	16.2%
Miami	16.6%
NC State	17.4%
Virginia Tech	17.6%

Take care of the ball
Duke and Miami are the two best teams in the ACC at taking care of the basketball. They are the only two conference members to turn the ball over on less than 17 percent of their possessions.

The Hurricanes' ball control could limit Duke's easy baskets. The Blue Devils lead the ACC with 19.1 points per game off turnovers. Miami allows a league-low 9.6 points per game off turnovers.

Catch me if you can
Duke leads the ACC in points per game (19.2) and field goal percentage (43.1) on catch-and-shoot jump shots this season.

In the Blue Devils' lone loss, they went cold on those shots, scoring just 12 points on 36.4 percent shooting in catch-and-shoot situations against the Wolfpack.

Duke struggled on those shots, despite being left unguarded on nine of its 11 catch-and-shoot attempts.

Catch-and-Shoot FG This Season

Duke	Opponents
PPG	19.2 << 8.5 <<
FG Pct	43.1 << 26.7 <<
3-pt FG pct	44.4 << 27.9
>> Leads ACC	

Seth Curry is shooting 47.9 percent on catch-and-shoot plays, fifth-best in the ACC. He's even better when guarded, making an ACC-best 53.7 percent of his contested catch-and-shoot attempts.

As good as the Blue Devils are on catch-and-shoot offense, they are just as good on the defensive end. Duke limits its opponents to 8.5 points per game and 26.7 percent shooting in such situations. Both figures lead the ACC.

Final Four pedigree?
Duke is allowing 88.4 points per 100 possessions this season, on pace for the team's best

defensive efficiency since the 1997-98 season.

The Blue Devils have held their opponents to 92 or fewer points per 100 possessions four times in the past 15 seasons. They've made it to the Sweet 16 each time and played for the championship twice, winning the 2001 title.

Last season, the Blue Devils allowed 99.7 points per 100 possessions, fourth-worst in the ACC.

What does Wednesday's blowout loss mean for Duke?

NBC Sports
Rob Dauster
Jan. 23, 2013

No. 1 Duke lost tonight at No. 25 Miami.

That much isn't a surprise. Miami got Reggie Johnson back tonight, and Duke is still playing without Ryan Kelly. The Hurricanes are the second best team in the ACC. They probably should be beating a banged-up Duke team at home.

But they shouldn't be embarrassing the Blue Devils, which is precisely what happened on Wednesday night.

Duke, who is now 16-2 and 3-2 in the ACC, lost by 27 points, 90-63. But that final score doesn't do justice the magnitude of the beat-down that Miami doled out. Miami was down 14-13 at one point in the first half. A tip-in by Mason Plumlee before the halftime buzzer made it 42-19 Hurricanes. Miami would push that lead to 49-19. That's a 36-5 run for those scoring at home.

In simpler terms, Miami did this to Duke.

Even Dick Vitale called it an embarrassment, and every knows how much he loves Duke.

We went through this last season when North Carolina lost by 33 at Florida State as the No. 3 team in the country. Only six teams that have won the national title have lost by more than 20 points in the season they won the title. Only one of those six teams — UCLA in 1965 — lost by as many as 27 points. Only two teams ever ranked No. 1 in the country — St. John's in 1951 and Houston in 1968 — have lost by more than 27 points.

But there's a difference here: Duke is without Ryan Kelly, who is such an integral piece to that team. He's a 6-foot-11 power forward that shoots over 50% from three and can guard multiple positions. Not only does he help cre-

ate the spacing that the Blue Devils need for Mason Plumlee inside and Quinn Cook's penetration, he takes away that spacing defensively with his ability to defend on the perimeter and block shots.

His value was evident when Duke lost to NC State.

But this?

This was more than just Ryan Kelly. The Blue Devils didn't have a prayer of slowing down Shane Larkin or Durand Scott tonight. They made Kenny Kadji look like a lottery pick. Seth Curry looked like a 40 year old down at the YMCA, shooting 0-10 from the floor and playing like that leg injury is a bigger deal than he's letting on. And he wasn't the only back court member that looked lost. Quinn Cook and Tyler Thornton combined to shoot 1-19 from the field.

When your three guards go 1-29 from the floor and allow the players they are guarding to combine for 43 points and nine assists on 17-28 shooting, you are going to lose.

Every time.

But the biggest concern was that Duke simply didn't have it in them to punch back when Miami started raining haymakers. There was no one on the team willing to step up and stop the run. They didn't play when pride. Throw in every sports cliché you want here, because they're all true.

That's not always going to happen, and the Blue Devils are clearly not as bad as they looked on Tuesday, but the one thing that is clear is that they look a lot more like the team that lost to Lehigh right now than the team that won the Battle 4 Atlantis.

Hurricanes hand Duke historic loss

ESPN Stats and Info
Jan. 23, 2013

For the third straight week, the top-ranked team in the country suffered a loss as the Duke Blue Devils became the first AP No. 1 to lose to the Miami Hurricanes.

The Blue Devils are the seventh top-five team to lose in the past two weeks and are responsible for two of the three losses by the No. 1 team during that span.

More surprising than the loss was its magnitude (90-63). The Blue Devils lost by 27 points, tied for their sixth-worst loss since Mike Krzyzewski took over in 1980-81 and tied for their largest since they lost to the UNLV Rebels by 30 points in the national title game in 1990.

Largest Margins of Victory vs. AP No. 1 Team

Winner	AP No. 1	
1951	Kentucky	St. John's 41
1968	UCLA	Houston 32
2013	Miami (FL)	Duke 27
1994	Massachusetts	Arkansas 24
1998	North Carolina	Duke 24

It was one of the most-lopsided losses ever for a team at the top of the AP poll. The only worse losses were by Frank McGuire's St. John's team in 1951 and Houston in the 1968 Final Four.

This is the Hurricanes' ninth season in the ACC. It's the first time they have beaten Duke and North Carolina in the same season. At 5-0 in ACC play, Miami is off to its best start since moving to the conference.

The game turned midway through the first half. Duke led 14-13 with 10 minutes left before halftime, but Miami ended the half on a 29-5 run and scored the first seven points of the second half.

Duke struggled shooting all game long, though, especially from long range. The Blue Devils entered the game shooting 42.2 percent on 3-pointers, ranking fourth in the nation. They went just 4-for-23 from behind the arc against Miami.

For the game, Duke shot 29.7 percent from the field. In the 87 losses by AP No. 1 teams in the past 15 years, that's the second worst shooting percentage. The only performance worse was also by the Blue Devils -- 27.7 percent in the 2006 NCAA tournament against the LSU Tigers.

Seth Curry entered the game with a chance to move the Curry brothers past Larry and Eddie Bird for the second-most points by a pair of brothers in Division I history.

Instead, he went 0-for-10 from the floor and finished scoreless for the fifth time in his career and the second time against Miami.

Most FG Attempts without Make

Power-6 Players This Season		
Quinn Cook	Duke	0-11
Seth Curry	Duke	0-10<<
Rasheed Sulaimon	Duke	0-10
Jordan Hulls	Indiana	0-10

Duke players now account for three of the 15 occurrences this season in which a Division I player attempts at least 10 shots without a make.

Duke has now lost both of its only true road games this season.

The big loss doesn't bode well for Duke's national title aspirations. Since the NCAA tournament expanded to 64 teams in 1985, no team that has lost a game by at least 27 points has won the title.

No. 1 Duke embarrassed in rout at Miami

FOX Sports Florida
Charlie McCarthy
Jan. 23, 2013

It's rarely big news when the nation's No. 1 college basketball team plays a one-sided game. But it always is when the top-ranked team gets slapped silly.

On Wednesday night, Duke was shockingly on the receiving end.

The 25th-ranked Miami Hurricanes, invigorated by the return of center Reggie Johnson, opened a 23-point halftime lead en route to a 90-63 demolition of the Blue Devils at the BankUnited Center.

It was the third-worst loss by a No. 1 team in history, and the second time in two weeks that a top-ranked Duke team lost to a ranked ACC team on the road.

"There's not much to say after that — men and boys," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "They were men, we were boys for 40 minutes. The score and the performance reflected that disparity."

What made for an amazing and exhilarating evening for Miami (14-3, 5-0) proved to be an embarrassing and humiliating one for Duke. The Hurricanes' biggest lead was 34 during garbage time with 1:40 to go. More impressive, Duke's smallest deficit in second half was 24 points — 24 points!

Time will tell if the game marked the night Miami basketball truly arrived. At the very least, it was the first time a group of Hurricanes defeated the nation's No. 1 team in seven tries. The Canes' sixth straight victory happened before the 10th sellout in the on-campus arena's 10 years.

"It wasn't easy, but we did it," said Johnson, who had been out since breaking his thumb

before a late-December holiday tournament in Hawaii.

"People were saying, 'Upset! Upset!' I don't believe in upsets. I feel like we've got to come and play, and they've got to come and play — may the best team win."

The teams battled closely at the start before the Hurricanes went on a 25-1 run with 9:42 left in the first half — 25-1!

"I've coached over a thousand games. I'm sure I've been hit by worse runs than that when I was at Army or at Duke and we weren't winning," Krzyzewski said after the Blue Devils' most lopsided loss in a regular-season game since January 1984. "In this game, you can be hit with everything and you have to be able to hit back."

One key factor in the outcome was Duke starters Quinn Cook (1-of-12), Seth Curry (0-10) and Mason Plumlee (5-15) combining for 6-of-37 shooting.

"That's something I haven't seen before," Krzyzewski said.

There also were the stories of the two Stretch 4s — aka forwards who can step out and shoot the J. Duke's Ryan Kelly missed his third straight game with a foot injury (as Duke fell to 1-2 without him) while Miami's Kenny Kadji likely earned increased NBA attention with 22 points, six rebounds and two blocks.

Then there was Johnson's return. The senior center, the star in last year's win at Cameron Indoor Stadium, telephoned his coach earlier in the day to say the doctors had cleared him to play.

"Quite honestly, I didn't think he was going to be back until sometime in February," coach Jim Larranaga said. "He hadn't practiced one time since Dec. 20. Not once!"

Johnson entered the game to chants of "Reggie!" just 5:43 into the game. His presence became an emotional lift more than a productive one as he produced two points and five rebounds in 16 minutes.

As a native New Yorker, Larranaga said the thought of Willis Reed and his dramatic return to the New York Knicks in 1970 came to mind before the game.

"I asked Reggie, 'Do you want to announce it?' and he said, 'No, no, no — we'll wait for the most dramatic time to make the announcement,'" Larranaga said. "I was cool with that."

Larranaga also was cool with the fan support. Students, taking a page from Duke's "Krzyzewskiville," camped out in an area they termed "Larranaga's Lawn." The coach and his wife supplied the group with 300 doughnuts before the game.

Miami's performance, also fueled by veteran guards Shane Larkin (18 points, 10 rebounds) and Durand Scott (25 points), gave indication the Hurricanes will be a serious threat in March. The Canes, who this week entered the national rankings for the first time in three years, are a disciplined, well-rounded, veteran team.

The Blue Devils (16-2, 3-2) will regain Kelly in a week or two, and likely will perform a lot better than they did Wednesday night and in their 84-76 loss at North Carolina St. on Jan. 12.

"Look, this wasn't for a championship," Krzyzewski said. "This is a heck of a game. We should be ready to play. They won. They killed us. I've done this for a long time. Do you think we're not going to try to show up the next time?"

Duke will get a chance for revenge in Durham on March 2.

The Miami Massacre: No. 1 Duke Goes Down in Coral Gables

GRANTLAND
Shane Ryan
Jan. 23, 2013

On Christmas Day, the Miami Hurricanes basketball team found themselves in Honolulu, leading Indiana State, 47-40, with 2:25 left in the third-place game of something called the Diamond Head Classic. A day earlier, they'd lost to Arizona by 19 points in the semi-finals, and it was hard to blame either the Canes or Sycamores for the ugly game that followed. It was a consolation, for god's sake, and they were making them play on the holiday. Miami's loss to Arizona was just their second of the season, but the first — a 63-51 embarrassment at the hands of Florida Gulf Coast — had taken the shine off a team some people had expected to contend for an ACC title. They followed that snafu by coasting through December, even picking up a home win over Michigan State to restore some luster, but now the doubts had returned. And the whole situation was about to get worse; Indiana State found one last spark — annoying, in a way — and rallied from a seven-point deficit to tie the game in regulation. That was it for Miami. They lost by two in overtime, adding a Hawaiian chapter to an ignominious start. The Hurricanes and coach Jim Larranaga were flying back to the mainland as yet another ACC punchline.

And the question we have to ask, here on January 24, is this: How did they go from there to here? How, in less than a month, did the disgraced Hurricanes manage to roll up a 5-0 ACC record and establish a two-game lead that makes them presumptive favorites for the regular season title? How did they wrap both hands around the soft neck of the conference, and how did they squeeze like giddy lunatics?

More to the point, how the hell did they just humiliate the no. 1 team in the nation, handing Duke its worst loss since the 1990 national championship game?

Here are a few theories, starting with the elements Miami can't control:

1. The ACC Is Either a Joke or a Nightmare. A Jokemare, Perhaps.

It's by far the worst of the major conferences, and the top halves of the Mountain West and Atlantic-10 also put it to shame. The Atlantic coast landscape is strewn with the rotting corpses of once-great teams, and there's no sign that anyone's coming to clean things up before March. UNC is on a down year, struggling for respectability with a roster full of inconsistent freshmen and disappointing veterans. NC State, whose fan base came in with high hopes, has proved to be a team with superlative offensive talent that would rather sulk than play defense, and is destined to break hearts by doing things like giving up 51 points in a half to Wake Forest. Florida State lost its offense from a season ago. Virginia plays the most boring style of basketball in the country and seems to win or lose based on random luck, and the fringe teams who showed early promise — Georgia Tech, Maryland, Virginia Tech — have all but broken apart at the seams. Which brings us to Duke.

2. Duke Is Doomed (For Now)

Duke came into Miami as a no. 1 seed the same way Gerald Ford came into the oval office in August 1974 as a U.S. President. Gerry was there by default after Nixon got caught snooping on the DNC at the Watergate, and the injury to the party after that little scandal made it all but impossible for him to actually win an election in 1976. The great strength the GOP had shown in the '72 election no longer applied to Ford. And Duke? Duke found itself at the top polls by default after Louisville and Indiana lost the week before, but an injury to Ryan Kelly on Jan. 8 had severely weakened the team and made it all but impossible for them to play at an elite level worthy of the ranking. The great strength the Blue Devils had shown in early-season wins over Minnesota and Louisville and Ohio State no longer applied to the team that faced Miami.

So Duke was a no. 1 team, sure, but they were paper champs. They won't see that ranking again this year, but if they get Ryan Kelly back at some point in the not-too-distant future, maybe they can recover the form that made them an elite team in December. If you believe Duke, though, they have no idea when or if he's coming back, or what he'll look like when he does. Which leaves Coach K with a team whose scoring power has been diminished and whose best player, Seth Curry, sometimes doesn't even practice with the team because of his own injury. And the last time Kelly got hurt, a loss to a certain Patriot League school wasn't far behind ...

3. Miami May Be Very Good

It's true that 5-0 in the ACC might not mean much, and even a win over no. 1 Duke might not mean as much as you'd expect, but the Hurricanes have become an excellent defensive team (12th in the country in efficiency, per KenPom) with an abundance of seniors and a lightning-quick point guard in Shane Larkin, whose legs move so fast at full speed that I swear the footage is sped up, like those old clips of Babe Ruth on the basepaths. If there was a star last night, it was Larkin, whose 18 points, 10 rebounds, and 5 assists gave Miami the engine it needed to overrun the visitors. Or maybe the star was Durand Scott, the senior guard who scored 25 points on 9-14 shooting and helped expose Duke's weak perimeter defense. Or maybe it was Kenny Kadji, the 6-foot-11 senior who became the latest big man to outplay Mason Plumlee, scoring 22 points on an absurdly efficient 9-11 from the floor. Or maybe it was Trey McKinney Jones, whose defense held Seth Curry to an 0-10 night and the fifth scoreless game of his career. Or maybe it was ...

You get the point. The real star of the game was Miami as a unit, the group of players who shot the lights out, totally befuddled Duke's guards on defense, and turned in what has to be considered the year's most dominant ACC performance. The Canes' weaknesses, which include hitting the offensive glass and making free throws, are becoming less and less important as the team gels. If there's doubt associated with the team, it's not that they don't have the talent to hold the two-game lead and win the conference, but whether they can avoid the letdowns and bad losses that have become their trademark.

Two last thoughts on the game ...

1. RIP, Mason Plumlee Player of the Year Campaign

This makes the third straight year that the middle Plumlee child got off to a hot start, raised everyone's hopes, and then plummeted in conference play. After being out-dueled by Clemson's Devin Booker and NC State's Richard Howell and Miami's Kadji, the file on his POTY hopes has been sealed shut. The stats never quite tell the whole story with Plumlee, but even those have become more pedestrian in the ACC. The points have gone from the 20s to the teens — and worse — and while the rebounds have remained more or less constant, the so-called free-throw improvement has regressed to 46.4 percent in conference play (13-28), and his impact on the game has been in free-fall mode. And I'll also say this — Duke fans get on me for repeatedly knocking Plumlee's instincts and lack of grace/court sense/fluidity/etc., since these qualities are observed and can't be measured, but it's truly remarkable to me that, in a long career of playing basketball, he's only learned 1-2 post moves and still seems to be completely at sea when he gets the ball in the post. Seriously, watch him next game. If he doesn't catch the first post pass, spin into the center of the lane, and launch into a hook shot that sometimes turns into a mid-air pass, I'll have my editors buy you a beer.

2. A Complete List of Rules About When It's Appropriate for a Fan Base to Charge the Court

Requirement no. 1: The fan base's team must win. Otherwise, why are they charging? For violent reasons? Not cool. (Implied in requirement no. 1 is that there must also be a basketball game at the time of the charge, and the basketball game must be over.)

Requirement no. 2: THERE IS NO REQUIREMENT NO. 2. STOP BEING A FASCIST COURT-CHARGING POLICE TRIBUNAL, AMERICAN INTERNET PEOPLE. THESE ARE COLLEGE KIDS. AND THEY WANT TO HAVE FUN. THEY CAN CHARGE ANY GODDAMN TIME THEY PLEASE AS LONG AS REQUIREMENT NO. 1 IS MET. THEY DO NOT HAVE TO ANSWER TO YOUR TWITTER ACCOUNT. FURTHERMORE, IF THEY CHOOSE TO CHARGE, I PROMISE THAT IT WILL NOT AFFECT YOUR LIFE BEYOND THE OBVIOUS DISPLEASURE YOU FEEL WHEN YOU WITNESS OTHER HUMAN BEINGS EXPERIENCING JOY. SO STOP. STOP. STOP. STOP. LEAVE THEM ALONE, YOU OLD CURMUDGEONLY MEDDLERS. LEAVE. THE. KIDS. ALONE.

Thank you for listening.

Miami fans, dance; Duke fans, breathe

ESPN.com
Myron Metcalf
Jan. 23, 2013

Yes, it happened. Duke, the No. 1 team in America, scored 19 points in the first half of a 90-63 loss at Miami on Wednesday night. It was tied for the program's most-lopsided loss in the past 15 years.

The Blue Devils also endured the third-largest loss by a No. 1 team in Division I history. Miami earned its first victory over a No. 1 team in seven tries.

But it's only Jan. 23.

So what's the proper way to digest this? That all depends on your allegiance, I guess.

If you're a Duke fan ... Don't cry. You're used to this. When your favorite squad gets whipped, it usually leaves the scrap with a broken nose and two black eyes. Remember last season? The Blue Devils went to Columbus and lost to Ohio State by 22 in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. North Carolina beat them by 18 in Durham last March. The season before that, they were ranked No. 3 when they went to New York and suffered a 93-78 loss to St. John's. In 2009-10, the last time they won the national title, they took a 14-point road loss against an unranked North Carolina State team.

My point is that Duke has proved in past years that it's resilient enough to recover from these lopsided losses. They almost seem normal now. (Although I can't say I envy any player who will be subjected to coach Mike Krzyzewski's next practice session, which could commence the recovery process.)

But this was an embarrassment. And it's easy to say the absence of Ryan Kelly (13.4 points and 1.7 blocks per game, 52.1 percent from the 3-point line) was the main reason for the loss. I'm sure he would have helped -- although he was 3-for-10 the last time he played the same Miami frontcourt last season -- but I'm certain he wouldn't have single-handedly closed the entire 27-point gap.

The Blue Devils struggled from the 3-point line (4-for-23) Wednesday. They've shot 23.3 percent from beyond the arc in their two road losses. At home and on neutral courts (16-0), they've registered a 43.1 percent clip from beyond the arc.

Kelly could have given them a boost on the perimeter. But what about Miami's easy buckets in the paint? The dunks? The jump shots Duke couldn't stop? What about the turnovers? The missed layups? The backcourt that watched the game from the team's hotel? The selfish one-on-one basketball that belied everything Coach K teaches? No excuses. The Blue Devils didn't show up, and they

didn't execute. With an entire half to play, they came out of the locker room with the body language of a squad that wanted to get back on the bus and go home.

It was a poor effort against an underrated team that clearly is capable of contending for the ACC crown. But it also was Duke's second consecutive letdown on the road (it has lost both its true road games this season). The Blue Devils fell from their No. 1 post the first time when they suffered an 84-76 loss at NC State on Jan. 12. Yes, they need Kelly. But even when the 6-foot-11 standout returns, they're going to stumble again in the ACC if they play the way they did Wednesday night, especially when they're on the road.

Unhindered Miami dunks, like this one from Rion Brown, are out of character for Coach K's Duke. If you're a Miami fan ... Somebody call Will Smith, Jennifer Lopez and LeBron James ... even Pitbull, if that's your style. It's time to dance in the streets of Miami. Yes, Hurricanes. We see you now. And to be honest, it should not have taken this long. We've given a bunch of programs passes for injuries and suspensions.

But Durand Scott and Reggie Johnson didn't warrant the scrutiny we've given Kelly even though the two Hurricanes starters have missed 12 games combined. Scott (NCAA suspension) wasn't available during the November loss to Florida Gulf Coast. Johnson (broken thumb) was absent during losses to Arizona and Indiana State.

So coach Jim Larranaga hasn't had a Miami squad at 100 percent for the majority of the 2012-13 campaign. Still, the Hurricanes' 5-0 start is the program's best start in nine years as a member of the ACC.

I think Johnson's surprising return was more of an emotional boost for the team than anything. He was clearly rusty after missing eight games with a thumb injury. But the Hurricanes finally had all their key pieces. The result? They pounced on the No. 1 team in America.

I have to give my wise colleague John Gasaway credit for this must-read commentary on Miami's D, ranked 12th in Ken Pomeroy's adjusted defensive efficiency ratings. In a Wednesday pregame post, Gasaway wrote: "Surprises have been plentiful in Coral Gables of late, but Larranaga and his players may be working on the biggest one of all. 'Miami' and 'deep tournament run' may not be mutually exclusive terms much longer."

Preach, John.

There is upper-level defense. And then there is Miami's defensive execution against the Blue Devils.

This Miami squad held the Blue Devils to a 2-for-11 mark from the 3-point line in the first half. Krzyzewski's squad didn't score a field goal for an eight-minute stretch before halftime. Quinn Cook and Seth Curry were a combined 1-for-22.

I don't know whether I've ever witnessed a Duke team get punched in the mouth like that. I was in Columbus when Duke lost to Ohio State by 22 last season. But this was different. The Hurricanes' defense really sucked the life out of the Blue Devils.

Kenny Kadji (22 points), Shane Larkin (18 points, 10 rebounds) and Scott (25 points) made sure Miami maintained a significant scoring margin. But the team's collective defense was superb.

And now, the ACC race will be more interesting. NC State just lost to Wake Forest. Miami is undefeated in conference play, with a win over Duke. Kelly will return, and the Blue Devils will maintain their post as the most talented team in the conference. North Carolina and Maryland are intriguing.

Overall, the biggest development of the evening is that the ACC is not a one- or two-team league. Duke's early push opposed that theory. The Hurricanes can win this league because of their defensive prowess and the fact that they're finally healthy. And as Gasaway noted, the Hurricanes are built to make noise in March, too.

Now, it's late January. And Miami eventually will play North Carolina State (road), North Carolina (home) and Duke again (road). So things could change.

But the Canes made a statement Wednesday night about their status in the conference.

In the words of the great Pitbull, from his song "Triumph," "They thought he was done, dawg, but he's back bigger, better, stronger and free."

I guess that describes Miami.

Should be the team's new anthem.

Hurricanes' lopsided win shows 14-3 record is no fluke

Palm Beach Post
Greg Stoda
Jan. 23, 2013

The campers, few of number yet mighty of spirit, called the occupied ground Larranagaland or Larranaga's Lawn in honor of University of Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga. They watched movies Tuesday night — "Space Jam," "Anchorman" and "The Lion King" — projected onto the outside walls of the BankUnited Center home of the Hurricanes, and cared not a bit about getting doused by sprinklers before dawn.

Such was the buildup to Wednesday night's Atlantic Coast Conference showdown between 25th-ranked UM and top-ranked Duke, which came complete with a sold-out arena and an ESPN national television audience tuned in to hear the ubiquitous Dick Vitale rant and rave.

Here's what he ended up ranting and raving about: Miami 90, Duke 63.
Blink, and read it again.
Ninety. Sixty-three.

And it wasn't that close. Really, it wasn't.

"It was Miami's show, baby!" Vitale summarized in a hallway after the game. "Never in my wildest dreams did I expect this. It was a complete performance by the Hurricanes." For once, that stands as a Dickie V. understatement.

The Blue Devils and their coach, Mike Krzyzewski, are icons of the college game. They're accustomed to such anticipatory madness back in Durham, N.C., where a Krzyzewskiville tent city routinely forms the evening(s) before any big game at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

But they might as well have been under tents of their own as Miami swamped them during a rush to a 42-19 halftime lead.

"We have to put it behind us," Larranaga told a television interviewer on his way to the locker room for the break.

They did.

They were relentless in demonstration of their first place ACC standing at 5-0 ... and with every other team already having lost twice in league competition.

Asked if he could find anything positive to say in defeat, Krzyzewski deadpanned, "The weather is good."

Miami forged its rout — its first against a No. 1-ranked opponent — on the strength of a sticky and aggressive man-to-man defense. It must have reminded the Blue Devils of themselves at their nasty best.

"Our defense is really what keys us," said UM guard Shane Larkin.

Duke shot 29.7 percent from the field.

The Hurricanes benefited emotionally from center Reggie Johnson's earlier-than-expected return from a thumb injury, and physically from a glistening performance by Larkin (18 points, 10 rebounds) and fellow guard Durand Scott (25 points).

"We played at a very high level for 40 minutes," Larranaga said. "Duke is so good at both ends of the court it's staggering. You have to be that way."

Miami was much better than Duke in almost every phase in this engagement.

Larranaga spoke of the need to create and maintain "a buzz" regarding his team. He hoped for more "long lines" to enter the building.

Are the 'Canes for real?

It's too early to tell, but 14-3 overall is no fluke. The stunning domination of Duke proved that much, at the very least.

And the 'Canes might have realized a victory off the court that could turn out to be bigger than any singular basketball success.

The NCAA, investigating the University of Miami for a scandal involving former Hurricanes booster Nevin Shapiro, said Wednesday some members of its enforcement branch had worked with Shapiro's defense attorney to obtain information improperly.

The alleged misconduct by the NCAA, which now is reviewing itself in the matter, means the organization's delivery of a notice of allegations against the 'Canes will be delayed. What it might mean for UM in terms of punishments for its basketball and football teams — unexpected leniency? — remains to be seen. Miami President Donna Shalala released a statement saying she is "frustrated, disappointed and concerned" that the NCAA might have compromised its own investigation.

The NCAA, according to President Mark Emmert, vowed to move ahead using "appropriately acquired evidence."

The episode provided a bizarre tangent to a basketball game during which the 'Canes, for one night, anyway, demonstrated undisputed evidence of superiority to one of the sport's kingpins.

It was a fitting reward for the campers.

Miami tightens its grip on first place by pounding Duke

Yahoo Sports
Jeff Eisenberg
Jan. 23, 2013

At the 17:43 mark of the second half, with No. 25 Miami curb-stomping top-ranked Duke by an unfathomable 30 points, the man with the reputation as TV's most well-known Blue Devils apologist had seen enough.

"This is the poorest performance I have witnessed from a Duke team in all my years sitting courtside," ESPN analyst Dick Vitale said. The Blue Devils salvaged a bit of pride by the end of Miami's 90-63 victory, but it was hard to argue with Vitale's assessment.

Miami held Duke without a field goal for more than eight minutes in the latter portion of the first half, unleashing a 25-1 blitz to turn what briefly had been a back-and-forth game into a 38-15 rout. Only five times in program history had Duke ever trailed by more than 23 points at halftime, yet it somehow got even worse to start the second half as Miami scored the first seven points to extend its lead to 30.

Even though the win was Miami's first against a top-ranked opponent, the ramifications of the victory for the Hurricanes were even larger than that. They're now 5-0 in the ACC, two games clear of Duke and NC State in the loss column and three or more ahead of every other team in the league.

Wednesday's loss will send Duke tumbling out of the top spot in the polls, meaning there will be a new No. 1 on Monday for the third consecutive week. The one-sided nature of the result also suggests the Blue Devils have more issues than merely the indefinite absence of forward Ryan Kelly (foot injury).

They were helpless against the quickness of guards Shane Larkin (18 points) and Durand Scott (25 points) off ball screens. They had no answer for the inside-outside versatility of Kenny Kadji (22 points, 9 of 11 shooting). And

while they uncharacteristically missed some layups and open 3-pointers, they also missed the perimeter shooting, passing and spacing that Kelly brings.

It's hard to imagine Miami playing any better than this, yet the Hurricanes will get stronger from a personnel standpoint in the coming weeks. Center Reggie Johnson, an all-conference candidate entering the season, returned from a month-long injury absence on Wednesday night, yet looked rusty and out of shape in a brief foul-plagued appearance.

As he gets back into game shape, Miami will have another interior weapon at its disposal. That's great news for the Hurricanes and bad news for the 11 ACC schools chasing them.

Johnson returns in UM's 27-point trouncing of Duke

College Basketball Talk

Daniel Martin

Jan. 23, 2013

Miami center Reggie Johnson entered Wednesday's game against No. 1 Duke at the 14:17 mark of the first half to a crowd chanting his name.

His unexpected return to the Hurricanes' lineup after missing eight games with a broken thumb might not bring instant production from the 6-10, 292-pound senior, but if Wednesday's energy and effort were any indication, his return has this team reinvigorated and ready for a run at an ACC title.

Energy and hot shooting from No. 25 Miami sunk Duke out of the gate, with the Hurricanes ripping off a 25-1 first-half run on their way to a dominating 90-63 win over the Blue Devils at BankUnited Center in Coral Gables, Fla.

The backcourt combination of Durand Scott and Shane Larkin was too much for Duke in the first half. Scott scored 15 first-half points on 6-of-8 shooting from the floor and Larkin added nine, extending the Duke defense away from the basket with strong shooting from three-point range.

Scott finished with 25 points and Larkin had 18.

Senior Kenny Kadji did his part to pick apart Duke's defense as well, scoring 22 points on the night, including 2-of-3 from three-point range and a layup, plus the foul that extended Miami's lead to 23 points with 2:54 to play in the first.

Duke worked to get open shots in the first half, but could not convert. The Blue Devils shot just 8-of-36 (22 percent) from the field in the first half, helping to spur Miami's transition game and allowing Scott and Larkin to lead the break.

The Blue Devils were once again without Ryan Kelly, who continues to be sidelined with a lingering foot injury. A stalling offense could likely have been helped along by his

Miami came out with the same intensity in the second half and never relented. Duke cycled in players from its bench looking for an energy boost, including Alex Murphy and Marshall Plumlee.

Murphy was one of the few bright spots for Duke Wednesday night, finishing with 11 points on 5-of-8 shooting from the floor. Quinn Cook, Seth Curry, and Tyler Thornton, expected to all be major contributors, combined to shoot 1-of-29 on the night. That abysmal three percent outing was only amplified by Kelly's absence.

The win keeps Miami undefeated in the ACC and improves its conference record to 5-0. The Hurricanes now have a two-game lead on Duke and a 1.5-game lead on NC State.

Miami moves on to play Florida State and Virginia Tech, meaning they could conceivably enter its Feb. 2 matchup with NC State at 7-0.

The Duke loss is one of the worst in recent memory for a No. 1 team. In 2004, No. 1 Wake Forest lost to Illinois, 91-73. Also in 2004, No. 1 St. Joseph's lost to Xavier, 87-67.

The loss is the third-worst ever for a team ranked No. 1 in the Associated Press Top 25 poll.

'Blowout City': Miami upsets No. 1 Duke

Miami Herald
Jan. 23, 2013
Michelle Kaufman

The University of Miami defeated a No. 1 team for the first time in school history and handed Duke its worst loss in five years.

Turns out Miami is not a good winter destination for No. 1-ranked teams.

A few weeks after the Notre Dame football team got humiliated by Alabama in the BCS National Championship Game, the top-ranked Duke men's basketball team was routed 90-63 on Wednesday night by the amped-up 25th-ranked University of Miami in front of a boisterous sellout crowd and a national TV audience.

"Blowout City!" screamed ESPN commentator Dick Vitale late in the second half. "I can't ever remember them being beaten like this. It's been a humiliation."

It was the third-worst loss ever for a No. 1 ranked team, worst since 1968, UM's first win ever over a top-ranked team, and the 27-point losing margin was Duke's biggest in five years. Blue Devils stars Quinn Cook, Mason Plumlee, Seth Curry and Tyler Thornton went 6 for 44, and the team shot a season-low 30 percent.

The Hurricanes, displaying a swagger reminiscent of the UM football teams of the 1980s, shot 57 percent and made their second consecutive victory over Duke look easy.

They reeled off a 25-1 run in the first half and led by as many as 34 in the closing minutes. The Canes improved to 14-3, and remain atop the Atlantic Coast Conference with a 5-0 league record.

"We beat the No. 1 team in the nation, that's big time," said UM senior center Reggie Johnson, who was a surprise last-minute addition to the roster after sitting out since Dec. 18

with a broken left thumb. "The crowd willed us to this win. I've never seen the gym like that. Some people probably still don't believe in us, but we believe in ourselves."

Durand Scott scored a season-high 25 points. Kenny Kadji added a season-high 22 points on 9-of-11 shooting. Sophomore point guard Shane Larkin, in neon green sneakers as loud as the crowd, ran the floor like a seasoned veteran, finishing with 18 points, 10 rebounds (yes, 10), and five assists. And Durham, N.C., native Julian Gamble was relentless on defense with 10 rebounds and four blocks.

"They were men, we were boys," said Duke's legendary coach Mike Krzyzewski, whose team dropped to 16-2, 3-2 ACC. "They killed us. They've got some great old, fifth and sixth-year players, old guys who are really good and accustomed to playing together. Their one young guy, Larkin, played old and ran his team so well. We didn't have an answer the whole game. Great win for them, but we did not hold up our end of the bargain."

The UM students chanted "Over-Rated!" at the start of the game. They were chanting it even louder the final three minutes of the game, and then they stormed the floor.

There were plenty of signs before tipoff that this was going to be a special night for the Hurricanes.

UM students started camping out at 10 p.m. Tuesday, determined to get a coveted seat in the often vacuous arena. They watched movies on the BankUnited Center wall. They got doughnuts delivered by UM coach Jim Larranaga, and visits from Larkin, Gamble and Rion Brown. Other than the unexpected 5 a.m. sprinklers, the kids had a blast. And the most fun was yet to come.

"We've been trying to get students excited about our basketball team for three or four years now, so it's great to have this kind of

excitement," said senior Trevor Scales. "It feels like a real basketball school."

"It was crazy out there," Larkin said. "I walked through the student line on Larranaga Lawn after shootaround and couldn't believe how long those students were out there. I don't know how you can stand outside for that long for a basketball game. It made me want to win for them."

Larranaga said he hoped the win would help convince people that UM is not just a football school.

"One of the challenges when we got here was to create excitement to bring larger numbers to the BankUnited Center," Larranaga said. "The most important thing was getting the students involved, because they live on campus, have great access to the arena, and they create the electric environment that excites other people in the community to go. Once you get the pep band and the students, you've got the right foundation."

Madness arrives for Miami Hurricanes men

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 23, 2013

A blimp, a line of tents and lawn chairs, ticket scalpers, volcanic arena, crowd noise so loud it drowned out Dick Vitale?

What was happening in Coral Gables? What was all the commotion Wednesday night on the University of Miami campus?

It was the hubbub of history. It was the delirium of college basketball. It was a whiff of March Madness in January.

It was Miami deconstructing Duke by the preposterous score of 90-63 for a milestone first victory over a No. 1-ranked team by the UM men's program.

As time ran out, UM fans chanted "Over-rated!" and rushed from the stands to become a pulsing orange horde on the court. They lifted players onto their shoulders as the pep band blared. They were eyewitnesses to something never seen in a place long considered a college hoops wasteland.

But UM's so-far super season is changing perceptions, and the bombshell win over Duke will put the boisterous BankUnited Center on the map.

No. 25 Miami's upset of Duke was more than a surprise because it was so bracing, so thorough. The 27-point margin made it the third most lopsided win over a No. 1 team in the sport's record books and the worst since 1968. This went way beyond rout to stupefaction. The Hurricanes drained the blue blood from the tradition-rich Blue Devils.

When asked if he could take any positives from the game, Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said, "I can't think of anything. Is the weather good?"

He spared a smile then, but judging by his expression during the game, you would not want to be a Duke basketball player on Thursday or Friday. This one is going to sting. Not because Duke had an off night, which happens to the best of teams, shooting a lousy 29.7 percent, but because Duke allowed Miami to shoot 56.9 percent and get to the basket with ease.

In one devastating 20-second sequence, Kenny Kadji hit a jump shot, hassled Duke's Mason Plumlee into a turnover, which Shane Larkin converted into a steal and then followed up his missed three-pointer with a layup for a 49-19 lead.

"They killed us," Krzyzewski said. "When our three veterans shoot 6 for 37 — that's something I have never seen."

No, not even Shane Battier could have rescued Duke, even if he had left the Heat-Toronto game downtown and put on his old uniform.

"This is a big-time win, but we're still hungry," said UM center Reggie Johnson, who made a last-minute return to the roster for the first time since a Dec. 18 injury and energized his teammates. "Some people still don't believe, but we believe in ourselves."

UM took full advantage of its exposure as a newly-minted Top 25 member during its night on the national ESPN stage and proved the votes were deserved, and that more should be forthcoming.

The Canes provided a pleasant tonic after a day of frustrating news from the NCAA, which announced its probe of UM had been compromised by the inappropriate actions of one of its investigators, further delaying the two-year process that has left UM football and men's basketball playing a waiting game.

But the basketball team, in its second season under Larranaga, showed no ill effects, improving to 8-0 at home, 5-0 in the ACC and

14-3 overall.

One of those losses was to Florida Gulf Coast, but Nov. 13 seems a part of the distant past.

The victory over Duke will prompt questions that get repeated every time the Hurricanes pull off a major upset: Has the UM program arrived? Can it be a consistent occupant of the NCAA Tournament bracket? Will 8,000 fans continue to fill the arena?

For those who have followed the program since its 1985 rebirth, for the loyal founders who have attended games where they could count the number of spectators and hear the sound of sneaker squeaks echoing off empty seats, the win was a long time coming.

"To have the students camp out overnight — it's the first time we've been able to create this kind of buzz," said UM coach Jim Larranaga, referring to Larranagaville, or, since this is Miami, Ciudad Larranaga. He delivered 300 doughnuts to those waiting in line six hours before tipoff.

Perhaps Duke arrived overconfident, scoffing at the ingénue enthusiasm of UM students when Duke players are accustomed to the mayhem of their Cameron Crazies every home game.

But they were quickly humbled after a 25-1 run and trailed 42-19 at the half. Krzyzewski refused to call timeout. He showed no mercy for his confounded players. UM's defense forced 16 turnovers, made eight blocks and left Duke flailing from three-point range.

"This school isn't known as a basketball school," Larranaga said.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/01/24/3197795/linda-robertson-madness-arrives.html#storylink=cpy>

Duke Becomes First #1 in 21st Century to Lose by 20+

College Hoopedia
Jan. 23, 2013

Hall of Famer Mike Krzyzewski has defeated five #1 opponents while coaching Duke. But there is a price to pay for the Blue Devils spending more weeks ranked No. 1 during Coach K's tenure than unranked. After getting embarrassed at Miami (Fla.), Duke moved ahead of North Carolina for school with the most defeats as nation's top-ranked team (31). Kentucky is right behind the ACC rivals with 29.

An individual all-time high 27 (only eight outside ACC competition) of the 30 such setbacks have been with Krzyzewski as the Blue Devils' bench boss. Marquee mentors ranking behind him for most losses coaching the nation's top-ranked team are Dean Smith (18 with North Carolina), Roy Williams (17/11 with Kansas and six with North Carolina) and Adolph Rupp (15 with Kentucky).

Miami's demolishing of Duke marked the first time in the 21st Century that a #1 team lost by more than 20 points. The blowout was the third-widest margin of defeat for a top-ranked team since polling starting in the late 1940s. The most recent such defeat was Duke at North Carolina in 1997-98. Following are the eight times a #1 squad succumbed by more than 20 points:

- 41 - St. John's at Kentucky (81-40 in 1951-52)
- 32 - Houston at UCLA (101-69 in 1967-68)
- 27 - Duke at Miami, FL (90-63 in 2012-13)
- 24 - Kentucky at St. Louis (87-63 in 1962-63)
- 24 - Arkansas at Massachusetts (104-80 in 1994-95)
- 24 - Duke at North Carolina (97-73 in 1997-98)
- 23 - Connecticut vs. Villanova (96-73 in 1994-95)
- 22 - Kansas at Oklahoma (100-78 in 1989-90)

Duke lost as the nation's top-ranked team seven straight seasons from 1997-98 through 2003-04. Five of the Blue Devils' seven such losses from late-November 1998 to the 2002 NCAA playoffs were by margins of fewer than four points.

Surprise Final Four contenders

ESPN.com

Fran Franschilla

Jan. 22, 2013

"The Hurricanes have played without their arguably best player, Reggie Johnson, since December. Yet they have not missed a beat. Since dropping games to the Arizona Wildcats and Indiana State Sycamores at the Diamond-head Classic, Jim Larranaga's team has run off five wins in a row, including its first four in the ACC.

While Johnson is still likely a month away from returning, Miami has relied upon the perimeter play of unsung sophomore point guard Shane Larkin and enigmatic senior scoring guard Durand Scott. Kenny Kadji, at 6-10, can stretch defenses with his shooting, and 6-8 Julian Gamble is holding down the fort inside until Johnson's return. There are a host of veterans who give Larranaga solid depth.

Ultimately, the Hurricanes have a not-so-secret weapon: Larranaga's coaching. The highly respected mentor plays a grind-it-out-style on both ends of the court. In less than two short seasons, his team has bought in. Seven years ago, the coach and his George Mason Patriots shocked the college basketball world. A Hurricane appearance in this year's Final Four would be a surprise, but not a shocker."

Basketball Buzz: 1/22

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Jan. 22, 2013

The 25th-ranked Miami Hurricanes have been busy preparing for Wednesday's game against No. 1 Duke.

Miami (13-3, 4-0) comes into the game winners of five straight. Duke (16-1, 3-1) suffered its first loss at N.C. State Jan. 12.

The 7 p.m. contest will be televised live on ESPN and the game will be called by Dick Vitale.

The game is officially sold out for only the second time in the 10 years Miami has played at the BankUnited Center.

"There's a buzz, no question about it," coach Jim Larranaga said. "There's a lot of talk. People I haven't heard from in years call me and ask me for tickets. Although I was sorry to say 'no' to them, I'm very happy for the reason I'm saying no to them is that we'll have a sell-out crowd and great student participation."

It is one of the biggest games the history of the arena and Larranaga is trying to calm his players.

"My message to them is to be who we are. Not to try to be something different and to focus on preparing for the game. We know our opponent, it's another league game, they are very highly-regarded, ranked very high in the national rankings, but the game has to be played and the gameplan has to be executed on Wednesday night. That's when you have to be at your best."

News & Notes

- Miami is 1-1 against Top 25 opponents this year beating No. 13 Michigan State 67-59 on Nov. 28 and losing to No. 6 Arizona 69-50 on Dec. 23.

- The common denominator in Miami's three losses this season has been their lack of scoring. Miami has scored 55 or less four times this season including all three losses. UM averaged 52 points in the losses shooting 33.1 percent (57 of 172) from the floor. Miami has averaged 70.8 points in their 13 wins.

- PG Shane Larkin leads the ACC in minutes per game at 36.1, a steady jump from averaging 25.6 as a freshman. Even with the added minutes, Larkin remains very effective and does not feel fatigued at the end. "No, I love playing," Larkin said. "I would play 40 minutes if coach wanted me to. I love playing basketball. Our trainer does a great job of getting us massages to make sure our bodies are uptight, making sure we stay hydrated, making sure we're lifting weights, making sure we have the same schedule every week to keep our bodies in tip-top shape. I feel great playing 36 minutes or 20 minutes or 40 minutes, it doesn't really affect me." Larranaga said: "He's in great shape, he's a young kid, and I love having him out there. We try to rest him when we can, but when a guy has the role that he has on this team you need him out there a lot."

- Larkin isn't the only Hurricane logging heavy minutes as four players are averaging over 30 minutes a game. This isn't uncommon for Larranaga, who had all five starters log over 30 minutes on his 2006 George Mason Final Four team. "We believe the guys are in great shape, work very hard in practice, and they look forward to playing a lot of minutes in the game," Larranaga said.

- Through 16 games, C Reggie Johnson leads the rotation players with an 18.33 player efficiency rating while SG Rion Brown ranks last in the group with a 6.63. Brown is the only regular with a rating under 10.

- True shooting percentage has been a new statistic used to measure a player's effectiveness combining three-point shooting and

free-throw shooting. SG Trey McKinney-Jones leads the team with a true shooting percentage of .575. A true percentage of .500 is considered average, .550 is very good, and anything over .600 is considered exceptional. PF Raphael Akpejori has the lowest true shooting percentage on the team at .413.

- In a sign of veteran leadership, sixth-year senior C Julian Gamble noticed in the game against Boston College that he and Kenny Kadji were not a good fit on the court together. Gamble noticed this and told Larranaga that the team needed to go small. "He was right," Larranaga said. "That little message to me created the decision to go smaller and it paid off for us."

- Both teams will be without two of their key players as Miami will be without C Reggie Johnson (broken left finger) and Duke will be without PF Ryan Kelly (foot). UM is 6-2 without Johnson, Duke is 1-1 without Kelly. "They're different, very much like we are without Reggie Johnson," Larranaga said. "Ryan Kelly is a stretch four, very similar to a Kenny Kadji and he was an intricate part of their offense, but they have a lot of good players."

- C Reggie Johnson is no longer in a cast, but Larranaga did not give a timetable for his return. "The early diagnosis was that it would take six to eight weeks for the bone to heal and nobody has given me anything any different," Larranaga said. Johnson injured his thumb on Dec. 21. Feb. 1 would be the six-week mark.

- Former Hurricane Darius Rice, currently with the Texas Legends in the NBA Development League, is aware of Miami's big game coming up: "I see they have Duke coming up, I hope they beat them," Rice said. "I saw they beat North Carolina the other day and they're rolling. If they can put it together they might make a little run this year."

Hurricanes becoming a force in the ACC

Washington Examiner

Brian McNally

Jan. 22, 2013

Jim Larranaga left George Mason three years ago for what seemed at the time nothing more than a retirement job at Miami. But that wasn't likely for a coach who took a mid-major program to the Final Four in 2006 and burned to do so at a bigger program. Larranaga instead has helped mold the Hurricanes into a legitimate force in the ACC, with one of the program's biggest games in years coming up when they host No. 1 Duke on Wednesday night.

Despite a slew of injuries, Miami is 13-3 overall, 4-0 in the ACC - the last unbeaten team in league play - and now ranked No. 25 in the country. And its resume, which includes a win over Michigan State at home, has been put together even without star center Reggie Johnson, out until late next month with an injury. Sophomore point guard Shane Larkin has helped ease the burden on shooting guard Durand Scott, long one of the ACC's most underrated players. Without Johnson, 6-foot-11 Kenny Kadji has become a shot-blocking force in the paint (1.6 blocks per game) who can also knock down an outside jumper or two.

Basketball Success Ramps Up Excitement in Miami

TheACC.com

Bill Hass

Jan. 22, 2013

If you're looking for a ticket to Miami's home game against Duke Wednesday night, don't ask Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga.

"We're going to have a sellout crowd," he said. "I don't think there is a ticket that's going to be available. I've had to turn down friends who normally I'd be begging them to come and give us some support. But now I don't have tickets myself."

There's an oddity of circumstances for the 7 p.m. game. Duke goes into the contest ranked No. 1 in the country but the Hurricanes are No. 1 in the ACC. Miami is alone in first place with a 4-0 record (13-3 overall) while the Blue Devils are 3-1 (16-1 overall).

The Hurricanes broke into the Associated Press rankings at No. 25 this week, which adds to the excitement that has been building around the campus in Coral Gables. While Larranaga cautions that it's only the fifth of 18 ACC games, he doesn't deny the importance of this meeting.

"I don't think there is any question there's been a huge buzz and there's been (one) for a while," he said. "I really like the way it's growing, the progress it's making. Last year when my staff and I arrived, it was thought we don't draw unless you play Carolina or Duke."

"We have a lot of people talking about our basketball program right now and we're headed in the right direction."

So who are these Hurricanes who have swept their first four ACC games?

They're a team that has adjusted to playing with one of its top performers, 6-foot-10 senior Reggie Johnson. He was averaging a double-double (12.6 points, 10.1 rebounds) through seven games before being sidelined by a broken thumb. Against Duke in Cameron Indoor Stadium last season, Johnson scored 27 points and grabbed 12 rebounds in Miami's 78-74 overtime win.

Into that breach has stepped 6-10 Julian Gamble, who is averaging 8.8 points and 6.8

rebounds in four ACC games. Gamble, who redshirted as a true freshman, also missed last year with a knee injury and was granted a medical redshirt. He is now playing the best basketball of his career.

"Gamble is a sixth-year senior and is averaging close to a double-double in the last five or six games," said Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski. "I mean, he's really been a key for them. The thing they do with their big guys is they protect their basket so well, and that's why they've been a really good defensive team."

"They're an old, very good team. They're accustomed to playing together, and they've adjusted really well with a key guy out. I'm sure they'd like to have (Johnson) back, but they're playing pretty well without him."

The Hurricanes start three other seniors – 6-5 Trey McKinney-Jones (9.5 points), 6-11 Kenny Kadji (12.5 points, 7.3 rebounds) and 6-5 Durand Scott (13.5 points). Rounding out the lineup is sophomore point guard Shane Larkin (12.2 points, 3.9 assists).

"I think players love the excitement," Larranaga said. "There is talk that we'll have students camping out (Tuesday) night so that they can get the best seats in the house come Wednesday."

Arriving at this point has been a long process for Miami. Although it boasted the top scorer in the nation in Rick Barry during the 1960s, attendance was so sparse that the program was shut down for 15 years before being revived in 1985.

Eventually it became a very good program in the Big East and a new arena, now called the BankUnited Center, opened in 2004. But the Hurricanes managed only occasional success when they joined the ACC a year later. The school lists the capacity as 7,200 and sellouts have been rare. Duke drew the top crowd of 7,972 two years ago, and that record may be surpassed Wednesday.

When the basketball job came open before the 2011-12 season, it intrigued Larranaga. As an assistant at Virginia in the 1980s, he experienced two Final Fours. He built a successful program at George Mason, taking it to a Final

Four. He knew what he was getting into when he accepted job at Miami, which competes for attention with the NBA's Miami Heat and LeBron James.

"It's very, very challenging," Larranaga said. "We had the same situation at George Mason. We were in a large, metropolitan area where the competition for the entertainment dollar was keen. Everybody said we couldn't draw and we couldn't build a great basketball program because, basically, Maryland and Georgetown dominated the DC area. And the pro fans followed the (NBA) Wizards and the (NHL) Caps. But we didn't listen to the naysayers."

"We just did what we planned on doing here in Miami, and that is build a grassroots network of people who support our program. Build a foundation and a winning attitude, and getting kids who make a commitment and want to play at the highest level of college basketball."

While the atmosphere might still be new for the Hurricanes, the Blue Devils are no strangers to walking into a frenzied environment, even though they are also without an injured key player in 6-11 Ryan Kelly.

"The people (in Miami) should be excited about their team," Krzyzewski said. "They're 4-0 and in the top 10 RPI. Every game that we play in, there's a good atmosphere. Wednesday will be no different than any other game we play except that we're playing an outstanding team."

Win or lose, the process of building the Hurricanes' program will continue. They want to get to the point where every game is treated as special, not just one or two per season. And Larranaga would like nothing better than to run out of tickets for every home game.

Scott Expects Exciting Atmosphere

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Jan. 22, 2013

With Reggie Johnson expected to be out for his ninth straight game with a broken thumb, Durand Scott will be counted on for his scoring.

Scott, who leads the Hurricanes averaging 13.8 points a game, has had a pair of big games against Duke in his career when he was a freshman.

Scott had games of 19 and 21 points in losses to Duke his first year. Since then, he's been held to 10, 10, and 11, as he's 1-4 against the Blue Devils in his career.

In last year's win at Duke, Johnson scored a career-high 27 points.

"I remember Reggie doing real well and I'd like to see him on the court," Scott said. "But unfortunately that won't be happening."

No. 25 Miami (13-3, 4-0) will host No. 1 Duke (16-1, 3-1) tonight at 7 p.m. which will be televised on ESPN.

"It's a very big game," Scott said.

The game has been deemed a sell-out, the second in the 10 years Miami has played at the BankUnited Center.

"I think it's going to be an exciting atmosphere," Scott said. "We just have to keep our composure and keep playing, stay to the task, and finish the job."

While Johnson, who is averaging 12.6 points, is considered out according to coach Jim Larranaga, Scott believes Johnson is close to returning.

"I think he's really close," Scott said. "I wouldn't know personally because I haven't

been speaking to the trainers, but I noticed he's come out of the cast and is in a little splint. He's been shooting, dribbling, doing a couple drills with us. He's really making progress and from the look of it, he's really close."

Julian Gamble has filled in admirably for Johnson averaging 8.9 points and 7.5 rebounds in his last eight games.

"He's playing real well right now," Scott said. "He's been rebounding the ball real well, scoring the ball real well, disrupting shots real well. As we all know he's a superb leader and he's continuing with that in being vocal. We definitely need him right now."

The Hurricanes are coming off a 60-59 win at Boston College as Olivier Hanlan missed a free throw in the final second to give UM the win. Hanlan was fouled on a 3-point attempt by Scott and knocked down the first two free throws before missing the third.

"I fouled him, that was pretty much it," Scott said. "It wasn't something we planned on doing. I was the last person (out of the huddle) to say, 'don't foul' and he got fouled."

It was the fifth straight win for Miami after losing back-to-back games in Hawaii.

"It was a learning experience," Scott said. "To be able to learn from a win is great. A loss is definitely hard and we're very, very grateful for that."

Ex Ibis: Miami-Duke is biggest Canes game of all time

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Jan. 22, 2013

CORAL GABLES — John Routh knows his University of Miami history.

Not only was he Sebastian the Ibis in its glory years (1984-92), Routh also runs the UM sports hall of fame. So he's qualified to speak on Wednesday's 7 p.m. game with Duke and where it fits into the Hurricane legacy.

The chance to beat a No. 1 team for the first time in school history makes it special.

"So to me, it's probably the biggest game this school's ever played as far as a regular-season game," Routh said Tuesday morning. "Certainly, we made it to the Sweet 16 before. ... If we pull off this victory, it will certainly be the biggest win in the school's history."

The mania is reaching levels typically associated with another sport on campus.

"I've gotten more calls from people asking for tickets to this game than I've gotten for even some of the football games," Routh said. "It's definitely creating a big buzz in town. South Florida is known as an event town and this is a big event."

Fewer than 70 tickets were available as of Tuesday morning.

The game will compete with a Heat game taking place just a few miles down the road. LeBron James and Co., tip off with the Raptors 30 minutes after Miami-Duke begins.

Durham's Gamble to star for Miami against No. 1 Duke

Miami Herald
Michele Kaufman
Jan. 22, 2013

University of Miami center Julian Gamble grew up in Durham, N.C., and starred at Durham Southern High School, just minutes away from the Duke University campus. Nobody needs to tell him about the magnitude of Wednesday night's nationally televised home game between the 25th-ranked Hurricanes and the top-ranked Blue Devils.

This game is so big that UM students are planning to camp out for tickets on the grass alongside BankUnited Center, affectionately being dubbed "Larranaga Lawn." It isn't quite Krzyzewskiville, the area outside Cameron Indoor Arena on the Duke campus, where students set up tents before big games and coach Mike Krzyzewski has been known to have pizza delivered. But by UM standards, this pregame hype is as big as it gets.

You can count the number of UM basketball sellouts on one hand, and this one will join the short list as a capacity crowd of 7,972 is expected. ESPN's ever-excitable Dick Vitale should have plenty to shout about.

The last time the teams met, Feb. 5, 2012 in Durham, UM pulled off a 78-74 upset in overtime. Hurricanes center Reggie Johnson scored 27 points in that game. He will be in street clothes this time, recovering from a broken thumb. Starting in his place is Gamble, a 23-year-old, sixth-year senior who grew up a North Carolina Tar Heels fan, despite his Durham address. He has stepped up big in Johnson's absence.

Not only has Gamble's scoring doubled from 4.3 points per game to 8.9, but his touch and tenacity around the rim also are key reasons the Canes are 13-3 and sit alone atop the Atlantic Coast Conference with a 4-0 record. Gamble faces a huge test against Duke (16-1, 3-1 ACC) and its All-American forward Mason

Plumlee, who averages 17.4 points and 11.5 rebounds per game.

ESPN commentators joked that in the win against North Carolina, Gamble backed into the paint like an older guy backing down a young guy in a YMCA league. Miami coach Jim Larranaga said that is exactly how he wants Gamble to play.

"When they say old man, they should really describe it as fundamental basketball in the low post," Larranaga said. "Because a low-post player's job is to attack the rim and get inside buckets for you, and he does it with his left-hand jump hook, his offensive rebounding and running the floor. Those are three fundamental things we ask him to do, and he is doing them very, very well."

Gamble is extra motivated against teams from North Carolina because they didn't recruit him heavily out of high school. Though he averaged 18 points, 10 rebounds and five blocks as a senior at Durham Southern, he flew under the radar until a phenomenal showing at the AAU Breakdown Hoops Festival in Miami in the summer of 2006.

Then-UM coach Frank Haith immediately took notice, as did coaches from Tennessee, Kentucky, St. John's and Georgetown. Gamble fell in love with Miami at first sight and never visited another school.

"That was kind of my coming-out party," Gamble said. "I didn't have anything to lose, so I was really aggressive and had a great week. I really liked Coach Haith and the laid-back family atmosphere on the team, so that sealed the deal for me."

It also helped that Anthony King, another Durham Southern grad, was on the UM team at the time. But Gamble's college career hasn't gone as he anticipated. He sat out his freshman year, averaged 7.5 minutes and 2.4 points as a redshirt freshman, 13.3 minutes and 3.5

points as a sophomore, and 15.2 minutes and four points as a junior. He tore his ACL in the summer of 2011, and sat out the 2011-12 season. He was granted a clock extension by the NCAA, allowing him to play a sixth season.

In the meantime, he earned a degree in sports administration with a minor in business administration. Larranaga calls Gamble "one of our smartest players on the court, almost like another coach."

Midway through the second half of last week's game against Boston College, Gamble approached Larranaga with a suggestion. "We're behind, and Julian comes over and says, 'We need to go small,'" Larranaga said. "'Kenny [Kadji] and I don't match up well with those three-point shooters.' He was right."

Watching Wednesday's game from back home will be his proud mother, Sarah, a 6-1 executive assistant at a pharmaceutical company who played some basketball in her younger years. Gamble calls her "my rock," and honored her with his first tattoo in 2007. Since then, much of his upper body has been covered in tattoos. He got his latest on the eve of this season. It is the word "Perseverance" on his left leg, which has withstood three surgeries.

On his wrist, he often wears a watch that belonged to his late father, Julius, who died of liver failure in his early 50s on Sept. 10, 2009. The alarm on the watch is set to 2:25 p.m., and when it buzzes every day, he thinks of his father. The Gambles separated when Julian was 7, but they remained close.

"His father's passing was very hard for Julian, but his faith and his teammates kept him going," Sarah Gamble said. "Coach Larranaga has been amazing, too, keeping Julian's confidence up even when he wasn't playing. It's so exciting to see his perseverance pay off."

Miami sells out Duke game

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Jan. 22, 2013

CORAL GABLES — It doesn't happen often, but Miami won't play in front of any unsold seats Wednesday night.

The school declared success in OperationSell-out on Tuesday afternoon when the final few tickets were sold for the 7 p.m. visit from No. 1 Duke.

They'd used various social media tools and OperationSellout.com to promote ticket sales for the rare home date with a top-ranked team.

It's a different story for students. The school said they're encouraged to line up starting at 10 a.m. outside the BankUnited Center. Only the first 1,300 students will gain admission to the game.

The arena normally seats 7,200 officially, but the game could threaten the attendance record of 7,972 set two years ago when Duke came to town.

No. 25 Miami is 0-5 against top-ranked teams in program history. It last hosted a No. 1 team in 1999 when UConn escaped with a 70-68 win.

Are you heading to the game? What are Miami's chances to take out Duke?

UM Prepares for Huge Duke Game

CaneSport.com
Matt Shodell
Jan. 22, 2013

The Hurricanes' biggest test of the young ACC season comes Wednesday, when No. 1-ranked Duke comes to the BankUnited Center.

Coach Jim Larranaga and his players know just what they are up against in a 15-1 Blue Devils team averaging 78.7 points per game compared to opponents' 61.5 - Duke is ranked No. 1 in the nation.

"We have to be who we are, not someone different," Larranaga said when asked about his team's preparations for the game. "We know our opponent - it's another league game. They are ranked very high in the national rankings, but the game has to be played and the game plan has to be executed on Wednesday night. That's when you have to be at your best."

Duke's lone loss was to NC State Jan. 12, 84-76.

"Our team being close to being ranked (we) need state-ment win," center Julian Gamble said. "We need to be precise in our execution and that will help us play a good game."

Guard Shane Larkin says "It's a huge game, but we're trying to take the approach it's just another game. You always know when you play Duke - when you get the schedule you circle that game because they're always one of the best teams in the country."

Last year UM beat Duke on the road.

"It's a new season, they've changed their team around a lot," Larkin said. "Last year they were one-on-one oriented. This year they're just playing a more tradi-tional Duke style where everyone touches the ball, any-one can get you any night. Five players are capable of big numbers. Hopefully we can have the same results as last year."

The Blue Devils are led by four players averaging in double figures - Mason Plumlee (17.4 ppg, 11.5 re-bounds), Seth Curry (16.9 ppg, 45.7 percent three-point shooter), Quinn Cook (11.5 ppg, 6.1 assists) and Rasheed Sulaimon (11.0 ppg). Duke will be without Ryan Kelly - he was averaging 13.4 points and hitting 52.1 percent of his threes.

Larranaga said Duke is a different team with Kelly out.

"He's a big guy that can shoot the three, was an inte-gral part of their offense," Larranaga said, "but they have a lot of good players."

Gamble added "They have so many weapons - we have to guard them on so many fronts."

Gamble will be matched up with Plumlee.

"He's having a career season," Gamble said. "He's a great offensive rebounder, is doing a lot of damage around the basket. It'll be a challenge for me, but some-thing I accept."

The Hurricanes, ranked No. 25 in the latest AP poll, talked more about the big challenge:

"I know when I came here I said I wanted to beat Duke, North Carolina - I've already done that (vs. UNC)," Lar-kin said. "I've never beat a No. 1 team. It's a great op-portunity for our team, our program to put our name on a bigger stage. ... it's a huge buzz going around campus. It's more excitement than I've ever seen down here."

Guard Durand Scott says it's "a very big game, very important. I think we're going to do well. ... I think we're going to be successful come Wednesday. We've put in a lot of work."

Miami is 0-6 all-time against top-ranked teams and the last time it beat a No. 2 team was 1999 against Con-necticut.

"As far as our history (a win) would mean a lot for our history," Gamble said. "It's our chance to do something memorable, really make a statement moving forward."

UM is currently in first place in the ACC, having won all its conference games.

"If we continue winning, the rankings will come," Gam-ble said. "But the most important numbers to me and our team is wins."

* The team's attitude entering Wednesday is to treat is as just another game.

"We have to prepare for each of these games equally so we can go out and prepare to the best of our abili-ties," Gamble said.

* The team expects a loud and boisterous crowd.

"I know they'll bring that energy and excitement with a team like Duke coming in to play us," Gamble said. "We have to play our game, to the best of our abilities and we'll be happy with the results."

"We expect 2,000 or more students to come out to the game, and I know people will get turned away."

Gamble said students may even camp out overnight in order to get into the game - students will be lining up behind the fieldhouse on what reporters are dubbing "Larranaga Lawn."

"Come Wednesday night we hope they're not too tired from camping out (to be loud)," Gamble said, adding that "Dick Vitale calling the game in Coral Gables, that's the first time I've seen that."

Scott adds that "The game is pretty much sold out, so

it's going to be an exciting atmosphere."

Asked about the excitement around the game, Larrana-ga joked, "I'm just happy our students know there's a game on Wednesday and are coming."

He added "There's a lot of buzz, a lot of talk. We'll have a sell-out crowd and great student participation."

* Miami has a week between games entering Wednes-day. Scott said he's not sure if that's a positive or negative.

"I feel (Larranaga) is going to prepare us for this game Wednesday, put us in the best possible position (to win)," Scott said.

* Asked about the perception that the Canes are being slighted in the national rankings -UM is No. 25 after be-ing unranked all season - Larkin said, "It kind of bugs you - you see teams ranked, think you put in more work than they have with RPI, strength of schedule, but you can't let that affect you."

Larranaga, asked about the rankings, said, "There's a perception of who is good. There are projections of who is going to make the Final Four in September. Once those positions are solidified and you're in the Top 25 you have to play your way out whereas a team not in it has to play their way in. And you have to beat a lot of teams. And the teams that are in it have to lose a lot of games. That's the system."

"To us it's not important or relevant as to what sort of team you have. What is relevant is the RPI. And the RPI isn't relevant until you've played at least 10 games."

* Starting center Reggie Johnson's return also may not be far off. He's coming off a broken thumb.

"I think he's really close - he's come out of the cast, is in a little splint," Scott said. "He's shooting the bas-ketball, dribbling. He's been making progress. From the looks of it he's pretty close. ... He's not full practicing, does a few drills."

Asked about Johnson's status, Larranaga said there's no determination on exactly when he might return.

"The early diagnosis was it takes 6-8 weeks for a bone to heal and we've heard nothing different," Larranaga said.

* A veteran team, Scott said a key for UM will be "We have to play smart, play together. Because we're a vet-eran team we have to use that to our advantage. We have to seek all their weaknesses and take advantage of it. They're going to come out, play hard. We have to play smart and hard at the same time."

Rice Still Fighting to Reach NBA

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Jan. 20, 2013

Darius Rice was considered a sure-fire NBA player back in 2000 as a senior at Lanier (Miss.) High School as he poured in a team-high 24 points for the East Squad in the McDonald's All-America game.

But the 6-foot-10 long-range shooter passed on entering the NBA Draft straight out of high school like fellow McDonald's All-Americans Darius Miles and DeShawn Stevenson.

Instead, Rice honored his letter of intent and attended the University of Miami despite Leonard Hamilton departing for the NBA's Washington Wizards.

Rice, the nephew of NFL great Jerry Rice who picked Miami over Kentucky, made an immediate impact as a freshman for the Hurricanes leading the team in scoring, something he did all four years at Miami.

Despite his success in college, Rice's draft stock fell during his time in Coral Gables. He went undrafted in 2004 and was one of the last cuts during preseason camp with the Cleveland Cavaliers. Rice also had summer league or preseason stints with the Heat, Blazers, Mavericks, Nets and Spurs since his days at UM, but is still looking for his first taste of playing in a regular season game.

"It's been a struggle for me," Rice said. "Coming highly recruited out of high school and pretty much being the man to being undrafted, it was really tough on me because I feel I did some things a lot better than some players in the NBA and some players in the NBA at my position. But I never gave up. I kept fighting. I got it from my uncle (Jerry Rice), work hard and keep fighting and I never stop. Every year I go somewhere and I play. I get MVP. I've won championships around the world. I won a D-League championship, and I'm a proven winner. I just have that drive and hunger to make it with a chip on my shoulder because I feel I should be there. As long as I keep that drive and that hunger, I'm going to keep fighting."

Rice has toured the globe in the past nine years playing in Italy, China, Uruguay, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, United Arab Emirates, Hungary, and Bahrain.

"They all have their perks," he said. "I like Puerto Rico because it is kind of like playing in the States. I like playing in the Philippines because the fan base is awesome; there are 20,000 fans every night and I was the leading scorer of the league there. I like Italy because of the competition. I liked the Middle East because the culture is very misleading with what you see on TV; they love basketball there, the city is not as bad. I played in Dubai and you don't see all the fighting that you see on TV and they really love basketball. Every place I've played really has their ups and downs. China was really nice and a lot of NBA players are going to China right now."

Rice is currently playing for the Texas Legends averaging 14.9 points a game in his third stint in the NBA Development League. He scored a league-high 39 points on Saturday in a loss to Sioux Falls as he connected on nine 3-pointers and grabbed a team-high 11 rebounds. Rice scored 26 in the second half including 18 in the final seven minutes.

Darius Rice scored 1,865 points at Miami (2000-04). (Photo courtesy: UM sports media relations)

"It was a good game, but unfortunately we didn't win," Rice said. "Overall I think I played pretty solid. I'm just trying to get a chance to get called up and show my shooting ability and do some things for someone who needs a four man who can stretch the floor."

It's not the first time Rice has had a big game in the D-League. As a member of the Dakota Wizards in 2007, Rice scored a record 52 points (on 18 of 29 shooting) in the championship game leading his team to a title. He knocked down 11 3-point-

ers that day including one with 4.5 seconds left in regulation to send the game into overtime. To add to his impressive performance, he did it coming off the bench.

"I still watch that DVD every now and then," Rice said. "I can still see the whole game playing in my head. It was one of my most memorable moments. I scored 69 points overseas in one game, but to win the D-League championship everyone got to see it at home and watch it. I hit the game-tying 3 at the buzzer, then hit eight points in overtime to seal it, and breaking the record for most 3s in a game, there was just so much that goes into that game—coming off the bench."

Yes, Rice said sixty-nine points. He dropped the improbable total in a game while playing in Dubai. He only hit five 3s that game, but made 24 free throws.

"It was a crazy game," Rice said. "I was just throwing stuff up and it was going in."

Rice is a natural scorer who can get very hot at any time and at any place. Take his experience in China back in 2005. Rice signed with a team in Qingdao for \$20,000 a month, for two months. He exploded for 58 points in his team debut and followed with a 52-point performance. His two-game eruption led to a tryout with the Dallas Mavericks. Only problem was that his Qingdao squad wasn't going to let him leave. His passport and cash in a safe deposit box were held from him. An agreement was struck to exchange the cash for his passport, but Rice kept both and was on the run calling it the "scariest experience I ever had." He eventually caught a flight out of Hong Kong back to the States.

"They wouldn't let me out," Rice recalled. "They broke in, kidnapped me, and stole my passport. Eventually I got back in China the next season and it was really nice. I just had that one unfortunate incident, but I got past it."

Rice, who turned 30 in October, has put overseas ball behind him returning to the States with the hope that it will be easier for NBA scouts to evaluate his abilities as he believes he can be an asset.

Darius Rice hit 9 3-pointers in his 39-point effort Saturday for the Legends (Photo courtesy: Sergio Hentschel)

"Hopefully someone in the NBA needs a veteran who's played the game, who knows the game, and I can help their team out," Rice said.

Last summer, Rice worked out with Dallas and San Antonio. Although he did not make the team, he received positive feedback.

"They said I'm an NBA player and I have a good chance of making it so that's one reason why I came back and tried the D-League," Rice said. "I came back and tried to show I can perform against this competition. I'm leading the team in rebounding and now that Chris Douglas-Roberts just got called up, scoring-wise too. I'm just hoping I can provide something to some team in the league."

It has been a vigorous road for Rice. Mentally it hasn't been easy wondering why he hasn't "made it" or thinking about how life could have been changed if he had made a different decision. Still, he's accomplished a lot since lighting up the scoreboards in Western Mississippi. He's been on all-league teams, collected MVPs, and won championships.

His story is the epitome of determination filled with "what ifs". What if he would have passed on attending college, what if he left college early? Where would he be today? Rice insists that he has accepted his life's path and doesn't dwell much on the past.

"Right now in my mind I've pretty much accepted it," Rice said. "Back in the day when I was 23, 24, 25 just coming out of college, I really had a chip on my shoulder because it was, 'well you should never have went to college, you should have skipped it, and you should have done this.' I heard all of that

talk. Once I blocked all of that out and played overseas I've gotten to appreciate different cultures and different lifestyles. Basketball is pretty much the same all over the world and I've played it everywhere. If you love the game you'll love to play it wherever you play it. My ultimate goal is to be in the NBA and that's why I came back. It was tough in the beginning, but I've accepted it and started playing better, taking care of myself better, and hopefully I'll get in there."

And if he were to get that call from an NBA organization?

"I don't know, I'd be too emotional," he said. "Because if you know me and you know all of the hard work, all of the things they've said about me, and all of things I've been through, I'm too small to do this, too slow to play this position, not strong enough, blah, blah, blah. If you look at the game now how it has changed, it fits my style perfectly. You look at the Kevin Durants and all of the long, lengthy skill players that aren't so big. I think back then I wasn't that big and was scrutinized for it because I was an outside shooter. Now you see that normally in the NBA. I think it would be a big weight off of my shoulders just to make it and whoever takes that chance on me, they are going to get a great player who works hard, who has been through the highs and lows of the game, and who has a serious chip on his shoulder. I would take full advantage of the opportunity."

Regardless if the NBA comes calling, Rice is thankful for the opportunities he has had overseas and enjoyed a successful career at Miami as he finished as the school's fourth all-time scorer with 1,865 points. He earned all-Big East honors three times while helping the Hurricanes to an NCAA tournament.

He also had one of the greatest single-game performances in UM history when he scored 43 points including a buzzer-beating 3 in an upset over No. 3 Connecticut. Sunday marked the ten-year anniversary of the game and he still remembers it like it was yesterday.

"I can still remember that full game, every shot, every moment of everything in that game," Rice said. "Games like that you don't forget. It was on ESPN, they were nationally ranked in the top three, and it was the second game in the home arena."

Rice was in Miami this past summer, but has not been to the campus since he graduated. He remains in touch with a number of former teammates including Robert Hite, Guillermo Diaz, Anthony Harris, Will Frisby, and Eric Wilkins.

He's hoping that one day Miami decides to retire his No. 21 jersey joining five others in the rafters.

"I hope so," he said. "I think I did what I had to do at the school. I'm saying this now, but I don't think I had the coach (Perry Clark) that marketed me and pushed me the way he should have, but things happen."

Despite playing for a coach that Rice does not speak highly of and the way his basketball career has turned out, looking back at his time in Miami, Rice does not have any regrets.

"If I could do it over again I think I made the right decision," Rice said. "I committed to Kentucky, a winning program, but I signed with Leonard Hamilton and Miami so I had a vision of starting my own name and I wanted to build something instead of being a part of something that was already established. I think I did what I had to do there. My second year with John Salmons and James Jones we started off 14-0 and were the last undefeated team left and we could have done a lot better—we got upset in the tournament, but if I could do it over again I wouldn't change a thing."

Plumlee a Challenge for Gamble

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Jan. 22, 2013

Julian Gamble prides himself on being effective on the defensive end of the court.

He'll have his biggest task of the season on Wednesday when he goes up against All-America candidate Mason Plumlee, who leads No. 1 Duke in scoring and rebounding.

"He's having a career season," Gamble said. "He's averaging 18 points (17.4) and about 12 rebounds (11.5). He's great running in transition, a great offensive rebounder, and just does a lot of damage around the basket. He's an improve free-throw shooter as well. He'll definitely be a challenge for me, but something that I accept."

Gamble is 0-4 against Duke in his career averaging 4.8 points and 2.0 rebounds against the Blue Devils. Plumlee has played in all four of those games, primarily as a reserve, averaging 6.5 points and 4.8 rebounds.

But Plumlee is a different player this year. The former McDonald's All-American is posting career-highs in points, rebounds, assists, blocks, steals, and free-throw percent.

To Gamble's credit; he too is a different player. The sixth-year senior is also establishing career-highs across the board and since being inserted into the starting lineup for Reggie Johnson, Gamble is averaging 8.9 points and 7.5 rebounds in eight games shooting 55 percent from the floor.

Gamble will look to continue his productivity on the offensive end against the Blue Devils, but his work against Plumlee will be his most important responsibility.

"On the defensive end I really pride myself on being a stopper of their best post presence and who produces the most in the post

for them," Gamble said. "I really take that job personally and it's something I enjoy doing to contribute and help my team win the game."

Miami is 6-2 since Gamble has been in the starting lineup while Johnson remains sidelined with a broken left thumb.

Mason Plumlee at UM's practice facility when he was a McDonald's All-American.

"(Julian) is always an energy guy, relentless on the court, always on the boards, always trying to get everybody hyped, he's just a great player," point guard Shane Larkin said. "He may not be the most skilled or be on the scouting report that they go to in the post scoring all of these buckets, but he's always clutch. He's always getting big rebounds, a big stop. He's one of those guys that regardless of what time it is in the game you know he's going to step up and meet the challenge with whoever is coming at him. He's a great player to have and I'm glad he's on my team."

Miami (13-3, 4-0) entered the AP Top 25 this week for the first time in three years and will look to beat Duke (16-1, 3-1) for the second straight season. Miami is 0-5 against No. 1 teams.

"(A win) would mean a lot for our history, for our program, our student body and especially for the nation with us being one of those teams that needs a statement win," Gamble said. "Despite all of that it's just a great opportunity for us to do something that is memorable and do something where we can really make a statement moving forward."

Miami is 2-11 against Duke since joining the ACC with wins over the Blue Devils in 2008 and 2012.

In addition to Plumlee, three other players—Seth Curry (16.9), Quinn Cook (11.5), and Rasheed Sulaimon (11.0) average in double fig-

ures for the Blue Devils.

"They have so many weapons so we really have to be able to guard them on many fronts," Gamble said.

Ryan Kelly is averaging 13.4 a game, but is out with a foot injury. Kelly has been replaced in the starting lineup by Josh Hairston, a role player who is averaging 1.9 points and 2.2 rebounds.

"They're different just not having that stretch four man who can really shoot the three, but at the same time it doesn't make them any less of a team because they're stepping in another McDonald's All-American (type of player) in his place and keep it moving," Gamble said.

The Hurricanes know Wednesday's tilt is a big game, but they are trying to keep the game in perspective.

"People talk to us about it and we just try not to get overly excited about it because while this is a huge game and a huge opportunity for us, it's just another game on our schedule," Gamble said. "We have 13 others after this to play in the ACC conference season as well as the tournament and hopefully the NCAA tournament after that. So although this is a big game for us we plan on doing much bigger things in the future."

Basketball Buzz: 1/22

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Jan. 22, 2013

The 25th-ranked Miami Hurricanes have been busy preparing for Wednesday's game against No. 1 Duke.

Miami (13-3, 4-0) comes into the game winners of five straight. Duke (16-1, 3-1) suffered its first loss at N.C. State Jan. 12.

The 7 p.m. contest will be televised live on ESPN and the game will be called by Dick Vitale.

The game is officially sold out for only the second time in the 10 years Miami has played at the BankUnited Center.

"There's a buzz, no question about it," coach Jim Larranaga said. "There's a lot of talk. People I haven't heard from in years call me and ask me for tickets. Although I was sorry to say 'no' to them, I'm very happy for the reason I'm saying no to them is that we'll have a sell-out crowd and great student participation."

It is one of the biggest games the history of the arena and Larranaga is trying to calm his players.

"My message to them is to be who we are. Not to try to be something different and to focus on preparing for the game. We know our opponent, it's another league game, they are very highly-regarded, ranked very high in the national rankings, but the game has to be played and the gameplan has to be executed on Wednesday night. That's when you have to be at your best."

News & Notes

- Miami is 1-1 against Top 25 opponents this year beating No. 13 Michigan State 67-59 on Nov. 28 and losing to No. 6 Arizona 69-50 on Dec. 23.

Shane Larkin leads the ACC in minutes per game at 36.1.

- The common denominator in Miami's three losses this season has been their lack of scoring. Miami has scored 55 or less four times this season including all three losses. UM averaged 52 points in the losses shooting 33.1 percent (57 of 172) from the floor. Miami has averaged 70.8 points in their 13 wins.

- PG Shane Larkin leads the ACC in minutes per game at 36.1, a steady jump from averaging 25.6 as a freshman. Even with the added minutes, Larkin remains very effective and does not feel fatigued at the end. "No, I love playing," Larkin said. "I would play 40 minutes if coach wanted me to. I love playing basketball. Our trainer does a great job of getting us massages to make sure our bodies are uptight, making sure we stay hydrated, making sure we're lifting weights, making sure we have the same schedule every week to keep our bodies in tip-top shape. I feel great playing 36 minutes or 20 minutes or 40 minutes, it doesn't really affect me." Larranaga said: "He's in great shape, he's a young kid, and I love having him out there. We try to rest him when we can, but when a guy has the role that he has on this team you need him out there a lot."

- Larkin isn't the only Hurricane logging heavy minutes as four players are averaging over 30 minutes a game. This isn't uncommon for Larranaga, who had all five starters log over 30 minutes on his 2006 George Mason Final Four team. "We believe the guys are in great shape, work very hard in practice, and they look forward to playing a lot of minutes in the game," Larranaga said.

- Through 16 games, C Reggie Johnson leads the rotation players with an 18.33 player efficiency rating while SG Rion Brown ranks last in the group with a 6.63. Brown is the only regular with a rating under 10.

- True shooting percentage has been a new statistic used to measure a player's effectiveness combining three-point shooting and free-throw shooting. SG Trey McKinney-Jones leads the team with a true shooting percentage of .575. A true percentage of .500 is considered average, .550 is very good, and anything over .600 is considered exceptional. PF

Raphael Akpejori has the lowest true shooting percentage on the team at .413.

- In a sign of veteran leadership, sixth-year senior C Julian Gamble noticed in the game against Boston College that he and Kenny Kadji were not a good fit on the court together. Gamble noticed this and told Larranaga that the team needed to go small. "He was right," Larranaga said. "That little message to me created the decision to go smaller and it paid off for us."

- Both teams will be without two of their key players as Miami will be without C Reggie Johnson (broken left finger) and Duke will be without PF Ryan Kelly (foot). UM is 6-2 without Johnson, Duke is 1-1 without Kelly. "They're different, very much like we are without Reggie Johnson," Larranaga said. "Ryan Kelly is a stretch four, very similar to a Kenny Kadji and he was an intricate part of their offense, but they have a lot of good players."

- C Reggie Johnson is no longer in a cast, but Larranaga did not give a timetable for his return. "The early diagnosis was that it would take six to eight weeks for the bone to heal and nobody has given me anything any different," Larranaga said. Johnson injured his thumb on Dec. 21. Feb. 1 would be the six-week mark.

- Former Hurricane Darius Rice, currently with the Texas Legends in the NBA Development League, is aware of Miami's big game coming up: "I see they have Duke coming up, I hope they beat them," Rice said. "I saw they beat North Carolina the other day and they're rolling. If they can put it together they might make a little run this year."

PG Larkin Ready to Face No. 1 Duke

Inside The U
Christopher Stock
Jan. 21, 2013

When Shane Larkin came to Miami one of his goals was to beat Duke and North Carolina.

Midway through his sophomore year, he's already accomplished that feat as Larkin is 1-0 against Duke and 1-2 against the Tar Heels.

Now, he'll look to accomplish another feat.

Larkin is looking to help lead No. 25 Miami (13-3, 4-0) to their first ever victory over a No. 1 team on Wednesday as the top-ranked Blue Devils (16-1, 3-1) come to Coral Gables.

"That would definitely be a great task," Larkin said. "I know when I came here I said I wanted to be Duke and North Carolina and I've done that already but I've never beaten a No. 1 team or played against a No. 1 team. Definitely with them coming here at home with the way we're playing right now, it's a great opportunity for our team, a great opportunity for our program to actually put our name on the bigger stage."

Wednesday's meeting is the first of two against Duke this season. Miami will travel to Durham on March 2.

"You always know when you play Duke," Larkin said. "When you get the schedule you circle that game because you know they're one of the best teams in the country and you always want to beat them."

The Hurricanes sit alone at the top of the ACC standings and will look to beat a No. 1 team for the first time in six tries.

"It's definitely a huge game," Larkin said. "But we're trying to take the approach that it's just another game, another team coming in here trying to beat us on our home court. We're preparing the same way."

After losing back-to-back games in Hawaii in late December, the Hurricanes have won five straight.

Larkin is fourth on the team in scoring averaging 12.2 points a game and leads the team in assists at 3.9 a game.

"I've definitely become a better player since I got down here," Larkin said. "I have to give all that to the coaches. They saw what I needed to work with my game and working on that over the summer, spring, summer, and this year I've definitely become a better player each and every day."

He's been a much-improved shooter from a year ago with a true shooting percentage of .560, which is considered very good on the scale as .500 is considered average and .600 is exceptional. In comparison, last year Larkin's true shooting percentage was .509.

"Just watching a lot of film, shot selection," said Larkin on areas where he's improved his game. "Last year I didn't have great shot selection and I shot (36) percent from the field and this year I'm up in the 40s so definitely shot selection, getting to the lane and using a floater and pull-up jump shot instead of going in there against the trees and trying to make a crazy layup, and shooting better 3s, and knowing what you need to do when you need to has definitely made me a better player this year."

There's been plenty of buzz around campus leading up to the big game, which is expected to be a sell-out.

"There's definitely a huge buzz on campus knowing that Duke is coming in here, we're on top of the ACC right now," Larkin said. "Walking through campus everybody is coming up to you saying 'good luck' and on Twitter. There's definitely a huge buzz going around campus

with the game coming up. It's a good feeling knowing that everybody is getting more interested in basketball down here."

Miami beat Duke 78-74 last February in the only meeting between the two schools and Larkin is hoping for similar results although he sees a difference in this year's Duke squad.

"It's a new season and a new year," Larkin said. "They've definitely changed their team around a lot. Last year they were pretty much one-on-one with Austin being there, they had to get him the ball, he was one of the better players in the country. This year they are playing a more traditional Duke style where everybody touches the ball, everybody can get you on any night, five players are capable of scoring big numbers so I just think they are a great team this year and hopefully we have the same result as we did last year."

Duke a game of anticipation for Miami's Hurricanes

The Examiner
Paul Borden
Jan. 21, 2013

The confirmation that Duke once again has risen to the top of the weekly college basketball polls makes the Blue Devils' visit Wednesday night without question the most anticipated game in the University of Miami's basketball history.

A rare full house is expected to fill up the 8,000-seat BankUnited Center with about a fourth of them students who are being encouraged to camp outside the arena the night before before charging in for their end zone seats.

The student association has labeled the ground outside of coach Jim Larranaga's office at the northeast corner of the facility as "Larranaga's Lawn," a play on Krzyzewskiville on the Duke campus.

"This is an opportunity for us to do something that is really memorable," senior center/forward Julian Gamble said, "and do something that we can really make a statement."

Miami has played No. 1 teams before, six times in fact, but none of the previous meetings -- all losses for the Hurricanes -- has carried the weight this one does.

Though ranked lower in the polls, the 13-4 Hurricanes go into the game ahead of the 16-1 Blue Devils in the Atlantic Coast Conference standings. At 4-0, they are the only team unbeaten in the conference. Duke is 3-1 in the league.

"There's a buzz, there's no question about it," Larranaga said. "There's a lot of talk. A lot of people who I haven't heard from in years are calling me and asking for tickets."

"Although I was sorry to say no to them, I'm very happy that the reason I'm saying no to them is that we'll have a sellout crowd and great student participation."

The Hurricanes have hosted No. 1 teams three times, the last on Jan. 20, 1999, when they lost to Connecticut by two points, but this will be the first time a No. 1 team has visited their on-campus

home in Coral Gables, which opened in January the 2002-03 season.

Previous home meetings were in the old arena in downtown Miami, the former home of the NBA's Heat that has since been replaced (and torn down) by AmericanAirlines Arena.

Duke was one of those opponents, beating the Hurricanes 117-102 on Dec. 10, 1988, long before the two teams became conference colleagues in the 2004-05 season. The Blue Devils also were No. 1 when they beat the Hurricanes in Durham two years ago.

The three other top-ranked teams to beat Miami were Kanas in the 1989-90 season, North Carolina in the 1986-87 campaign, and Houston way back in the 1968-69 season. (Two years after that, the Hurricanes discontinued their program until resuming it for the 1985-86 season.)

As for this matchup to be nationally televised on ESPN, both teams will be without a key player. Miami lost center Reggie Johnson to a broken thumb back in late December. The Hurricanes lost two of their first three games without him, but have won five in a row since.

Duke lost power forward Ryan Kelly to a foot injury in the first half of the game against Clemson. The Blue Devils have split the two full games they have been without the 6-11 senior, losing at North Carolina State but beating Georgia Tech at home.

Johnson was averaging a double-double (12.6 points, 10.1 rebounds) and had blocked 13 shots in seven games for the Hurricanes at the time of his injury. He also had a huge game -- 27 points and 12 rebounds -- in Miami's overtime win at Duke last season.

Kelly was averaging 13.4 points and 5.4 rebounds a game when he went down, but more key to the Blue Devils' success on offense was ability to stretch opposing defenses with his 3-point accuracy while playing power forward. He had hit more than half (25) of his 48 attempts (52.1 percent).

"They're different, very much like we are without Reggie Johnson," Larranaga said when asked how Kelly's absence had impacted the Blue Devils. "Ryan Kelly is what they call in the coaching

vernacular today a 'stretch-4,' a big guy who can shoot the 3 very similar to Kenny Kadji."

Kadji, a 6-11 forward, has hit 38-percent of his 3-point attempts in his two years with the Hurricanes.

"He was a very integral part of their offense," Larranaga said, getting back to Kelly. "But they have a lot of good players, and (Josh) Hairston and (Amile) Jefferson are very, very capable of not only playing well but having a big impact on the game. And (Alex) Murphy as well."

Quick hits: Tipoff for Wednesday's game is 7 p.m. The crowd could eclipse the attendance record for the BankUnited Center, which is the 7,972 who showed up for the Duke game two years ago and saw the Blue Devils handle the Hurricanes 81-71. ... Miami has held its first four ACC opponents to under 60 points a game. The 53.5 points per game the Hurricanes have allowed in conference play ranks second to the 50.5 of Virginia. ... With Miami creeping into the No. 25 spot in this week's Associated Press poll, this will be the third time the Hurricanes have played Duke when ranked in the top 25. The Blue Devils have won the two previous meetings, both in Durham. ... Senior guard Durand Scott is four short of 1,400 points for his career. When he gets those four, he will become the 12th Hurricane to reach the mark. ... In addition to the big game Johnson had for the Hurricanes last season at Duke, Kadji scored 15 points and gathered in eight rebounds, Scott had 11 points, six rebounds and two steals, and guard Shane Larkin had seven points and four assists. Those three along with Trey McKinney Jones (two points) and Gamble (injured and did not play) are expected to be in the starting lineup Wednesday. Duke's leading scorers last year against Miami were guards Seth Curry (22 points) and Austin Rivers (20). Curry is No. 2 on the team in scoring (16.9 average) this season but Rivers is now playing for the New Orleans Hornets in the NBA.

'Canes Gamble with 'old man basketball'

Sun Sentinel
Michael Casagrande
Jan. 21, 2013

Old man basketball.

It's a style Julian Gamble was accused of playing by ESPN commentators in Miami's 68-59 win over North Carolina on Jan. 10. He was backing down Tar Heels like he was at the YMCA, they said.

For a sixth-year senior, that's not surprising. It's also not insulting.

Filling in for injured center Reggie Johnson, Gamble is a big reason Miami cracked the Associated Press top 25 on Monday afternoon. His scoring average doubled from 4.3 points a game before Johnson's injury to 8.9 after. He did it with a variety of old-fashioned moves and defensive moves on the other end.

At 23, he's not that old.

"When they say old man, you should really describe it as fundamental basketball in the low post," coach Jim Larranaga said. "Because a low-post player's job is to attack the rim and get inside buckets for you, and he does it with his left-hand jump hook, his offensive rebounding and running the floor."

With No. 1 Duke (16-1, 3-1 ACC) and All-American forward Mason Plumlee coming to town Wednesday, Gamble's progress will face the ultimate test. The Blue Devil anchor averages a double-double with 17.4 points and 11.5 rebounds a game.

For someone accused of playing well beyond his years, Gamble's description of his game doesn't jive.

"Really just going out there and being the energy guy," he said. "Being very relentless, whether it be on the offensive or defensive

end. On defensive I pride myself on being a stopper of their best post presence."

He contained Maryland's 7-foot-1 Alex Len in check for most of Miami's 54-47 win Jan. 13. And when Gamble didn't feel like he had the proper impact last Wednesday at Boston College, he spoke up.

"We're behind and Julian comes over and says we need to go small," Larranaga said. "Kenny [Kadji] and I don't match up well with those 3-point shooters and he was right."

Miami (13-3, 4-0 ACC) won 60-59 to set up Wednesday's highly anticipated showdown with the No. 1 Blue Devils. They just won't have Johnson, who scored 27 points in UM's shocking 78-74 win at No. 2 Duke last year. But Larranaga understands the dynamic changes with Gamble, who was injured for last year's game.

"He's an older guy," Larranaga said. "He's confident in his play and he knows his role and that role hasn't changed. We aren't asking him to be Reggie Johnson. We're just asking him to be the best Julian Gamble he can be."

Johnson went through a limited practice routine Monday with a wrap replacing the hard cast on his broken thumb. He wasn't using the left hand much, but was able to shoot the basketball. Regardless, Johnson won't be out there for a few more weeks.

And his absence created a trickle down effect.

Since Gamble was his replacement previously, Larranaga had to look deeper to find someone to spell the new starting center. Though Raphael Akpejiori and Tonye Jekiri haven't been offensive powers in their expanded roles, they haven't been defensive liabilities. Both have been getting significant action midway through first halves recently as Gamble recharged.

He's been a different player since Johnson went down in Hawaii. Gamble said there was uncertainty with how the team would adjust.

They just leaned on their old man, and Miami's been on a tear ever since.

Canes continue to blow through ACC with balanced approach

College ChalkTalk
Joshua Parrott
Jan. 18, 2013

With Miami returning four starters among 10 upperclassmen from last season's NIT squad, second-year coach Jim Larranaga still spoke fondly of the Hurricanes even a few days after a Nov. 2 exhibition loss to Division II Saint Leo.

"Right now with a veteran team I'm very confident that we can be very, very good," Larranaga told College Chalktalk at the time. "We caution our players that it's not about our press clippings. It's about performance, and one thing we need to perform is to stay healthy."

The 'Canes (13-3, 4-0 ACC) have performed well this season despite missing key personnel due to health and off-the-court issues with a collection of players who know their roles. With a 60-59 win over Boston College on Jan. 16, Miami is off to its best start in conference play since opening 5-0 in the Big East in the 1997-98 season and has sole possession of first place in the ACC.

Three of those four conference wins for Miami, ranked No. 25 in this week's Associated Press poll, came on the road against Georgia Tech, North Carolina and Boston College. The Jan. 5 win over Georgia Tech was the 500th career victory for Larranaga as a college coach. The 'Canes also beat Maryland, 54-47, on Jan. 13 in Miami after holding a 19-14 half-time lead.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," Larranaga recently said of the Maryland win on the Tim Brando Show. "It was beautiful to me."

The real beauty to Miami's success has been watching Larranaga keep his players focused amid some tough times. Various injuries left the 'Canes with only eight healthy players to start the season, plus senior guard Durand Scott sat out the first three games as part of an NCAA suspension for receiving improper benefits.

With no Scott and a short bench, Miami lost its second game of the season at Florida Gulf Coast. The 'Canes responded by winning seven straight – including a win over No. 13 Michigan State on Nov. 28. Then senior center Reggie Johnson broke his left thumb the day before

the Diamond Head Classic.

The absence of Johnson (12.6 points, 10.1 rebounds, 1.9 blocks per game) left a huge hole in the middle, and the 'Canes lost to then-No. 4 Arizona and Indiana State in the Diamond Head Classic. Miami has regrouped since returning from Hawaii to win five in a row going into Wednesday's home game against No. 3 Duke (16-1, 3-1).

How have the 'Canes survived this season? With a balanced offensive attack that features five players averaging at least nine points per game as they seek the program's first NCAA tournament appearance since 2008.

Scott leads the team in scoring (13.8 ppg), provides energy and leadership and is a quality rebounder (4.5 rpg) and perimeter defender (1.9 spg). He scored a team-high 15 points and made four critical free throws in the final minute of the recent win over BC.

Sophomore guard Shane Larkin (12.2 ppg, 3.9 apg, 2.3 spg, .410 3PT%) has had a breakout season and leads the ACC in steals. The son of baseball Hall of Famer Barry Larkin has nearly doubled his scoring from last season and is on the Bob Cousy Award watch list.

Senior forward Kenny Kadji (12.6 ppg, 7.3 rpg, 1.6 bpg) has recovered from some early shooting woes to average 14.7 points over the last seven games. The 6-foot-11, 242-pound Kadji has been Miami's most consistent performer in ACC play, averaging 14.3 points and 8.3 rebounds while shooting 42.1 percent (8-of-19) from 3.

Larranaga has praised Kadji, a third-team All-ACC pick as a junior (11.7 ppg, 5.3 rpg, 1.6 bpg), for improving his physical condition by losing 20 pounds in the offseason. Kadji had 18 points, nine rebounds and four blocks in Miami's 68-59 win at North Carolina on Jan. 10.

"Kenny is 6-11 and athletic, and his best asset is his soft shooting touch," Larranaga told College Chalktalk in November. "He's known as a stretch 4, a power forward who can play on the outside like Chris Bosh (of the Miami Heat)."

Two overlooked pieces for Miami this season have been senior guard Trey McKinney Jones (9.8 ppg, 4.0 rpg, .407 3PT%) and sixth-year

senior post Julian Gamble (6.6 ppg, 4.6 rpg, 1.4 bpg, .543 FG%).

McKinney Jones has been a major X-factor as an efficient player who has seen time at four different positions. He had 12 points, eight rebounds and seven assists in the recent win over Maryland.

Gamble has started in place of the 6-10, 292-pound Johnson, who is expected to return in another month.

The 6-10, 250-pound Gamble, who missed last season after an ACL injury, led the 'Canes to a Dec. 23 win over Hawaii with 16 points and 13 rebounds. He also had 11 points, nine rebounds and four blocks in a loss two days later to Indiana State.

Gamble had eight points, nine rebounds and four blocks against Maryland and 14 points, six rebounds and three blocks at UNC. Recently, he was the ACC Digital Network's Spotlight Player.

"As good as Reggie is in the post, Julian Gamble blocks shots," said ACCDN's JR Reid, a former UNC standout and NBA veteran. "He plays above the rim and is a big body as well. He's Reggie with a bit of oomph inside."

Last February, Johnson racked up 27 points and 12 rebounds in Miami's 78-74 overtime upset of then-No. 5 Duke. With Johnson still sidelined, the Hurricanes will need more oomph from Gamble when they play the Blue Devils on Wednesday.

Numbers say Miami men deserve more respect

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 16, 2013

If computers voted in The Associated Press men's college basketball poll, the University of Miami surely would be ranked by now.

According to three of the most popular computerized Ratings Percentage Indexes, the Hurricanes (12-3, 3-0 ACC) are ranked No. 5 in the nation, and their strength of schedule is No. 1 or No. 2.

But it is members of the media who vote in the AP poll and coaches who vote in the USA Today poll and, apparently, they are not quite impressed enough because they left the Canes off the Top 25 poll this week despite road wins over Georgia Tech and North Carolina, a home win over Maryland, and earlier wins over Michigan State, Detroit and UMass.

UM received nine votes in the AP poll, putting it in 33rd place. The final three teams in the rankings — Illinois (14-4), UCLA (14-3) and Marquette (12-3) — have RPI ratings of 14, 31 and 22, respectively. UCLA's strength of schedule is No. 65, and Marquette is No. 30.

But the Hurricanes are a veteran team with veteran coach Jim Larranaga, and they know better than to obsess over numbers or pay attention to pollsters. They head into Wednesday night's game at Boston College focusing on only one thing — beating the Eagles.

"It's not a situation where we're trying to impress voters every night," said UM senior center Julian Gamble, who has played relentless defense and provided inside scoring in the absence of injured 6-10 center Reggie Johnson. "Our RPI and strength of schedule are high, but the only number that really matters to us is wins. As long as the wins keep coming, they won't be able to deny us in the rankings much longer."

The Hurricanes are coming off a physical game against Maryland, which they won 54-47. Kenny Kadji led UM with 14 points. Gamble and Trey McKinney Jones came up big down the stretch, and UM is off to its best league start since the Canes went 5-0 in the Big East in 1997-98.

Boston College is 9-7 and has lost two of its three conference games, but those losses were by a combined eight points. It lost 75-72 to Wake Forest and 78-73 to No. 20 N.C. State.

"They've won six of eight, and their ACC losses were really close and could have gone either way, so we know this will be a tough game," Gamble said. "Their two freshmen are playing really well, and they spread people out and make it hard to guard them."

Eagles freshman Olivier Hanlan, a native of Quebec, averaged 17.5 points, 6.5 rebounds, four assists and 3.5 steals in the past two ACC games. He leads ACC freshmen in scoring with 13.4 points per game. Sophomore Lonnie Jackson scored a career-high 23 points against Wake Forest.

Boston College coach Steve Donahue lauded UM's size and defense. Even with Johnson out, the Hurricanes have 6-11 Kadji, who can play inside and on the perimeter, 6-10 and 250-pound Gamble, who is a handful around the rim, and big backups in 6-10 Raphael Akpejori and 7-foot freshman Tonye Jekiri.

"The thing about Miami is they have great size and they are so physical on the defensive end," Donahue.

After the Boston College trip, UM will have a week to prepare for the Jan. 23 home game against No. 3 Duke, which is expected to be a sellout.

ACC preview: Miami out to avoid letdown

FOX Sports Carolinas

Andrew Jones

Jan. 11, 2013

The task for Miami is simple: following up a win over North Carolina with another solid performance. But if Jim Larranaga's team hasn't fully moved on from that victory, it could find itself in trouble against a deep and talented Maryland club.

The Hurricanes welcome the Terrapins to Coral Gables for a 6 p.m. tip Sunday evening and given the adversity Miami has already faced -- which includes playing six true road games already and losing starting center Reggie Johnson a few weeks ago -- this group may be well equipped to handle the situation.

Prior to Johnson's pre-Christmas injury, the Hurricanes (11-3 and 2-0 in the ACC) were playing as well as any ACC team not named Duke. They beat Michigan State, won at Massachusetts, beat Charlotte and won at Hawaii. But then a blowout loss to Arizona and an overtime loss to Indiana State on neutral courts in Honolulu derailed what had been built up.

"When we got to Hawaii we were exhausted," Larranaga said Thursday night after his team beat UNC at the Dean Smith Center. "Trey McKinney-Jones was in the hospital with a 105-degree temperature, Durand Scott's back tightened up on the trip -- he couldn't move, he couldn't bend over. Shane Larkin tweaked his ankle and Reggie Johnson broke his thumb, so there was a lot of things.

"We played very well the first night without Reggie, beating Hawaii, but then we lost to a very good Arizona team, and the against Indiana we just totally ran out of gas with about five minutes to go."

But the Hurricanes have won consecutive road ACC games and finally return home to take on Maryland (13-2, 1-1) for just their second home game since Dec. 14.

Pick: Miami 64-60

Gamble pays off in Miami's 2-0 ACC start

ESPN.com
Robbi Pickeral
Jan. 10, 2013

There were times, early in Miami forward Julian Gamble's left-knee rehab, when he wondered if he'd ever be able to even hop without pain -- much less battle for back-to-back offensive rebounds and score on a putback to jump-start a game-winning run at North Carolina.

Breaking the Tar Heels' 10-game winning streak over the Hurricanes?

Starting 2-0 in the ACC for the first time since his team joined the league?

Winning at the Smith Center, just a short drive from his Durham, N.C., hometown, 68-59?

Yes, Gamble said Thursday night, returning for a sixth year was certainly worth it.

"Of course this is what you hope for," Gamble said after notching 14 points, 6 rebounds and 3 blocks en route to pushing UNC to 0-2 in the ACC. "But not just for me -- for my team."

Indeed, the victory marked the road-tested Hurricanes' third consecutive victory -- perhaps extra impressive, considering all have been without center(piece) Reggie Johnson.

When the 6-foot-10, 292-pound center fractured his thumb last month before the Hurricanes' trip to the Diamond Head Classic, there was worry about how the guard-heavy team would adapt without his defensive presence in the lane and double-double (12.6 points, 10.1 rebounds) average per game.

Going 1-2 in the Diamond Head Classic didn't exactly help curb that concern.

But Gamble's play of late just might.

In wins against La Salle and at Georgia Tech,

he averaged 6.5 points and 7.5 rebounds.

And making his sixth straight start in place of Johnson on Thursday, the 6-10, 250-pounder was even more aggressive from the outset. With Miami trailing 32-30 at the break, the team went to him early and often in the second half, wanting to establish an offensive presence in the lane to help open things up for its outside shooters. And he delivered, scoring six of Miami's first seven points to make it 37-all.

"I feel like we're a bigger, stronger, more physical, more experienced team than them [the Tar Heels] at this point, so we just had to take advantage of it," said Gamble, who got plenty of advice and words of encouragement from Johnson on the bench.

His biggest advantage-taking moment came with 4 minutes, 31 seconds left.

After UNC reserve P.J. Hairston buried a 3-pointer to cut Miami's lead to 56-55, Gamble grabbed teammate Durand Scott's missed 3-pointer. Playing with four fouls but backing off not one bit, he missed the putback, but grabbed another rebound in traffic and made that one to put his team up by three points -- and jump-start an 8-0 run.

"I was just thinking 'Be relentless, outwork them,'" Gamble said. "That's what one of our coaches always tells us: No matter what happens, no matter what adversity happens, just keep working."

It was that mentality, too, Gamble said, that helped get him through the frustrations of rehabilitation after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee during a workout in August 2011. There were days, he remembered, when medication barely numbed the pain. He didn't know until February whether the NCAA would allow him to play for a rare sixth year (he redshirted his freshman season, in 2007-08). And he actually had to un-

dergo a second knee surgery, he said, when a lesion was found on the back of his ACL graft.

"It was another blow to my mindset, and my confidence: Was I ever going to play like I could before?" he said.

But he is.

Maybe, at times, even better.

"Reggie Johnson is a tremendous inside presence, he's a low-post player, back to the basket, and he helps us a lot of different ways," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said. "But Julian has done an admirable job, stepping up and defending, rebounding and scoring. Tonight, he had double figures, 7-for-10 from the field, 14 points and 6 rebounds. That's an outstanding performance, especially in a game like this where every possession counts."

Senior Kenny Kadji led the Canes with 18 points and 9 rebounds Thursday. James Michael McAdoo led UNC with 14 points and 6 rebounds, although Miami held the Tar Heels to just one field goal (that Hairston 3-pointer) during a crucial 7-minute span in the second half.

"[This win] gives us great confidence, but at the same time, we know we have 16 more games left," Gamble said. "It's the beginning of the conference season, and we don't have a lot of time to dwell on this victory."

Although after all that rehab, Gamble -- who had more than a dozen friends and family members in the crowd -- admits he does appreciate each "W" a bit more.

"To be playing basketball at the highest level, and to be playing at places like Duke and Carolina, and just having the opportunity to play in front of family and friends, it's just a great feeling," he said.

Miami wins at UNC without Johnson; Canes for real?

NBC Sports
Rob Dauster
Jan. 10, 2013

On Wednesday night, Minnesota staked their claim to being one of the Big Ten's best teams by going into Champaign and knocking off Illinois.

On Thursday night, it was Miami's turn to make a statement, as they rolled through the Dean Dome and picked up their third straight win, knocking off the Heels 68-59.

There was quite a bit of concern about Miami's season and tournament hopes after their starting center, double-double machine Reggie Johnson, went down with a broken thumb a couple of days before Christmas. But after a disappointing showing out in Hawaii at the Diamond Head Classic, the Canes have come on strong.

They beat a better-than-you-think La Salle team last week and followed that up with a win over in their ACC opener on Saturday. But going into the Dean Dome and knocking off North Carolina — even if this UNC team is closer to being a carbon copy of 2010 than a true ACC title contender — is impressive. Doing it without Johnson is even more so.

How is Miami surviving without their big fella in the middle?

Well, it helps when Kenny Kadji is kicking in 18 points, nine boards, four blocks and three assists. It's even more helpful when Julian Gamble, who is starting in Johnson's place, is going for 14 points, six boards and three blocks. More to the point, Miami still have a talented group of individuals that understand their roles. They have a point guard in Shane Larkin that is as underrated as anyone in the ACC. They have a slew of shooters on the perimeter. Kadji and Gamble have enough size and bulk to manage in the paint.

And then there is talented veteran Durand Scott, who does whatever he team needs him to do on a given night.

The bottom-line is this: the only known quantity on the ACC is Duke. Everyone else is entirely beatable. NC State, Maryland, Florida State and North Carolina — obviously — have their flaws. The conference is way down this season, so even without Johnson, Miami will be able to win a lot of games.

What's more? They already have. They are a top 10 team in the RPI thanks in large part to six top 100 wins.

And now the scary part: they've spent less than a month of the season at full strength.

Chew on that.

Durand Scott: We're looking forward to winning the game

CaneSport.com
Matt Shodell
Jan. 10, 2013

Durand Scott says he sees tonight's game at North Carolina as a measuring stick for the UM program this season.

"Most definitely," Scott said. "The ACC is a great conference and North Carolina is a great team and has one of the great coaches (Roy Williams). They're a really hard-working team. We have to make sure we go out there and outwork them, come out with a 'W'."

Scott said UM will need a Rion Brown or Trey McKinney-Jones to step up and help provide scoring in order to win.

"It's our job to get them shots, get them open," Scott said. "When they score it makes it easier for everyone else inside and outside because they have to come out and play the three-point line."

After losing big at UNC last year (73-56), Scott says this year "we're looking forward to winning the game. We have to get ready because we know they're a strong team, well-coached, a well-oiled machine. We have to stay on track and everything will pan out for us."

"They never will be down, always will be at the top of the league. They haven't been playing to their potential now, but I'm pretty sure they'll bounce back and play well. Hopefully they won't bounce back against us. We have to play together, do the right things and we'll be fine."

UNC lost its last game to Virginia, 61-52.

Scott says he'd "rather face them coming off a win than a loss, but at the end of the day we have to play basketball. We have to go out there and do our job."

Scott was asked if a win against UNC would help open the nation's eyes to UM's ability.

"I just want to go out there and play basketball, win games," Scott said. "I just know we have a lot more work to do. Regardless of the results of that game, we have to get ready for the next one."

* Of missing big man Reggie Johnson (broken thumb), Scott said, "he's a big portion of our team that's missing right now. We need him back. It's difficult mentally knowing he's a teammate that we need."

* Of Rion Brown's breakout game at Georgia Tech (22 points), Scott said, "When it happened I was so happy for him. ... I just pray, hope he continues that."

* Coach Jim Larranaga was asked how this year's

team is different than the one that was blown out last year at UNC. His response: "Well, we're a little bit older and have a little more experience," Larranaga said. "That could help us. All I remember about last year going there is we played Virginia on a Saturday and Carolina on Tuesday, both on the road, and during the trip the guys all got sick." (Larranaga said that Shane Larkin was sick earlier this week with a stomach flu).

- Larranaga said Rion Brown "is a huge key for us the rest of the season."

"Our bench has not produced many points, so having Rion score is an added boost especially knowing we are without Reggie Johnson."

GAME NOTES

* The Game: Miami travels to Chapel Hill to face North Carolina on Thursday, Jan. 10 at 7 p.m. The Canes are looking to open ACC play with a 2-0 record for the first time since joining the league for the 2004-05 season.

* The Series: Miami is 2-18 against North Carolina in the all-time series, which dates back to the 1949-50 season. The Canes' two wins came in a 64-61 overtime victory on Jan. 4, 2003 and an 81-70 victory on Jan. 14, 2006. The Hurricanes last faced off against the Tar Heels on Feb. 15, 2012 in Coral Gables and lost 73-64.

* The Broadcasts: Catch the game on ESPN and Watch ESPN with Dave O'Brien and Jay Bilas making the call and Jeanine Edwards on the sideline. The game will also be carried live by 560 WQAM Radio with Joe Zagacki (play-by-play) and Josh Darrow (analyst).

* The Coach: Head coach Jim Larranaga is in his 29th season as a head coach and second at Miami. He has a 500-350 overall record and is 30-16 in his second season at Miami.

* Second Half Scoring: Miami has outscored its last two opponents 51-22 in the first 12 minutes of the second half. At Georgia Tech, Miami went on a 24-11 run after the half, and the Canes outscored La Salle 27-11 in the first 12 minutes after the break. Through 13 games, UM has outscored its opponents 508-405 in the second half.

* Miami vs. the ACC: In his first season at UM, Coach Larranaga and the Canes defeated eight of their 11 ACC opponents at least once. Miami beat Boston College in both meetings, and downed five teams in their sole matchup - Clemson, Duke, Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech and Wake Forest. UM split games with Maryland and Florida State, but lost to North Carolina (twice), NC State (twice) and Virginia.

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ranaga defeated defending national champion North Carolina to advance to the Sweet 16, during the Patriots' run to the Final Four. GMU beat UNC on a Sunday, after defeating Michigan State two days prior. This season, Miami downed then-No. 13/14 Michigan State on Nov. 28 and looks to defeat UNC for the first time in the Coach L era.

* RPI and Strength of Schedule: According to WarrenNolan.com as of Jan. 7, Miami's RPI is 8 and strength of schedule is 3. RealtimeRPI.com has UM with an RPI of 8 and SOS of 3. Since joining the ACC, Miami's best non-conference SOS was 112 and RPI was 39, both in in 2007-08.

* Number of Games Potentially Missed by the Canes: Based on a 32-game schedule, this year Miami will be undermanned in potentially 108 games due to injuries and transfers. Durand Scott missed three games due to an NCAA withholding penalty and Reggie Johnson is expected to miss 13 games while Garrius Adams could miss the entire season (32 games) due to injuries. Two transfers, Bishop Daniels and Melvin Johnson, will miss 28 and 32 games, respectively. Last season, Miami players missed 108 games due to injury or NCAA suspensions. The list of players missing time included starting center Reggie Johnson (nine games to injury, one to suspension), forward DeQuan Jones (10 to suspension), starting guard Durand Scott (three to suspension), starting guard Malcolm Grant (two to a death in the family), guard Garrius Adams (14 to injury and knee surgery), and guard Rion Brown (two to illness). Even guard Shane Larkin missed the opener until the NCAA approved his eligibility. Veteran forward Julian Gamble (knee) and freshman guard Bishop Daniels (foot) sat out the entire year.

* ACC Leaders Durand Scott and Shane Larkin: Durand Scott leads all returning ACC players with 1,364 career points, ahead of C.J. Harris (WF - 1,326), Erick Green (VT - 1,286), Michael Snaer (FSU - 1,274), Scott Wood (NC State - 1,188) and Travis McKie (WF - 1,111). Scott is the only current ACC player to have averaged in double figures three times in his career. Scott is also third in points per game among active leaders with 12.6 career ppg. Shane Larkin was fifth overall and tops among freshmen in the ACC in steals a year ago, and was fifth among freshmen in scoring with 7.4 ppg, trailing Ryan Anderson (BC), Dennis Clifford (BC), Nick Faust (MD), and Lonnie Jackson (BC). This season Larkin leads the ACC in steals and is ninth in assists.

* UM's Offensive Output: Four players - Durand Scott, Shane Larkin, Reggie Johnson and Kenny Kadji - are averaging double-digit points this season and one - Trey McKinney Jones - is at 9.8 ppg. When three or more Canes score in double digits, Miami is 9-1. In seven games this year, four or more Hurricanes have scored in double digits.

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after defeating Michigan State two days prior. This season, Miami downed then-No. 13/14 Michigan State on Nov. 28 and looks to defeat UNC for the first time in the Coach I era.

* RPI and Strength of Schedule: According to WarrenNolan.com as of Jan. 7, Miami's RPI is 8 and strength of schedule is 3. RealtimeRPI.com has UM with an RPI of 8 and SOS of 3. Since joining the ACC, Miami's best non-conference SOS was 112 and RPI was 39, both in in 2007-08.

* Number of Games Potentially Missed by the Canes: Based on a 32-game schedule, this year Miami will be undermanned in potentially 108 games due to injuries and transfers. Durand Scott missed three games due to an NCAA withholding penalty and Reggie Johnson is expected to miss 13 games while Garrius Adams could miss the entire season (32 games) due to injuries. Two transfers, Bishop Daniels and Melvin Johnson, will miss 28 and 32 games, respectively. Last season, Miami players missed 108 games due to injury or NCAA suspensions. The list of players missing time included starting center Reggie Johnson (nine games to injury, one to suspension), forward DeQuan Jones (10 to suspension), starting guard Durand Scott (three to suspension), starting guard Malcolm Grant (two to a death in the family), guard Garrius Adams (14 to injury and knee surgery), and guard Rion Brown (two to illness). Even guard Shane Larkin missed the opener until the NCAA approved his eligibility. Veteran forward Julian Gamble (knee) and freshman guard Bishop Daniels (foot) sat out the entire year.

* ACC Leaders Durand Scott and Shane Larkin: Durand Scott leads all returning ACC players with 1,364 career points, ahead of C.J. Harris (WF - 1,326), Erick Green (VT - 1,286), Michael Snaer (FSU - 1,274), Scott Wood (NC State - 1,188) and Travis McKie (WF - 1,111). Scott is the only current ACC player to have averaged in double figures three times in his career. Scott is also third in points per game among active leaders with 12.6 career ppg. Shane Larkin was fifth overall and tops among freshmen in the ACC in steals a year ago, and was fifth among freshmen in scoring with 7.4 ppg, trailing Ryan Anderson (BC), Dennis Clifford (BC), Nick Faust (MD), and Lonnie Jackson (BC). This season Larkin leads the ACC in steals and is ninth in assists.

* UM's Offensive Output: Four players - Durand Scott, Shane Larkin, Reggie Johnson and Kenny Kadji - are averaging double-digit points this season and one - Trey McKinney Jones - is at 9.8 ppg. When three or more Canes score in double digits, Miami is 9-1. In seven games this year, four or more Hurricanes have scored in double digits.

Canes adjusting to ACC play without Johnson

FOX Sports Florida
Charlie McCarthy
Jan. 9, 2013

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — The Miami Hurricanes prepared for the Atlantic Coast Conference schedule knowing they needed to rebound in a couple of ways.

They needed to bounce back from a disappointing 1-2 Hawaii trip on which center Reggie Johnson was sidelined with a fractured thumb.

And in Johnson's absence, the 'Canes focused on crashing the boards.

"When you have a guy like Reggie Johnson, one of the best rebounders in the country, you expect him to get every rebound, so you don't have to worry about it that much," senior forward Kenny Kadji said. "But now you have to be aware to go get it."

Miami (10-3, 1-0) will visit North Carolina (10-4, 0-1) on Thursday night, when the 'Canes will try to go 2-0 in the ACC for the first time since joining the league in 2004-05.

The Hurricanes are hoping ACC success follows a tough nonconference schedule. Miami's nonconference strength of schedule and its Ratings Percentage Index (RPI) both are in or near the top five nationally.

There was a shocking early-season loss at Florida Gulf Coast, but then victories came against Michigan State and at Massachusetts. The 'Canes eyed a Diamond Head Classic title when they departed Miami on Dec. 20.

Before the tournament began, however, Johnson fractured his thumb when going for a rebound in practice. He sat while the 'Canes beat Hawaii and lost to Arizona and Indiana State (in overtime).

The Hurricanes returned to defeat La Salle on Jan. 2 before opening the ACC slate with a victory Saturday at Georgia Tech. Guard Rion Brown supplied much-needed bench scoring with a career-high 22 points against the Yellow Jackets.

"Your nonconference schedule should prepare you for your league games, and your performance in the nonconference should give you the experience you need to play well," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said. "But conference play is different. The teams are much more familiar with each other. You're playing teams, for the most part, home and away.

"The crowds are much more enthusiastic. They're larger, and there's more excitement in the arena. And a lot of them are on national television."

This year, a lot of them are expected to be without Johnson.

Miami announced on Dec. 30 that Johnson would be sidelined 6-to-8 weeks with a fractured thumb. Asked Tuesday if the timeline was still the same, Larranaga said, "I have no idea."

No idea? The more likely scenario is the coach wants to wait and see how the thumb progresses. Playing while wearing a cast was not an option for Johnson at the outset because of concerns the thumb would not heal properly.

Until Johnson returns, the Hurricanes will try to get by without his averages of 12.6 points, 10.1 rebounds and 1.9 blocks per game.

Offensively, Johnson often demands double-teams that open up the perimeter. Larranaga expects that to happen less without the senior.

On defense, the 6-foot-10, 290-pound center forms a mountain in the middle against driving opponents.

"He takes up a lot of the paint," said senior guard Durand Scott, who leads the team with 14.7 points-per-game average. "He's been blocking the ball well, rebounding real well, and he's definitely a scorer on the offensive end. He's a great big portion of our team that's missing right now. We definitely need that back."

Johnson's rebounding ability is missed at both ends. The 'Canes are trying a rebounding-by-committee approach led by 6-11 Kadji, 6-10 senior Julian Gamble, 6-10 junior Raphael Akpejori and 7-foot freshman Tonye Jekiri.

"We all have to rebound and play well inside," Kadji said. "It's going to help us when Reggie comes back. A guy like Julian will go back to the bench, but he'll have more confidence."

Can anyone replicate Johnson's mass in the middle?

"We try," Kadji said with a smile, "but me and Julian have to combine for that."

UM's Brown busts slump with inspiration from father

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Jan. 9, 2013

It's been rough for Rion Brown this year.

Nothing was falling for the Miami sharpshooter. Nothing — as in 14 straight missed 3s over a six-game span. So he switched it up. Before playing in front of 40 hometown friends and family last Saturday at Georgia Tech, Brown hit the gym at 8 a.m.

And something clicked.

Playing on the same floor his father, Tico Brown, starred for the Yellow Jackets a generation ago, Brown nailed 4 of 6 from the perimeter and scored a career-high 22 points. Three of his 3s came in the second half when the Hurricanes pulled away for the 62-49 win. The family connection can't be ignored, coach Jim Larranaga said.

"That actually inspired him," he said. "When he went by to shoot, he saw that his father was an All-American there. He saw his jersey was retired. His photo was up on display and you get excited about that."

Larranaga even joked about bringing a wallet-sized photo of Tico Brown everywhere Miami travels to keep the mojo alive. It would be in Chapel Hill, N.C., on Thursday as Miami (10-3, 1-0 ACC) faces North Carolina at 7 p.m. on ESPN.

Brown, who was a 39 percent 3-point shooter last season, said his dad served as more than inspiration during the early season slump. They'd talk regularly on the phone about breaking the streak.

"He really tells me to concentrate on something else," Rion Brown said. "Don't always go into the game thinking about your shooting. So, going into that game, the first thing I was thinking about was I'm just going to play great

defense and get as many rebounds as I can. Next thing I know I hit the first shot."

The slide ended 11 seconds after checking into Saturday's game. By halftime, he had a team-high 11 before making three more 3s in the second half.

With senior center Reggie Brown sidelined for several more weeks with a broken thumb, shooters like Brown could be the key to staying in the ACC race. The team's collective 0-for-15 night from 3-point range against Indiana State led to a 57-55 overtime loss on Christmas Day.

Brown has a good idea what was going wrong at that point.

"It's definitely mental," he said. "Earlier in the season it was getting to me. All I'm thinking about is how many shots I've missed and I can't think like that. I'm a shooter, I have to think 'keep shooting,' and the next one is going in."

Every possible solution was in play. He'd spend 10 minutes before each game silently visualizing making shots. But they weren't falling in reality and it became more of a challenge to keep pulling the trigger.

Rion Brown: Rebounding, setting D keys at UNC

CaneSport.com

Matt Shodell

Jan. 9, 2013

Rion Brown broke out of a five-for-38 three-point slump at Georgia Tech, hitting nine of 11 shots for 22 points in the victory.

Did he sense before the game that he'd have a big night?

"I'd been shooting really well in practice but it wasn't translating to the game," Brown said. "My teammates said 'Never stop shooting,' and it just came around for me."

Now the team will likely need Brown at his best again when UM heads to North Carolina on Thursday night in a game that will be televised on ESPN.

This isn't a UNC team in the top 25, but Brown says Miami has to treat them "exactly the same" as always.

"They're always going to be a good team, someone you can't take for granted," Brown said. "We're going to treat it like last year, like they're the No. 1 team they've always had."

UNC averages over 80 points a game.

"I don't think we can slow them down, it's more we have to speed up," Brown said. "We can't give them easy layups. We have to pick up our speed, actually."

Is this the kind of game where UM might really miss the inside presence of Reggie Johnson (broken thumb)?

"Definitely," Brown said. "Not only does he score, but he dishes out. I get a lot of my threes off of him kicking it out when he's doubled. We have to find a way (to win without him)."

Brown is asked if he thinks this is an NCAA

Tournament team even without Johnson.

"Honestly I think we're still at tournament team," Brown said. "Raphael (Akpejiori) and Julian (Gamble) are both stepping up (in Johnson's absence). With those two guys playing so well together we're fine. I think those two guys put together make a Reggie."

He adds that "With Reggie I think we'll be a great tournament team, Sweet 16 team."

* Brown's keys to the UNC game?

"I'd say the two biggest things are rebounding and getting back and setting our defense every time," Brown said. "Coach says between all of us guards we should have 15 rebounds easily. He's putting more pressure on the guards to go down and get some (rebounds) out of there."

Asked if the team will learn a lot about itself vs. UNC, Brown said, "We know what we have to do, just play hard, run our offense and get our guards creating for everybody, getting the big guys easy basket."

* Brown's father, Tico, is a former Georgia Tech star. His advice when Brown had the shooting slump?

"He said the main thing is you have to stop focusing on it, just go out there and try to go get every rebound and it'll come to you," Brown said. "I didn't go into the game thinking I had to hit shots; I thought I had to play defense. I went in and then I hit my first shot."

Notes from the ACC Coaches Teleconference

State of the U.com
Jerry Steinberg
Jan. 7, 2013

Coaches from around the conference, including Miami Head Coach Jim Larranaga, spoke to the media about the state's of their respective teams, as well as looking ahead to this week's games.

Coach Larranaga first gave Assistant Coach Eric Konkol credit for developing the out-of-conference schedule, and mentioned the 'Canes OOC schedule was top 5 in the country. He felt the team was well prepared for the opener against GT due to the tough early schedule.

Here are some other highlights:

On playing with out Reggie Johnson:

"First of all Reggie was playing very well and giving us great inside presence. He has continued to work very hard, and hopefully when we get him back he will be ready to contribute mightily. He gives us a lot, in terms of rebounding, inside scoring. The rest of the guys (Kenny Kadji, Julian Gamble, Tonye Jekiri and Raphael Akpejori) realize that they have a major responsibility. The whole key for us offensively is to have balance. If we can get 4 or 5 guys in double figures I think we are in good shape."

On whether he thought he'd ever get his 500th win:

"I don't look at it on the whole, I look at it day to day. I love what I am doing. I really enjoy helping kids grow and learn the game, as well as grow off the court. It's the kids that win games."

On having family members at the game:

"My son Jay was at the game, he is an assistant with the Atlanta Hawks. (Assistant Coach) Chris Caputo and I went to the Celtics-Hawks game and then I had dinner with my son Jay afterward. The Larranagas had a great day."

On team camaraderie:

"What you see if a group of guys that are dedicated to one goal, and that's winning. Rion Brown on Saturday had a great game, and everybody was very excited for him. His dad was an All-American at Georgia Tech. And even though some of our starters had sub par scoring games, they were far more excited to win. I think this team is very unselfish, and they play very hard."

On Rion Brown:

"First of all the great thing about Rion Brown is he has a terrific work effort and attitude. And the great thing about him shooting 9-11 is it will help him relax

more. Every game is different in terms of match-ups so you may not see the same performance, but I do know Rion Brown will bring a great attitude and work ethic every game."

On UNC:

"One of the key statistics on Carolina is they are 7-0 at home. They have some young young players and they also have a great support system with their home crowd. We have played some very good teams in hostile environments, hopefully we will be ready. They are a tremendous running team. North Carolina is traditionally in the top 2 or 3 in fast break points."

On Durand Scott:

"I love Durand Scott. He is such a great competitor, and he involves himself in every aspect of the game, and every aspect of our team. He only cares about winning. He is from New York and so am I. We have somewhat of a kinship having played in the same Catholic Basketball League. When we didn't have him, we didn't have our emotional leader. He's going to go down as one of the best players in Miami Basketball history."

Notes from the rest of the ACC:

Wake Forest Coach Jeff Bzdelik noted that he felt 6'9 240 pound freshman forward Devin Thomas could eventually be "one of the better rebounders in the country."

James Johnson of Virginia Tech spoke about the need for other players to step up and match Erick Green's play. When asked, Johnson gave "effort" as the reason for CJ Barksdale's recent benching.

Tony Bennett of Virginia mentioned the health of Jontel Evans and the conservative approach towards his minutes, due to two setbacks in his recovery. Expect his minutes to increase incrementally. Bennett mentioned the ability of Evans to get into the paint as the biggest difference between Evans and freshman PG Teven Jones. Finally he mentioned that one of the keys to slowing down UNC in UVA's win last night over the Heels was making a conscious effort to get back on defense and "form a wall."

Mark Gottfried of NC State noted a healthy respect for Georgia Tech, considering the Jackets beat the Pack last year in Raleigh. When asked about TJ Warren coming off the bench Gottfried said if he could we would "start six." Coming off a tough win on the road at BC, he said Ryan Anderson's improvement and freshman guard Olivier Hanlan's presence make BC an improved squad. Finally Gottfried spoke about Scott Wood's intelligence and confidence and how his communication on defense was underrated.

Roy Williams of North Carolina congratulated Tony Bennett and UVA on defeating his team last night, but also spoke about the play down the stretch last night being a "rude awakening" for his squad. He mentioned some players on the team were not pro-

gressing as much as he hoped. He was pleased with the play of Reggie Bullock but felt they needed to get him more shots.

Mark Turgeon of Maryland talked about rebounding better, being the key against a physical Florida State team this week. About the Terrapins schedule, he said his team was as good as its' record, and had time to prove themselves in conference play. On Nick Faust missing last weekend's game, back spasms were the official reason. Turgeon said he would be "very disappointed" if Faust missed this week's game against FSU.

Brian Gregory of Georgia Tech complimented Miami, and noted that his team did some nice things despite the loss. Gregory mentioned that Stacy Poole Jr. is going to need some time to catch up, after missing a lot of time as a mid semester transfer. But Poole's defense and ability to run they floor would be key for the Jackets. Gregory also spoke about the improvement of freshmen Robert Carter and Marcus Georges-Hunt, and how their impact has not been a surprise due to their work ethics.

Leonard Hamilton of Florida State talked about the Seminoles inconsistency and inexperience. But he noted the team is starting to figure things as the practice effort has been better than the game effort. Ian Miller's return from a bone bruise was also mentioned as hope for improvement. Hamilton said that he is still excited about the team, and that they were capable of doing great things, and that they would "find out a lot about the team" this week against Maryland.

Mike Krzyzewski, Duke's legendary coach, spoke about how Rasheed Sulaiman's transition to major college hoops has been aided by the Devils' more experienced players. Coach K gave Mason Plumlee credit for Duke's high percentage of three point shooting. As far as pressure in being undefeated, he said that "hunger for preparation" was the key. Krzyzewski also called Quinn Cook, a "natural point guard", who is judged on whether or not the team wins, as opposed to statistics.

Brad Brownell, of Clemson said he felt that Duke was a better team this year than last. On Rod Hall's performance, Brownell noted he has done "reasonably well" but needs to be more of a vocal leader. He also noted, despite the team's performance against FSU he felt they were a sound defensive squad.

Steve Donahue, of Boston College felt his team played well despite the loss to NC State. On Facing Va Tech he mentioned the exceptional play of Erick Green, and the challenge of executing against their defensive pressure. Donahue mentioned Joe Rahon's toughness made him seem more experienced than a true freshman.

Be sure to stay tuned as we bring you updates through out the season. The ACC Coaches Teleconference takes places every Monday morning.

NCDS: Miami's Eric Konkol on "Roles"

College ChalkTalk
Staff
Jan. 9, 2013

As non-conference play transitions to the conference season, players are settling into a specific role on their respective teams. Over the years, I have found that the teams with the most players who have "fallen in love with their role" have been the most successful. Deciding who plays is the most difficult aspect of game coaching. Putting the best lineups on the floor with buy-in from each member is vital for success. Our staff spends a great amount of time communicating with our players about their role on the team and the level of performance we expect from them. Players typically fall into the following roles:

1. Scorer
2. Defender
3. Rebounder
4. Transporter
5. Energy giver

Of course, the best and most complete players have qualities of each of the five roles, but many players have special skill sets. Some players can really score and others are most gifted as lock down defenders or counted on to clean up the glass. You may have players who are proficient at finding teammates good shots or keeping the ball moving as a transporter. Most of all, you want each player to give energy to one another by being enthusiastic each day no matter what the role and how much or how little they play.

When our staff makes decisions on playing time and role definition there are times we want to educate them on why we make the decisions we do for the benefit of the team. We also want to provide them goals on how to expand their role for the future.

Here is an example: Shots

Everyone wants to score and we had a player who saw himself as a perimeter shooter and wanted more shots even though he was a career 15% three-point shooter. He could score around the basket, was one of the best rebounding guards we ever had, and was a very good defender.

We did a simple exercise with him about his shot attempts and the shot attempts he felt each of his teammates should get per game. We asked him how many fast break layups he should get, half court driving layups or floaters, pull up jump shots, and three point attempts. He also did this for each member of the team. After his calculation, he came up with himself shooting 15 shots per game, our leading scorer 22 shots, and our team attempting over 120 shots per game!

Of course, he was surprised to know that our leading scorer was shooting just 12 times per game and we were averaging close to 55 shots per game as a team.

To show him what he was best at, we calculated each player's rebounds per minute played and he was our leader. He was exceptional at this and we wanted him to love being good at this skill and not focused on being someone he wasn't at this point of his career.

Numbers tell a story and there are times like this where we like to bring players into the coaching world of decision making. We also like to give players something to test themselves on and strive for so they can work daily toward expanding their current role. Players should dream about advancing their game and we want to help them achieve those dreams.

When it comes to shooting the three, we have a simple test to gain the green light to shoot three point shots in games. It is called 5 Minute Threes.

It requires one shooter, one ball, and one rebounder for five minutes. The shooter can be anywhere on the arc and even stay in one place. They shoot for five minutes and if they can consistently make over 50 threes in five minutes they have the green light to shoot open threes in games. If they are in the 40s they have the yellow light. They can take one wide open three and shoot another if they make it. If a player makes 39 or less consistently in five minutes, they have the red light and that of course means no threes in games. We have had players start in the 40s and are now consistently in the 60s. Last season Malcolm Grant set a record by making 85 threes in 5 minutes. We chart the results for each player over time and post it in the locker room. This helps each player see where they are at as well as their teammates. It's important for each player to know who our best three point shooters are.

Big Picture -

A player "falling in love" with their current role while having goals to expand or change that role down the road is a big part of our player development. Evaluating a player's strengths daily, having them understand what they do well and what they don't do well, will help them recognize how they can help the team succeed. Roles can change during the season. You see teams that have players improve, regress, become injured or healthy, transfer, or become eligible or ineligible mid-year. Constant communication with the players is vital to a team first environment and will help them be ready to step into a new role if the opportunity calls.

Best wishes to you and the team you coach or cheer for.

- Eric Konkol

Alabama DB remembers Larkin as football phenom

Sun Sentinel
Michael Casagrande
Jan. 5, 2013

MIAMI GARDENS — Miami sophomore basketball player Shane Larkin is having a breakout season, but one of his former high school teammates remembers him for his versatility.

Alabama safety HaHa Clinton-Dix still keeps up with his Dr. Phillips High teammate and they talk from time to time.

"I think he's better at football, though," Clinton-Dix said at Saturday's BCS National Championship Game media day. "He's a great athlete."

Clinton-Dix, who was one of the nation's top defensive back recruits in the 2011 signing class, recalls Larkin gashing defenses as a quarterback, running back and defensive back.

"He was the man," Clinton-Dix said.

Larkin averages 13.5 points and 3.6 assists per game for the 10-3 Hurricane team that opened ACC play with a 62-49 win over Georgia Tech.

Injuries continue to beset Miami Hurricanes

Examiner
Paul Borden
Jan. 3, 2013

If University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larranaga had one wish for the season as his Hurricanes go into their Atlantic Coast Conference opener at Georgia Tech, it likely would be for good health for his team.

It's something he hasn't had yet in his brief time in Coral Gables.

Center Reggie Johnson has missed the last four games with a broken thumb, and guard Garrius Adams is likely done for the season with a knee injury.

Johnson at least has been able to play in seven games and was averaging a double-double (12.5 points, 10.1 rebounds) when he was hurt in practice the day before the Hurricanes played in the pre-Christmas Diamond Head Classic in Honolulu.

Adams, who has 37 career starts in 87 games, hasn't played at all in 2012-13.

The day after his team's 76-59 Wednesday night win over La Salle, Larranaga took a moment to count up all the players who have missed time either because of injuries (Adams and Johnson), a suspension (Durand Scott), or a change of heart (guard Melvin Johnson, who asked out of his letter-of-intent last summer, and Bishop Daniels, who left after the semester break).

"This is a projection of where we are now," Larranaga said. "Garrius Adams is going to miss the season, so that's probably 32 games. Reggie Johnson, he's already missed four, I'm guessing he probably will miss 13 games."

Actually, it is five Johnson has already missed -- he sat out one earlier because of a back injury.

"Bishop Daniels, we had him for four games," Larranaga continued. "I have him missing 28 games. Melvin Johnson, who is a kid we signed, he's not here, I have him missing 32 games. Durand Scott missed three games.

"That's 108 games where we are undermanned, where we don't have a full complement. That's unusual, very unusual. And last year it was the same thing."

That total of games missed by players for Larranaga's first season at Miami -- 106.

"It's challenging enough when your team is healthy to figure out your starters, your substitution pattern, how you're going to play offense, how you're going to play defense," the coach said. "But when you have constant moving pieces -- this guy's in, this guy's out ..."

He let the sentence hang for its obvious conclusion: It ain't easy.

It's not that Miami is alone with this.

In fact, injuries that sidelined players like guard Kendall Marshall, forward John Henson, guard Leslie McDonald, and guard Dexter Strickland for various stretches, including the postseason, cost North Carolina a legitimate shot at a national championship in 2012.

For Miami, the stakes don't aren't quite as high, but the casualty list could cost the Hurricanes a shot at their first NCAA Tournament berth since 2008, depending on how they fare without Johnson in the early going.

The Hurricanes are 9-3 overall, which includes a signature win over Michigan State, and have played one of the five most difficult schedules in the country, according to RPI rankings.

With both Johnson and Scott (missed the first three games) available, they are 7-0. Without

one of those two, they are 2-3.

And they have nothing but ACC games remaining in the regular season, starting with the trip to Atlanta for Saturday's game against Georgia Tech.

The Yellow Jackets are off to a surprising 10-2 start, have won their last six and are 8-0 at home. They are one of the top teams in the country statistically in scoring defense, yielding only 53.5 points a game. That's No. 2 in the conference behind Virginia (50.7).

"They are a very, very, very good, tough, hard-nosed man-to-man team," Larranaga said of coach Brian Kellogg's Jackets. "The term in basketball now is 'pack.' They 'pack' in it around the basket and make it very hard for you to get layups and post feeds."

Larranaga halftime message resonates in victory

CaneSport.com

Matt Shodell

Jan. 2, 2013

At halftime on Wednesday night, with the Canes playing sloppy ball and trailing La Salle by six, players said coach Jim Larranaga "delivered a message."

UM responded, taking a lead within three minutes and then going on a 14-0 run to win easily, 76-59.

"Coach delivered the message and we displayed it - (he said) 'Attack, we have to be aggressive,'" guard Durand Scott said. "The first half they came at us and they got the upper hand and we had to show our toughness by going back at them. Coming into this game we respected their game, but we had to show we were the better team, were tougher."

"Coach delivered a message and we did exactly what he said."

Larranaga said that "The message at halftime was very, very clear. La Salle came out attacking us and it took us quite a while to respond. We dug quite a hole, were down 11, cut that to six and in the second half really came out attacking."

Shane Larkin had 18 points on six of 15 shooting (three of six threes), and Scott had 18 as well (five of 10 shooting).

Trey McKinney Jones added 14 points (four of five three-pointers), and Kenny Kadji had 14 points and 11 rebounds.

"Me and Shane, when we're aggressive everyone becomes aggressive," Scott said. "We're the key to the engine. We go up and start the engine up and everything is flowing. I'd like for me and him to do that the rest of the season."

Without Reggie Johnson, who is out a month with a broken thumb, the team gave 21 minutes to Julian Gamble (six points, eight rebounds).

The Canes out-rebounded the Explorers in the big man's absence, 40-33.

"With Reg out that eliminates a lot of rebounds, a lot of scoring," Scott said.

Larranaga said that "We haven't been a great rebounding team, and without Reggie it's going to take more of a team effort. Julian is going to play Reggie's position, but he's not the same player. You saw tonight against a team like La Salle, which is very small, they try to stretch you out and shoot a bunch of threes. In the first half they were very successful."

Miami trailed early in the game, 15-8, before taking a two-point lead after a 12-3 run, 20-18, with under eight minutes remaining in the first half. A 12-0 La Salle run made it 36-25 Explorers, and the Canes ended the half on a 5-0 run to make it 36-30 with La Salle in the lead.

With 16:55 to go a Scott finger roll put UM ahead, 40-38, but neither team was able to pull ahead by more than four points until 9:11 remained when a Larkin three put the Canes ahead, 54-47. He followed that with another three as part of a 14-0 run that gave Miami a 61-47 advantage with under seven minutes left.

The Explorers never got it back within single digits.

"Our defensive intensity picked up as soon as we started being aggressive offensively," Larranaga said.

Miami hit on 47.1 percent of its shots in the game (eight of 17 three-pointers); La Salle hit 37.1 percent (seven of 21 threes). UM also made 20 of 28 free throws while the Explorers hit on six of nine free throws.

"We just want to go out and get better every day," Scott said. "There's plenty more games ahead of us the rest of the season - we want to go out and win these games."

Next up for the Canes: The ACC opener Jan. 5 at Georgia Tech.

The conference schedule will determine UM's post-season fate.

"Last year being on the (NCAA Tournament) bubble, no one liked that feeling," Larkin said. "This year we want to make sure we get enough quality wins and in ACC play so we don't have to be on the bubble."

Larranaga added that "Right now we're 9-3, that's a pretty good number. Our non-conference strength of schedule is in the top 10 in the country. We've challenged ourselves. Right now we're in the top 15 or 16 in the RPI, which if this was March it would be a great indicator of a team that would play in the NCAA Tournament. ... we'll put non-conference behind us and now we have to produce under conference circumstances."

* Larranaga said he hopes to get Johnson back "in February sometime," and said he's working hard on keeping his conditioning in top shape.

Miami Skid Underscores Invaluableness Of Johnson

Busting Brackets

Evan Williams

Dec. 26, 2012

Miami set out for the Diamond Head Classic minus its most precious jewel in game-ready shape. The Canes returned home late Christmas night in a not-so-festive spirit, greeted by a lump of coal in their stocking as a reminder of how valuable that jewel is.

In Coral Gables, the gem is best known as Reggie Johnson, the imposing, wide-bodied center and lifeblood of Miami basketball who missed the three-game holiday tournament after jamming his left thumb in practice last Friday. Games played without Reggie Johnson are best known in southeast Florida as accidents waiting to happen.

Honolulu (HI) felt the brunt of Miami's latest spill, playing host to the Hurricanes as their storm veered off course. Taking the floor without Johnson, Miami stumbled through a sloppy first half against the host school Hawaii, floundered against Arizona in a 19-point rout, then came undone in an overtime loss to Missouri Valley Conference dark horse Indiana State.

As the Canes transition from one holiday to the next, head coach Jim Larranaga is trading in his Christmas list for one pivotal New Year's resolution: to keep No. 42 healthy.

You see, Johnson is the ACC's most indispensable player, more valuable to Miami than any other player in the conference is to his respective team. Mason Plumlee may be the league's best center—best player, even—but Johnson means more to the Canes than Plumlee does to Duke given Miami's parasitic supporting cast, which becomes unhinged without its man in the middle.

Remove Plumlee from Duke and the Blue Devils, while no longer elite, remain an even-keel, well-coached and battle-tested team replete with veteran leaders (Seth Curry, Ryan Kelly), a stellar point guard (Quinn Cook) and a host of other blue-chip talent at Mike Krzyzewski's disposal. Substitute Julian Gamble, an edge piece, for Johnson, a centerpiece, and the Miami basketball puzzle falls completely apart. Let's start with the direct implications.

Without Johnson patrolling the paint, the Hurricanes take a substantial hit on the glass. Johnson's rebounding rate (14.3 per 40 minutes) is among the best in college basketball and almost twice as high as that of Gamble (8.0 per 40 minutes), his backup. The Winston-Salem native hasn't scored the ball at an efficient clip—he's shooting 42.6-percent from the floor, down almost 7-percent from last season and 16.5-percent from the season before—but he does lead the team in points per 40 minutes (17.8), gets to the free throw line (7 free throw attempts per game) and shoots the ball well while there (71-percent).

As significant as Johnson's unilateral production is, the ripple effect his presence has on the rest of the offense presents even greater value. Johnson creates a dynamic one-two punch in the frontcourt with Kenny Kadji, Miami's standout stretch-4. The defensive attention Johnson attracts inside opens up the perimeter for Kadji, whose defender often-times strays toward the paint to double-down on Johnson or assist with help-side rebounding. The upshot: more open looks for arguably the ACC's most versatile 4-man.

In games Johnson has missed this season, that difficult-to-defend combination is lost and defenses are able to zero in on Kadji as a result. Kadji made just 5 of his 16 field goal attempts in Tuesday's loss to Indiana State in the third place game, largely because of the defensive attention reallocated from inside to the perimeter in Johnson's absence. In all, the Cameroon native is shooting just 19-of-45

(42-percent) from the floor and 2-of-9 from behind the arc in the four games played without the team's starting center.

Miami has a strong backcourt too, spearheaded by senior point guard Durand Scott and upstart sophomore Shane Larkin. But the Diamond Head Classic showed the Hurricanes are at their best with a balanced offensive attack, not when their two starting guards combine for 26 shots per game, as Scott and Larkin did against the Sycamores.

The Canes, to their own detriment, have never run their offense through Reggie Johnson, even when he's healthy. The program's influx of talented gunners over the years (e.g., Scott, Larkin, Malcolm Grant, Garrius Adams) has centralized the offense upon the perimeter. If Johnson cannot stay healthy—and he hasn't in either of the last two seasons, including this one—Miami's backcourt will bear the burden once again in a guard-stacked conference. And that isn't auspicious news for a program tabbed as an under-the-radar ACC contender before the season started.

More than any other team in the league relies upon one player, Miami needs a healthy and productive Johnson the rest of the way to even approach the preseason expectations of the team that now seem far-fetched. Any tenuous hope the Canes have of living up to the lofty hype hinges on the sturdy shoulders and fragile finger of the ACC's most valuable player.

Men's Hoops Under the Radar

CaneSport
Jim Martz
Dec. 22, 2012

What will it take for Jim Larranaga's talented basketball team to receive the attention and respect it deserves? Defeat top-ranked Duke?

The Hurricanes will have a couple of opportunities to do that - Jan. 23 at the BankUnited Center and March 2 at Durham, N.C.

It shouldn't have to come to that because the Canes already have knocked off then-13th ranked and traditional power Michigan State 67-59. And they have clearly shown they can with poise against quality opponents on the road such as UMass and Central Florida.

Larranaga is fielding what is arguably the best UM men's basketball team since Leonard Hamilton took the Hurricanes to the NCAA Sweet 16 in 2000. Yet the Canes can't make page one of the home town paper, the Miami Herald, except when they whipped the Spartans.

When they trounced undefeated UNC-Charlotte 77-46, the story was back on page seven. After they thumped a 6-2 UCF team in Orlando 72-50, they moved up to page two but there were just four paragraphs, no quotes.

Page one, meanwhile, had a story on what NHL players are doing during the lockout and a feature on the Petino father-son meeting between Louisville and FIU, plus the Heat and Dolphins.

And on the glut of five sports talk stations in South Florida you seldom hear mention of UM basketball except on the UM flagship station WQAM's once a week show.

Moreover, the two major rankings, the AP (writers/broadcasters) and USA Today (coaches) have barely noticed. The Hurri-

canes are unranked by the coaches and they received only three votes in the AP poll, putting them 35th.

They are getting some attention nationally, however. The CBSSports.com RPI rankings have Miami 11th, ahead of such teams as Indiana, Louisville, Florida and Ohio State, who are in the top 10 of the AP and coaches' polls.

Someone else has noticed, and his perspective should be respected. Pete Gillen, basketball analyst for CBS College Sports Network and former coach at Virginia, Xavier and Providence, gushed about Larranaga and the Hurricanes during Tuesday night's national telecast of the UCF game.

"They could be an Elite Eight team," Gillen said more than once. "They could be one of the top two in the ACC, right behind Duke ... They're better than North Carolina State (ranked 25th) ... I love their back court."

Gillen lauded the Canes' tenacious defense and noted that defense would be a crucial factor in carrying a team deep into the NCAA tournament. Miami is holding opponents to an average of just 59.7 points per game.

Teams that go deep in the Big Dance usually feature a strong defense and quality guards. Hamilton's team that advanced to the Sweet 16 had those qualities as the veteran-laden team was led by guard-forwards Johnny Hemsley and Vernon Jennings and forward Mario Bland.

This year the Hurricanes boast an experienced team and much more size than the Sweet 16 squad, with 6-10, 292-pound center Reggie Johnson; 6-11, 242-pound forward Kenny Kadji; 6-5, 220-pound guard Trey McKinney Jones; and 6-5, 203-pound guard Durand Scott, all of them seniors.

Then there's the sparkplug point guard in 5-11, 176-pound sophomore Shane Larkin, who

was just named to the 2013 Bob Cousy Award watch list. The award recognizes the top point guard.

Gillen said the Hurricanes lack depth, though they have received quality minutes from 6-10 senior forward-center Julian Gamble. But they need more from 6-6 junior forward Erik Swoope and hot-cold 6-6 junior guard Rion Brown. They miss 6-6 guard Garrius Adams, who is injured and may have to be redshirted.

Tonye Jekiri, a 7-0 freshman center, is showing improvement and, obviously, is a shot blocker.

Larranaga likes the balance on the team and the way players share the ball.

Perhaps the 63-51 loss at Florida Gulf Coast in the second game of the season skewed the perception of this team. But FGC is a decent team at 8-4 and the Hurricanes didn't have Scott in the early season due to NCAA sanctions carried over from last season.

Miami takes a six-game winning streak into the Diamond Head Classic in Honolulu, Hawaii, beginning today against the host Hawaii Rainbows. The tournament provides an opportunity for the Canes to build their resume and RPI.

It may not get them on page one of the home-town paper, and it may take a defeat of Duke to get mention on radio talk shows. But you've got to like what Larranaga and his staff and players are putting together this season.

Elite Eight? That would get everyone's attention.

Long Hawaii trip has long-term impact for Miami

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Dec. 22, 2012

The University of Miami men's basketball team, which has quietly racked up a 7-1 record and a No. 10 RPI rating, crammed its long legs into an airplane and traveled 4,800 miles to Hawaii for the Diamond Head Classic, an eight-team holiday tournament that includes fourth-ranked Arizona and 18th-ranked San Diego State.

The Hurricanes arrived on Thursday night, took the obligatory leis-around-the-neck photo at the Honolulu airport, and spent Friday practicing and getting acclimated to the time difference. Their first game is Saturday at 7:30 p.m. local time (12:30 a.m. Sunday, Miami time) against the host University of Hawaii. Talk about a home-court advantage for the Warriors. The one team that didn't have to travel will play the team that traveled the longest distance.

If UM wins, its Sunday opponent would be the winner of the game between Arizona and East Tennessee State. Other first-round games are Indiana State vs. Ole Miss and San Francisco vs. San Diego State. The final is Christmas Day.

Aside from the rare opportunity to play in Hawaii and visit Pearl Harbor, which the Canes plan to do Monday, UM coach Jim Larranaga views this tournament as an excellent chance for his team to maintain its high RPI before heading into the Atlantic Coast Conference schedule in January. The Canes received votes in the AP Top 25 poll last week, and a win over Arizona would surely vault them to the list.

"Your nonconference schedule is built with one thing in mind, and that is to have a quality RPI ranking at the end of your nonconference games," Larranaga said. "The teams in this tournament, a number of them are in the top

20 to 40, and that's the kind of competition you want to face if you want to earn an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament.

"So, it's going to be vitally important for us to play well and advance to improve our status for the selection committee to look at us as a quality team deserving of a bid."

The Warriors are playing well of late and eager for the challenge.

"Obviously, we have a huge game against an outstanding team in Miami," coach Gib Arnold said. "They're getting top-20 votes and they're big and strong and athletic like an ACC team. ... We have a lot to prove. We have a chance to play those guys at home, and we really want to play our best."

The Warriors are 5-3 and back in Honolulu after playing last week on the island of Moloka'i, where they beat NCAA Division II neighbor Chaminade 104-93.

The Warriors hit season highs for points, field-goal percentage (.600), three-pointers made (11) and three-point percentage (.524).

"If we come out on top out there, I think we'd definitely be nationally ranked," UM guard Rion Brown said. "We're all excited to see Hawaii, but our main goal out there is to come home with the title."

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/12/22/3153153/long-hawaii-trip-has-long-term.html#storylink=cpy>

Hawaii trip not a Christmas vacation for 'Canes

FOX Sports Florida
Charlie McCarthy
Dec. 21, 2012

Nobody needs to tell Miami coach Jim Larranaga that a trip to Hawaii does not guarantee fun and games.

Games? Yes. Three to be exact.

Fun? Not necessarily.

"We went out there my first year (as an assistant) at Virginia and we almost lost to Chaminade in a very, very close game," Larranaga said Wednesday. "Two years later, we went out there as the No. 1 in the country and did lose to Chaminade.

"We kind of put them on the map back then, and people thought, well, we didn't play very well. The fact of the matter is, those teams on the islands are good. They have talent."

Larranaga and the Hurricanes now are on Oahu, where they will play in the Diamond Head Classic. Miami will face Hawaii — "the home team, they don't have to travel at all," as Larranaga put it — on Saturday night (or Sunday morning, 12:30 a.m. ET). The Canes then will meet fourth-ranked Arizona or East Tennessee State on Sunday before playing a final game on Christmas Day.

Other teams competing in the tournament include No. 18 San Diego State, Indiana State, Mississippi and San Francisco.

"We're excited to go there because we heard it's like a paradise," 7-foot freshman center Tonye Jekiri said. "But our major goal is to win the tournament. The way we're playing now, we really see ourselves winning the whole thing. That would be the biggest fun we have there -- winning the tournament."

Miami, fourth behind N.C. State, Duke and North Carolina in a preseason poll of the ACC

coaches, stumbled badly when it lost at Florida Gulf Coast in the season's second game. Guard Durand Scott, who leads the Canes in scoring with 15.6 ppg., missed that game while sitting out the second half of a six-game NCAA suspension for receiving impermissible benefits that began last season.

Scott and the 'Canes, however, have rebounded nicely; victories against then-No. 13 Michigan State at home and at Massachusetts have been the highlights of the non-conference slate so far. Miami won its sixth straight game by beating the University of Central Florida 72-50 at Orlando on Tuesday night.

The Hurricanes then left Miami on Thursday morning for a nearly 5,000-mile commercial flight trek to Dallas and then Honolulu. The team planned to enjoy a luau Friday night and a trip to Pearl Harbor on Christmas Eve — other than that, the focus will be basketball.

"This kind of trip is very much like a business trip in that you're so busy preparing ... there's not a lot of down time," Larranaga said. "There's a lot of travel because we're traveling so far. I would say it's a good time to bond but there's not a lot of free time."

With Arizona a potential second-round opponent at the Classic and a possible game against San Diego State, the Hurricanes (7-1) know they can crack the Top 25 with a good showing.

The Diamond Head Classic also represents a chance to impress the NCAA Tournament selection committee.

"Your non-conference schedule is really built with one thing in mind, and that's to have a quality RPI ranking at the end of your non-conference play," Larranaga said.

"The teams in this tournament, a number of them are in the Top 20, 40, 50 ... and that's the kind of competition you want to face if you

want to earn an at-large bid. So it's going to be vitally important for us to play well and advance to improve our status for the Selection Committee to look at us as a quality team deserving of an at-large bid."

After returning from Hawaii, the Hurricanes will enjoy a few days of rest before playing host to La Salle on Jan. 2. The ACC slate will begin Jan. 5 at Georgia Tech.

Scott and fellow senior Reggie Johnson (12.6 ppg., 10.1 rpg.) have led the way for a balanced Miami attack. Sophomore Shane Larkin (14.8) and seniors Kenny Kadji (11.3) and Trey McKinney Jones (11.0) round out the double-figure scorers.

Besides his players' knack for sharing the ball offensively, Larranaga has been pleased with defensive improvements.

"What we've been working in is 'help the helper,'" Larranaga said. "We've been OK with the first help — a guy gets beat and the first help is there, but then often ... let's say it's Reggie or Kenny, they help but then their man scores. So we need someone to help the helper."

"You need first help, second help and third help. We did that (Tuesday night) probably the best we've done."

With ACC opponents waiting soon after the Diamond Classic, the Hurricanes realize there's no time to relax.

"We're still striving to get better," Scott said. "We just want to go out there and work hard and get better at every key aspect of the game."

Chris Caputo Is Living His Hoop Dream

Westfield State Communications Office
Mickey Curtis
Dec. 20, 2012

It is a full court shot from Parenzo Hall Gym to the big time world of college basketball, but Westfield State alumnus Chris Caputo is living his dream as an assistant coach at the University of Miami.

Caputo, a 2002 Westfield State graduate and a four-year letterwinner as a reserve point guard for the Owls, has been in sunny south Florida for the past two years. Prior to that, he was a member of the George Mason University coaching staff in Fairfax, Va., for nine years. The 32-year-old Caputo already has many memorable moments in his short basketball odyssey: Miami's upset victory at Duke last season, George Mason's remarkable run to the NCAA Division I Final Four in 2006, and his four years at Westfield State.

"I've seen a lot of great places like Duke and North Carolina and I have been to the Final Four, but I wouldn't trade those for my time at Westfield; it was special and worthwhile," said Caputo the day before the Miami Hurricanes departed for a Christmas Tournament in Hawaii.

Caputo's passion for coaching began at an early age and continued at Westfield State. As a seldom-used point guard for the Owls, Caputo was a keen observer on the bench as a member of Westfield State head coach Rich Sutter's first recruiting class in 1998. In between classes he was a regular visitor to Sutter's office, peppering him with questions on coaching strategies. Caputo also watched a lot of game tape on Westfield opponents and gave Sutter detailed scouting reports. "I don't know if he used them," said Caputo with a chuckle.

Interestingly, Caputo stresses his academics at Westfield State also played a pivotal role in preparing him for the 24/7 world of big-time college basketball.

"My time at Westfield was really valuable," said Caputo. "It's a place where you cannot get lost because it is a smaller school and a lot of demands are put on you academically. I

was a finance and economics major where I had to grind it out and fight through it studying, especially near the end of the semester. That's helped me today."

Caputo's connections (he and Miami head coach Jim Larranaga both graduated from Archbishop Malloy High School in New York City where they played for the legendary coach Jack Curran), coaching passion and work ethic landed him a job straight out of Westfield State as a volunteer assistant coach for Larranaga at George Mason. The Elmhurst, N.Y. native toiled as an unpaid assistant for three years before becoming a full-time staff member at George Mason in 2005. He even turned down several full-time paid positions at other colleges to remain at George Mason because it was such a price-less training ground.

"Ten years ago there were not as many NCAA restrictions and I was able to do more things," said Caputo in explaining why he didn't take the money and run. "In addition to breaking down film, I could make calls to recruits, work camps and recruit off campus within 30 miles of the school. Plus coach Larranaga is a great mentor and a veteran in the business."

Caputo's main duties at the University of Miami are recruiting and scouting opponents. He admits the pay and perks are good; his per diem is a lot more than the \$7.00 meal money he received at Westfield State. But the lifestyle isn't always glamorous and the pressure to win is enormous as Miami is a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"It's more than just two hours in suits coaching basketball," said Caputo. "There are late nights watching film, countless trips to see high school recruits that you are not going to get, and hours of sacrifice and family time missed. It is a tough profession and a very workmanlike job. But being at Miami has been great and the school has such a name brand – five football national titles and four baseball national titles. And the ACC is the best basketball conference in the country. Every night is a moment in this league. It's a great city with great weather and an exciting place to be."

Caputo's first "coaching moment" came when he was a sophomore in high school. In March of 1996, he and a friend went to the Hilton in midtown Manhattan, the headquarters for the

NCAA Final Four. Caputo watched in awe as a who's who of coaches roamed the lobby.

"I saw coaches like Mike Krzyzewski and Jerry Tarkanian and I said this is what I want to do, this is cool," said Caputo. "Then 10 years to the date I was living out my dream of walking around the lobby at the Final Four as a coach."

One day Caputo dreams of strolling the lobby and the sidelines as a Division I head coach. He is realistic that may not happen for some time, if at all, because head coaching positions are scarce and highly sought. But he does point out that that four of Larranaga's former assistants during the past decade are currently head coaches. A content Caputo just bides his time, works hard, and continues to network and make new friends in the coaching profession. He frequently sends text messages to Erik Spoelstrag, the head coach of the 2012 NBA champion Miami Heat.

"Anyone who is in this business does it to become a head coach," said Caputo. "But if I become a head coach it has to be the right fit for me; I am big on that. I am also big on knowing what the commitment is from a school. But if nothing comes along I will also be happy to work with Coach Larranaga."

Commitment and loyalty are constants for Caputo. He remains good friends with his

Westfield State teammates, in particular Phil Connors (Class of 2002). And two other Owl teammates – Kris Kachelmeyer (2001) and Jon Mazzone (2001) – visited with Caputo when Miami played at UMass Amherst in early December. Wherever Caputo's coaching odyssey takes him, Westfield State will be of big part of it.

"A lot of nice things happened to me at Westfield State and playing there was a great experience," said Caputo.

Miami No. 2 in ACC? So says Pete Gillen

Examiner
Paul Borden
Dec. 19, 2012

As he watched the University of Miami dismantled Central Florida 77-46 Wednesday night, CBS Sports Network announcer Pete Gillen, who coached Xavier, Providence, and Virginia, said he thought the Hurricanes were the second-best team in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Told of the comment the next day, Miami coach Jim Larranaga found it amusing.

"It's funny he would say that because he probably hasn't seen any of the other teams in the league," Larranaga said with a wry smile. "When listening to commentators, I often am amused by some of their comments.

"Their job is to enhance the viewers' experience. So they'll say things in the extreme to get the audience thinking, 'Wow! That guy is great! He is unstoppable!'

"A comment like that is good for our recruiting, but other than that it doesn't mean anything."

Well, not to argue for the erudite Larranaga, one of the more studious coaches of the game, but to be considered just behind Duke and ahead of such traditional powers as North Carolina, North Carolina State, and Maryland does mean something else. It is evidence of the respect his program has gained in just over a year.

Last season's team, Larranaga's first at Coral Gables, won 20 games overall and was 9-7 in the ACC but was left out when it came time to pick teams for the NCAA tourney. The Hurricanes settled for the NIT.

This season, though there was an inexplicable stumble at Florida Gulf Coast when Miami was

without senior guard Durand Scott, the Hurricanes have won seven of eight games, beaten a ranked foe in Michigan State, and have won six in a row since Scott returned.

They are now headed for Hawaii and the Diamond Head Classic with an opportunity to make an even bigger impression.

If the Hurricanes are able to handle tourney host Hawaii in their opener on Saturday, a matchup with fourth-ranked Arizona likely will await in the second round the next day. The Wildcats open the event against East Tennessee State.

"I've been pleased with the progress we've been making defensively," Larranaga said, noting the wins over Massachusetts, Charlotte, and UCF that followed the Michigan State game. "I think it's shown up in games.

"I've been pleased with how we've shared the ball on offense. We have five guys averaging in double figures. There's a lot of balance in the inside and outside attack.

"And we've matched up pretty well with these teams. So it's been a good test, and we've responded very well."

The Diamond Head tourney is an eight-team affair that winds up on Christmas Day. In addition to Arizona, San Diego State also is nationally ranked at No. 18 in the Associated Press poll.

Ole Miss, San Francisco, and Indiana State round out the field.

After returning to the mainland on Dec. 26, the Hurricanes will have the opportunity to adjust to the time zone differences with their next game not until Jan. 2 when La Salle visits.

The Hurricanes open their 18-game ACC schedule at Georgia Tech on Jan. 5.

"As I've mentioned before, your non-conference schedule is really built with one thing in mind," Larranaga said. "And that is to have a quality RPI ranking at the end of your non-conference.

"And the teams in this tournament, a number of them are in the top 20, top 40, top 50, and that's the kind of competition you want to face if you want to earn an at-large bid.

"So it's going to be vitally important to play well and advance to improve our status for the selection committee to look at us as a quality team deserving of an at-large bid."

Underrated Miami looks like one of ACC's best

FOX Sports

Andrew Jones

Dec. 19, 2012

Forget the loss at Florida Gulf Coast, as just about every team gets a mulligan in college basketball. The Miami Hurricanes are developing into one of the best teams in the ACC.

And if you are one of the ACC's top clubs, you are among the best in the nation, too. Putting Miami in such company isn't much of a reach if you have seen the Hurricanes play in recent weeks.

The Hurricanes have some issues, for sure. They can be a bit reckless with the ball, can take some questionable shots and don't have a great deal of proven depth right now. They could also use a more classic midsize slasher to complement their backcourt and front line.

Otherwise, the 'Canes are good. Really good.

While the national pundits have ignored them, the 'Canes have put together quite a run, including Tuesday night's 72-50 romp at Central Florida.

Miami streaked to a 17-4 early lead that included three 3-pointers, one by Reggie Johnson, a beautiful backdoor layup, slam-dunk follow of a miss, a nifty layup by Shane Larkin on a feed from power forward Kenny Kadji, and a minute later a dunk by Kadji off a dish from Larkin.

And this was against a UCF club that played in the CBI a year ago, entered the game 6-2 and started transfers from Oklahoma and Virginia. It also was on the road.

Most impressive about Miami (7-1) in the past few weeks is how it has managed to move from one important game to the next without mental drop-offs. The 'Canes didn't even hit a speed bump going through the investment in

the win over Michigan State, which included the school handing out shirts to students to wear.

After beating the Spartans in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge, the 'Canes followed up with an impressive road win over a UMass team that has a good shot to play in the NCAA tournament. And after 12 days without a game for the final-exam period, Jim Larranaga's club routed then-unbeaten Charlotte by 31 points. Four days later, Miami clobbered UCF.

The Hurricanes, who have five starters averaging double figures in scoring, play with a confident swagger, but their dreams are no longer just fantasies, and the players know it. Johnson said in October that the only difference between Miami, Duke and North Carolina are the names on the front of the jerseys.

Of course, when the 'Canes lost to Florida Gulf Coast on Nov. 13, such a comment was swatted away like a gnat on a humid southern evening. In fairness to the 'Canes, senior guard Durand Scott didn't play that night, and not having him out there left a void that wasn't filled.

"Durand is our leader vocally on the court," Larkin said. "He's the loudest person on the team. He's always talking, getting everybody in the right position, and I think that's something we were missing when he was out. Nobody took that leadership role."

So Miami's foundation was rattled a little, and overlooking an opponent was an obvious lesson. But it has handled that loss well and may be better in the long term for the experience. Watching the 'Canes tear apart UCF on Tuesday, nobody ever could guess this club already had suffered such an indignity.

The 6-foot-10, 292-pound Johnson is smart and much more well-rounded a player than his body type might suggest. Scott is athletic and gives the team the kind of toughness usually associated with players from the Bronx.

Kadji is a long athlete from Cameroon whose game continues to grow. Trey McKinney Jones is a long-bomb shooter, and Larkin may be the most underrated point guard in the nation. He needs to distribute a bit more, but he's cat-quick and super-fast. Larkin sees the floor well and comes from great bloodlines. His father, Barry Larkin, was recently inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

The 'Canes can run, they can bully you in a half-court game, they can adapt on the fly and they play defense. Opponents are converting just 38 percent of their shots from the field, including just 29.5 percent from behind the 3-point line.

Four seniors start and two key reserves are also in their final years of eligibility. Plus, no other ACC team whose coach isn't named Williams or Krzyzewski has a coach who already has guided a team to the Final Four. Larranaga took George Mason there in 2006.

Miami has more than enough to contend for the ACC regular-season title and make a run for something special in March. All Larranaga must do is keep this bunch on the same page and thinking about this season and not their futures.

ACC Hoops Power Rankings

FOX Sports South

Andrew Jones

Dec. 17, 2012

Miami headlined a light week in ACC hoops by taking apart a previously unbeaten Charlotte team last Friday night.

The Hurricanes hadn't played in 13 days, but they looked well-drilled and ready to rock from the opening tip. Miami coach Jim Larranaga's team, which throttled the 49ers 77-46, has five players averaging scoring in double figures. Here are this week's rankings:

1. Duke (9-0)

The Blue Devils didn't play last week but should move up to No. 1 in the national rankings after Indiana lost to Butler on Saturday and Florida fell at the buzzer at Arizona.

2. Miami (6-1)

The Hurricanes pummeled previously unbeaten Charlotte by 31 points last Friday. The victory came after a 13-day layoff for Miami, which was led by Kenny Kadji's 17 points and 16 from Durand Scott. This is a very good basketball team that appears to be improving each time it plays.

3. Maryland (9-1)

A 71-38 rout of Monmouth marked the Terrapins' week. They have now won nine straight games after losing to Kentucky in the opener, though their best wins are at Northwestern and over George Mason in D.C. Maryland is the No. 4 rebounding team in the nation.

4. N.C. State (7-2)

As Lorenzo Brown improves learning how to manage a team and game, the Wolfpack will also move forward. Brown is playing well of late, and along with Richard Howell is giving State the gravitas and grit it needs.

5. North Carolina (8-2)

While the Tar Heels have point guard issues, they still lead the nation in assists, and while they have rebounding issues, Roy Williams' team is still 7th in the nation on the boards. Carolina can shoot, but it doesn't defend well as it should and doesn't get enough meaningful rebounds. Its only game was a 83-87 win over East Carolina, though UNC was more than six points better on the afternoon.

6. Virginia Tech (8-2)

Losing at home to Georgia Southern on Saturday is no way to maintain your spot in any ranking, and it also basically cancels out at least the Iowa win. So the Hokies can't afford to slip up anymore or once again VPI will plant itself on the fence and hope for a miracle.

7. Virginia (8-2)

The Wahoos didn't play so they remain in this position. Interesting game versus Old Dominion in Richmond coming up this weekend for Tony Bennett's squad.

8. Clemson (6-3)

A week after blowing a late lead to Arizona, the Tigers jumped all over Florida A&M in freshman Jordan Roper's first career start. Roper led Clemson with 16 points, as the Tigers owned the glass 47-31.

9. Georgia Tech (6-2)

No game this past week for the Yellow Jackets, though they have two this week and four more before ACC play begins. All four contests are at home in the new McCamish Pavilion and versus patsies.

10. Florida State (5-4)

FSU better get its act in gear before the Seminoles still have a few potentially tough nonconference games left before ACC play begins. Senior Michael Snaer needs to lead by example more than he has.

11. Wake Forest (4-5)

Wake didn't play last week but BC did, and the Eagles offered no reasons why they should jump the Demon Deacons.

12. Boston College (5-5)

A 61-59 overtime victory over New Hampshire isn't exactly the kind of win people notice in a good way.

Charlotte coach sold on Hurricanes

Examiner.com
Paul Borden
Dec. 16, 2012

University of Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga says it's too soon to start looking at things such as RPI rankings -- a formula that figures into the selection process when the NCAA issues at-large bids to the national tournament -- for his Hurricanes at this early point of the season.

With their win over Charlotte Friday, the Hurricanes have won five in a row since senior guard Durand Scott completed serving the last three games of the six-game suspension the NCAA levied against him late last season.

They will take a 6-1 record to Orlando Tuesday for their last outing before heading to Hawaii and the Diamond Head Classic for the Christmas holidays. They open against tourney host Hawaii.

After that comes their final non-conference outing, a home game against La Salle on Jan. 2.

Then, Larranaga says, will be the time to start looking at Miami's RPI status.

Charlotte coach Alan Major doesn't have to wait, however, to see good things in Miami's future. He witnessed firsthand just what the Hurricanes can do after they dismantled his previously unbeaten 49ers 77-46.

Offensively, he said, the Hurricanes' scoring balance makes them difficult to defend. All five starters are averaging in double figures with Scott and sophomore guard Shane Larkin both averaging 15.3 points per game to lead the way.

Senior center Reggie Johnson is averaging a near double-double -- 12 points and 9.7 rebounds -- followed by wingman Trey McKinney

Jones at 11.7 and forward Kenny Kadji at 11.4.

"You can't really go into a game and say, 'All right. Let's chop these two guys out and let the other three get theirs.' ... Any time a guy is averaging in double figures that means he has a chance to get 16 or 20," Major said. "So it's tough to try to pick one guy to just shut down.

"That's probably their biggest strength, just their balance across their starting five."

Defensively, Miami's size up front in the 6-10 Johnson, 6-11 Kadji, 6-10 Julian Gamble, and 7-0 Tonye Jekiri presents a formidable wall.

"They're a very long team," Major said. "I think they were 37, 38 field goal percentage defense coming in. And because of their rotation, playing eight guys, they're not a team that overly extends themselves.

"They tend to let you come to them, whether it's penetration or driving the ball. When you drive to the rim, there tends to be three guys standing right across the front of the rim, so they don't want to give you a direct layup.

"They force you to play in the mid-range a little bit and force you to make some perimeter shots. They force you to finish against their contact around the rim.

"I think because of their size and length they have a chance to go very far with that type of length across the front line."

How far?

Major called them a potential "Sweet 16" team for the NCAA tourney.

But, as Larranaga would say, it's still early. Very early.

UM's Shane Larkin finds comfort zone, doubles output

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Dec. 18, 2012

Sometimes, Shane Larkin just likes to get away.

The Miami guard will grab teammate Julian Gamble and "go wherever the world takes us," he said. It's about team-building, and the products of such escapes are paying off.

There's a unity the Hurricanes' leading scorer and assist distributor found with teammates in his second season in Coral Gables. The son of Hall of Fame baseball player Barry Larkin is now comfortable in his role as a sophomore after taking the occasional lumps as a freshman.

He's averaging 15.3 points a game as Miami (6-1) won its fifth straight with a 77-46 pounding of previously unbeaten Charlotte on Friday night.

"Knowing what they expect of you just makes it easier to go out there and play your game instead of trying to please everybody, which I think I was really trying to do last year," said Larkin, a product of Orlando's Dr. Phillips High School. "I was just trying to please everybody and make sure they were feeling good about themselves. But this year, they know what they want out of me. So I can just play my game."

Part of the problem last year was a late arrival. He didn't enroll until August, so he missed out on the crucial bonding period most players enjoy while taking summer classes.

And it's not like Year 1 was a disaster. Larkin made the ACC All-Freshman Team while averaging 7.4 points and 2.5 assists per game. By early December, he was a starter, but he wasn't quite sure how his veteran teammates

reacted to that.

Coach Jim Larranaga saw Larkin "trying to fit in," last year on a veteran team with established bonds.

"As a freshman, there's a natural tendency to defer to the upperclassmen," Larranaga said. "But after a year, especially after being a starter . . . I was on him from Day 1 at practice to think of himself as a 15-point-a-game scorer."

And he has with a few tenths to spare. Larkin also tries to speak up on a team Larranaga said is among the quietest he's coached.

"I'm a lot more vocal. I'm just more comfortable with everybody off of the court. So on the court, I feel like I can tell them what I see and they just accept it more," Larkin said. "Last year, they were like 'Ah, he's a freshman. He doesn't know what he's talking about.' Now everybody is just more comfortable with each other so I think it makes it a lot easier to communicate on the floor."

Center Reggie Johnson sees a more confident Larkin out there this year. He sometimes needed a boost in practice back then, but now he's one of those leading the way.

"Shane's getting extra shots up now," Johnson said. "Last year, he did it. But he did it because it was the right thing to do. This year I feel like he does it because he wants to be a better player."

PG Larkin Emerging as a Sophomore

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Dec. 13, 2012

Miami point guard Shane Larkin has emerged in his sophomore season leading the team in scoring. He'll look to help lead the Hurricanes to their fifth straight win Friday against Charlotte.

The once reserved point guard who was a late arrival at Miami last season whose primary concern was pleasing his teammates, is having a breakout season as a sophomore and accepting his role as a leader on the floor.

"It makes it easier just go out there and play your game instead of trying to please everybody, which I think I was really trying to do last year, just trying to please everybody and make sure they were feeling good about themselves," Larkin said. "This year they know what they want out of me so I need to play my game and everybody just plays well together."

After averaging 7.4 points and 2.5 assists on 36 percent shooting last season as a freshman earning All-ACC rookie team honors, Larkin has exploded as a sophomore averaging a team-high 16.3 points and 3.7 assists while shooting 56.5 percent in six games for the 5-1 Hurricanes.

"All of the work I've done this summer and extra work I've been coming in late getting shots up is just really showing on the court this year," Larkin said.

Larkin has scored at least 13 points and played at least 34 minutes in all six games this season, which includes a career-high 27-point night against Jacksonville.

His shooting percentages are drastically improved as he's also hitting 52 percent (13 for 25) from behind the 3-point line and is an 83 percent free-throw shooter.

Teammates have seen Larkin take necessary steps to be a better player this year.

"He's been more of a complete basketball player I'd say," senior center Reggie Johnson said. "Shane is coming in getting extra shots up. Last year he did it but he did it just cause it was the right thing to do. This year I feel Shane does it because he wants to be a better player. Shane is coming to practice every day with the mindset of getting better. Last year

coach had to stay on Shane for practicing hard, but this year he's practicing hard."

Shane Larkin scored a career-high 27 points against Jacksonville on Nov. 16.

While Larkin ranks third in the ACC in scoring, he would like to see his assists improve as he currently is eighth in the conference.

"I always take what the defense is giving me, this year I'm averaging 16 points and 4 assists or something like that," he said. "Those are OK numbers, but I would like to see my assist numbers go up. I'm averaging four, but the top point guards are averaging seven or eight so I would like to see my assists go up even if that means the points drop. I would take that assist to point ratio."

Larkin attributes his connection with his teammates, which includes five seniors in the regular rotation, as another reason for his growth. He believes his teammates are more responsive to his opinions.

"I have a good relationship with everybody off the court so I think on the court I can tell them what I see and they accept it more whereas last year they would be like, 'oh he's a freshman, he doesn't know what he's talking about,'" Larkin said. "But now everybody is just more comfortable with each other and that makes it easier to communicate on the court."

Senior backcourt mate Durand Scott says Larkin has been good for team chemistry.

"A great kid, always laughing, always smiling, just goofing around trying to make everybody around him happy," Scott said. "He creates a happy environment for everybody, he's not so serious, but he works hard and when things go wrong, trust me he turns the switch on real quick and you know when he's upset and when he wants to turn it up and start playing good."

The Hurricanes take a 5-1 record into Friday's home game against 9-0 Charlotte.

"I know Charlotte is a great team, they're 9-0 and beat Davidson recently and they're a great team," Larkin said. "I think we have to come out there with the focus and energy and not just take that, 'we're good now, we're 5-1, we have four wins in a row and just be calm and they're just Charlotte, in the A-10, not a good team.' We can't come out and do that. We need to take everybody seriously and play like there's five McDonald's All-Americans out

there."

Miami came into the season with expectations of reaching the NCAA tournament behind an experienced group. A loss to lower-tier opponent Florida Gulf Coast in the second game affected their case for being a top 25 team, but they pulled out an upset over then No. 13-ranked Michigan State and have won four straight.

"I think we're one of the better teams in the country right now with the way we're playing, but you need those big wins," Larkin said. "I know we had one against Michigan State, but that kind of balances out with the Florida Gulf Coast loss. I wouldn't say we're under the radar, just that one loss pulled us down in the rankings."

Head coach Jim Larranaga, who took in Larkin after spending the summer at DePaul before transferring to Miami before last year, has been impressed with Larkin.

"He is a very quiet, a very nice young man who happens to be very gifted athletically and from a family who is very gifted academically," Larranaga said. "He chose basketball as a youngster, but it could have been any sport. He would have been a great baseball player, football, or basketball player, any sport he chose to play because he has all of the natural physical talents that it takes plus all of the intangible qualities it takes to be successful in whatever he tries to do. He's smart, hard-working, has developed his fundamental skills, he's fast, quick, can jump, has basketball skills—can dribble, pass, and shoot, and he's a clutch player. He likes the big moment where you have to make a big shot, a big free throw or get a big stop so he's got the whole package."

Shane is the son of baseball Hall of Famer Barry Larkin, who still would have liked to have seen his son stick with baseball although has been very supportive of his basketball career.

"I know he wanted to play baseball," Shane said with a smile. "He still to this day is telling me I could go out there and hit 30 home runs and steal 50 bases, but it's just not the game that I fell in love with."

Barry Larkin's son starring for Miami basketball team

Palm Beach Post

Jorge Milian

Dec. 13, 2012

One of the perks of being Barry Larkin's kid is that you get batting tips from the likes of Ken Griffey Jr., Pete Rose and Tony Perez.

As a youngster, University of Miami sophomore point guard Shane Larkin annually accompanied his dad to spring training with the Cincinnati Reds, shagging fly balls, fielding grounders with his father's glove and learning to hit from some of the game's greatest players.

Larkin became close to Perez, a Hall of Famer who now serves as special assistant to Marlins executive Larry Beinfest, and adopted his batting style — complete with a leg kick. But Larkin's love affair with baseball came to an unhappy end on a Little League field in Orlando when he was 7.

"I went up to hit one day and my coach is like, 'Whoever taught you how to swing like that didn't know what they were talking about,'" Larkin said. "It really killed my love for the game. After that season, I never went back." Barry Larkin, a 12-time All-Star with the Reds and a 2012 inductee into the Baseball Hall of Fame, recalls being "incredibly disappointed at the time."

"He wanted to be a baseball player like his dad when he was little," the elder Larkin said this week from his home in Orlando. "And I really wanted him to play baseball. But, hey, he turned into the starting point guard at the University of Miami, which isn't too bad, either."

Baseball's loss has certainly been the Hurricanes' gain.

Going into Friday's game against Charlotte (9-0) at the Bank United Center, Larkin leads the surging Hurricanes (5-1) in scoring (16.4 ppg) and assists (3.8 apg). UM has won four consecutive games, including an upset of No. 13 Michigan State two weeks ago, and is receiving votes in both the Associated Press and USA Today polls.

An All-ACC Freshman selection last season,

Larkin's game has taken a giant step as a sophomore. After averaging 7.4 points in 2011-12, Larkin has more than doubled that number. He's scored at least 13 points in each of UM's six games, including a career-high 27 against Jacksonville on Nov. 16.

Instead of passing up shots to feed others as he did last season, Larkin has looked to score more this year. He's been efficient, too. Larkin is shooting an impressive .565 percent from the field and .520 from three-point range.

"When you come in as a freshman, especially with a veteran team like we had last year, you're kind of just trying to fit in and you don't want to step on anybody's toes," coach Jim Larranaga said. "You have a natural tendency to defer to the upperclassmen."

Larkin is only 5-foot-11 and 176 pounds but he's one of the quickest players in the ACC, which makes him a pest both offensively and defensively. Last season, he finished fifth in the conference with 1.6 steals per game.

"He's a terrific defender, he has great hands and vision, he's good in transition and he's tough," said Seth Greenberg, the former Virginia Tech coach now working as an ESPN college basketball analyst. "I love Shane Larkin's game."

Larkin almost never played at Miami. He originally enrolled at DePaul, but asked for a waiver from his scholarship because of an undisclosed medical condition that required him to be closer to home. The NCAA accepted an appeal from Larkin, allowing him to play immediately at Miami without sitting out a season.

Among those regularly watching Larkin at UM's home games is his father, who is a baseball analyst for ESPN.

"I know he wanted me to play baseball," Shane said. "He still tells me I could hit 30 home runs and steal 50 bases. But it was not the game I fell in love with."

That game is basketball and Shane is adding to the family lore in the sport. His uncle, Byron, is one of the most decorated players in Xavier University history and remains one of

the 25 top scorers in NCAA Division I history.

"Shane has always wanted to make his own way," Barry Larkin said. "He's always been very conscious of people believing that his success was predicated on his last name. That's one of the reasons our family moved from Cincinnati to Florida. I wanted my kids to have their own blank canvas and create their own identity."

Larranaga Discusses Recruiting

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Dec. 6, 2012

Jim Larranaga is getting used to recruiting in the toughest conference in the country.

With perennial national powers North Carolina and Duke in a competitive conference and a talent base that is spread out across the state, Larranaga has had to adjust to recruiting at Miami compared to being at George Mason.

"First, it's geography," Larranaga said. "There are a few local kids that we've been recruiting that we'd love to get, but a lot of the kids even if they're in the state of Florida they are three or four hours away. And we're going to have travel extensively up and down the eastern seaboard to get the players we're looking for. If we take a transfer we may be taking a kid even from the west coast. We've had to expand our target area for recruiting purposes including we may go to China to get a kid. That's how important getting the right kids are."

Larranaga prefers to play up-tempo on offense and a scramble man-to-man defense.

"There's two categories in the game that are very important to us--skills for the position, and speed and quickness," Larranaga said.

Getting high-caliber prospects has not been an issue says Larranaga, but making sure they are seriously interested is an issue.

"We're trying to learn the best way to market our university," Larranaga said. "We don't want kids to think they are coming here to be on vacation for four years. One of the great assets can be a liability. In terms of a quote, 'you're greatest strength is also your greatest weakness.' In recruiting one of our greatest assets is our geographical location. It's a beautiful, beautiful area to live in, but the negative side is of someone who wants to just come in and visit because it's a free weekend. We have to find the kids who are really seriously interested in us, not because the weather is nice. That's one of the reasons why it's important to recruit the state of Florida because they already know what the environment is like, it's not going to be a major change for them. They just like the idea that the Miami Heat are in town, we have a beautiful practice facility, in the ACC, and there's a lot of things that impresses a kid."

Recruiting at a program with just XXXX NCAA tournament appearances and one league title isn't easy when going up against in-conference foes with more tradition.

An ongoing NCAA investigation for infractions committed by the previous coaching staff has also been a hurdle Larranaga's staff has been trying to overcome.

UM Signee Deandre Burnett is an under-the-radar prospect the Miami staff is very high on.

"It's like this cloud that hangs over our heads," Larranaga said. "It comes up all the time and there's no answer to it. We just know that eventually that too will pass."

Larranaga feels the NCAA investigation has caused Miami to lose out on prospects.

"Yeah a bunch," he said. "Now losing may mean something different to you than it does to me. The week that the investigation was announced our five top prospects dropped us. That doesn't mean we were going to get any of them anyway because they were involved with other great schools, but those kids were planning on visiting us and it didn't go one phone call past the first one. We called one parent and he said, 'I just can't see my son going there with this cloud hanging over your heads.'"

So what does Larranaga tell recruits and their parents about the investigation?

"I just tell them we're going to build a championship-caliber team and we'd like your son to be a part of it," Larranaga said. "He's going to get a degree from a fantastic academic institution, live in a very wonderful environment, play with some other terrific players, have a great college experience, and go on and play professional basketball. Hopefully that's going to include appearances in the NCAA tournament, but we want know that until the investigation is over."

UM Signs Two in Early Period

Miami signed two guards--Damon Reed and Deandre Burnett--during November's early signing period.

Reed is a 6-foot-5 four-star prospect from Princeton, N.J. who averaged 26 points and nine rebounds as a junior.

"He's one of those guys that is great for team chemistry because he knows how to play," Larranaga said. "If there's an open man, he'll find him. If he has an open shot, he'll shoot it, he won't hesitate. If he beats his man, he knows where the next open man is. He really reads the defense well, plays well within a system, and plays well with other very good players. There's some guys that are great when they're the only show in town. He's not that way. He's actually better when he's surrounded by other really good players."

Burnett is a 6-foot-1 combo guard from Miami, who is playing a year at Massanutten, a prep school in Virginia.

"We were very impressed with him at Carol City when he averaged 36 points a game and he continues to perform very well at Massanutten," Larranaga said.

Burnett has put up big numbers this season including 39 against Oak Hill in a scrimmage, had 44 points against the Miller School, and went 16 for 19

with 40 points against South Kent.

"He's someone that really stayed under the radar scene from a lot of schools," Larranaga said. "The thing I will tell you is that he really wanted to come to the University of Miami. It was his favorite school, he wanted to come here. After watching him play the summer before his senior year the thing we wondered was if he was a point or a two-guard and as it turns out, he's really both. He can play either position, very good at finding the open man, is a very unselfish player, but he is a high octane player."

Burnett possess supreme confidence in his abilities and has a personality that Larranaga likes.

"I love talking to him because what I've told him and other recruits--what we're looking for are guys who want to be here with us, are really hard workers, and want to be in the gym all of the time because those guys find a way to win, find a way to be successful," Larranaga said. "In Deandre's case, he's worked very, very hard to prove himself and has a little bit of that chip on his shoulder that we like. He doesn't have that 'I expect everything to be given.' He has the attitude of, 'I expect to earn everything I get and I will.' We like that work ethic and attitude that he brings to the floor."

Looking to Add Four

Larranaga is looking to add four more players in the 2013 class.

"We're going to be looking at two more high school prospects, then possibly a junior college player, and possibly a transfer student," Larranaga said. "We've had great success (with transfers). Last year we had Malcolm Grant, Trey McKinney-Jones, Kenny Kadji, and Shane Larkin who were all basically transfers and all in our top eight players. So we want to keep that door open in the spring time because often times a very good player materializes."

Landing forwards is the focus.

"What we really need in this class are forwards," Larranaga said. "We need guys that are 6-7, 6-8, guys like C.J. Leslie who can play the 3 or the 4, matchup with smaller players, but also can play big. We had a great deal of success with that at George Mason finding undersized guys who played big. We're looking for that. It's not that easy at the ACC level because everyone we're interested in is also being recruited by the Big East, ACC, Big 10, and Big XII."

The aforementioned comment by Larranaga about finding a player in China wasn't an exaggeration. Last month Larranaga was in discussion with someone from China about a 7-foot-3 prospect.

"There's a lot of big kids and we need some size right now," Larranaga said.

Conference Power Rankings: ACC

ESPN.com
Robbi Pickeral
Nov. 30, 2012

With Duke's schedule and Virginia Tech's new coach, who would have guessed that the Blue Devils and Hokies would be the two remaining undefeated teams in the league right now? Here's this season's first set of ACC power rankings, based on a myriad of factors including how teams have played lately and the foes they've faced:

1. Duke. The Blue Devils aren't just tops in the ACC; they have a strong argument for being No. 1 in the nation after knocking off three top-5 teams in November (plus VCU and Minnesota). Forward Mason Plumlee has played his way into the early conversations on national player of the year.

2. Maryland. The only blemish on the schedule for the Terps so far: a three-point loss to then-third-ranked Kentucky. Transfer Dez Wells (12.0 points per game) has been a boost, while sophomore big man Alex Len has been a beast (15.2 ppg, 9.0 rebounds per game).

3. Miami. Durand Scott is back, and the Hurricanes finally seem to be getting it back together. After sitting out three games (including a perplexing loss to Florida Gulf Coast) due to suspension, the guard returned for his second contest of the season to help the Canes upset No. 13 Michigan State in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. Shane Larkin is averaging 16.8 ppg.

4. NC State. The Wolfpack showed some life with their late rally at No. 3 Michigan earlier this week -- but they aren't exactly looking like the team everyone expected to win the league. Still, NC State gets a chance to prove that it's learned something from that loss, as well as its blowout defeat to Oklahoma State in the Puerto Rico Tip-Off, when it plays UConn on Dec. 4.

5. North Carolina. The Tar Heels have trailed

by 20-plus points on two occasions already this season -- losses to Butler in the Maui Invitational and at top-ranked Indiana. Coach Roy Williams wants them to be tougher. They are a work in progress.

6. Virginia Tech. The Hokies get a huge test when 15th-ranked Oklahoma State travels to Cassell Coliseum this weekend. But right now, Erick Green (24.3 ppg) and Jarell Eddie (17.5 ppg) have them on a 6-0 roll under new coach James Johnson.

7. Virginia. The Cavs have won four straight, including an impressive victory at Wisconsin earlier this week, after starting the season 1-2. Joe Harris leads the team with 16.0 ppg, and guard Jontel Evans played 16 minutes against the Badgers in his return from a foot injury.

8. Florida State. Coach Leonard Hamilton expected more fire out of his team against No. 21 Minnesota. He didn't get it during the loss, which was sort of surprising after the Seminoles won the Coaches Vs. Cancer tournament championship. FSU, which also lost to South Alabama in the season opener, needs to be more consistent in order to move up.

9. Georgia Tech. The Yellow Jackets have nine players contributing at least nine minutes per game as they stress a balanced rebuilding approach. Junior forward Kammeon Holsey is the leading scorer (11.2 ppg) on a 4-2 team that finished in third place at the DirecTV Classic before falling to No. 22 Illinois.

10. Clemson. It will be curious to see whether forward Milton Jennings, suspended for the third time in two seasons, gets another chance. If not, Clemson loses one of its leading scorers, and one of only two seniors on the team.

11. Wake Forest. Travis McKie is averaging 14.3 ppg for the Demon Deacons, but things don't really seem to be getting much better in Win-

ston-Salem. They are 3-3, with a 16-point loss to Nebraska in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

12. Boston College. The sophomores continue experiencing the ups and downs of rebuilding, with an early slate that includes a loss to Bryant followed by a win over Penn State. Ryan Anderson is averaging 14.2 ppg.

10 Under-the-Radar Teams Who Could Make It to March

Bleacher Report

William Smith

Nov. 30, 2012

The Hurricanes looked poised to make it to March this year.

There has never been a question as to whether the Miami Hurricanes have the talent to reach the NCAA Tournament. It seems this team has underachieved whenever they get a big upset win or there is buzz surrounding them.

This year, however, has a different feel to it for this group. Led by sophomore point guard Shane Larkin—the son of MLB Hall-of-Famer Barry Larkin—the Hurricanes look like a viable threat to contend in the ACC this year and have five scorers averaging 10 or more PPG in their 4-1 start.

Skeptics point to an ugly 63-51 loss at Florida Gulf Coast in their second game of the season as proof this team doesn't have what it takes.

However, Miami upset No. 13 Michigan State 67-59 in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge behind senior Trey McKinney Jones' career-high 18 points.

Second-year coach Jim Larranaga seems to have this program moving in the right direction as the Hurricanes are seeking to make their first NCAA Tournament appearance since the 07-08 season. This year, it looks like they may have the mental toughness to match their talent.

5 things we learned from the ACC/Big Ten Challenge

CBS College Sports

Sean Bielawski

Nov. 29, 2012

Somehow, the ACC found a way to come out of the ACC/Big Ten Challenge with the first tie in the history of the event. The league picked up four wins on Wednesday night, two of them on the road, and No. 2 Duke brought the conference all the way back with its marquee win over No. 4 Ohio State.

Here are five things we learned during the ACC/Big Ten Challenge:

1. The ACC might be deeper than most thought before the season. The ACC split with the Big Ten even though North Carolina State, North Carolina and Florida State all lost. All three of those teams were picked to finish in the top four of the league. Virginia Tech is off to a 6-0 start and looked good beating Iowa by double-digits. Virginia picked up an impressive win at Wisconsin. Miami beat Michigan State and is a different team, as expected, with PG Durand Scott back in the lineup.

2. Maryland looks like the second-best team in the conference. There are two reasons the Terrapins look to be right behind Duke currently in the ACC hierarchy. The first is the availability of SF Dezmine Wells, who scored 23 points on 9 of 11 shooting against Northwestern. The second is the consistency of C Alex Len. Len has scored in double figures in each of Maryland's six games this season, and if he continues to average 15.2 points and 9.0 rebounds per game, the Terrapins will be a really tough out come March.

3. Florida State and North Carolina have a lot of work to do, but they aren't finished products. Both teams were beaten handily in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. However, the Tar Heels and Seminoles are young and still have players settling into new roles. One thing both teams need is for their best players -- Florida

State G Michael Snaer and North Carolina PF James Michael McAdoo -- to pick it up. Snaer is shooting 39.3 percent from the floor and averaging three turnovers per game. McAdoo needs to play better against quality competition. He was 4 for 15 from the field with 10 points against Indiana.

4. Joe Harris is more than ready to be Virginia's go-to player. Harris might be the most underrated player in the league. He had a game-high 22 points and also a team-high five assists in Virginia's 60-54 upset win at Wisconsin. Harris was 7 for 12 from inside the arc and has improved off the dribble, making plays for himself and teammates. There was a question as to who would step in to fill the void left by Mike Scott, but Harris has shown he will be the guy.

5. Wake Forest is in for another long season if it doesn't pick it up defensively. The Demon Deacons lost by 16 points at home to Nebraska, and the Cornhuskers shot 62 percent from the field in the second half. Wake is allowing opponents to shoot 45.6 percent so far this season, the worst mark in the ACC. F Travis McKie and G C.J. Harris, Wake's leading scorers, shot a combined 3 for 17 from the field and had 10 points between them. The Demon Deacons can't afford to have those two play poorly on the same night.

Larranaga, Miami Have Big Opportunity Against MSU

CBS.com
Jon Rothstein
Nov. 28, 2012

The buzz about the top teams in the ACC came and went this summer without Miami being mentioned.

The chatter surrounding the conference was fixated on the upside of NC State, the balance of Duke, and the potential of North Carolina.

The Hurricanes couldn't really be a contender at the top of the league, could they?

We'll have a pretty good idea if that's possible after Wednesday night when Miami hosts Michigan State as part of the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

"Everyone here is aware of the magnitude of this game," Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga said on Tuesday. "We had a pep rally and our student body is really excited. Our band size will quadruple for this game, making it almost like a football-related event."

Miami (3-1) played their first game of the season on Saturday with senior guard Durand Scott in the lineup. Scott missed the first three games of the season due a suspension but scored 15 points and grabbed five rebounds in a 77-62 win over a solid Detroit team.

"He makes a huge difference," Larranaga said of Scott. "He's our leading scorer, (our) best perimeter defender and (our) energy guy."

To beat the 13th-ranked Spartans, Miami will need big games out of their three frontcourt players – Julian Gamble, Kenny Kadji and Reggie Johnson, whom Larranaga said would return to the starting lineup against the Spartans after coming off the bench against Detroit.

"Michigan State is huge," Larranaga said. "They're a very big and strong team inside with (Derrick) Nix and (Adreian) Payne. They're also getting great guard play from Keith Appling."

It may be late November, but a victory over the Spartans could go a long way in the Hurricanes' at-large resume for the NCAA Tournament. Miami already has suffered a bad loss when they fell at Florida Gulf Coast. A win against Michigan State, a team that is expected to be in the Top 25 for the duration of the season, could be pivotal down the road.

"Winning the game would be a huge boost to our RPI," Larranaga said. "That's the one thing you aim to build with your non-conference schedule, and that's what we're focused on."

Hoops Buzz: 11/28

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Nov. 28, 2012

The Miami Hurricanes will host No. 13 Michigan State tonight at 7:30 in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge televised live on ESPN.

"It impacts a lot of things," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "It's on national television on ESPN so hopefully they'll be a national audience watching, hopefully the recruits watching will be impressed with the way we play. It's important for the ACC because it is a battle for bragging rights as to who is the best basketball conference in the country every year, and it is also big for future attendance if we win, I think our students and fanbase might turn out in larger numbers to watch us play."

Miami (3-1) will be facing a Michigan State (5-1) team that has had 20 turnovers in each of their last two games in wins over Oakland and Louisiana-Lafayette and could be without their second leading scorer in Gary Harris (shoulder).

"(Tom Izzo) is one of the premier coaches in the country, a Hall of Fame coach and he always has his teams very well prepared no matter who they play, no matter where they play," Larranaga said. "The areas where he believes his team needs to improve, he's going to have them improving. We're not a team that forces a lot of turnovers so it's not going to be all of a sudden that we're emphasized that we need to force a lot of turnovers. No we need to work on the areas that are most important for our success and that is defensive conversion, defense on 2 and 3-point shots, and defensive rebounding."

A win over Michigan State could be even more important because of the disappointing loss to Florida Gulf Coast.

"It would definitely help us," senior Reggie Johnson said. "But I think if we do good in the ACC even with that loss we can still get in the tournament."

Miami is coming off a 15-point win against Detroit Saturday.

Following the game against Michigan State, Miami will travel to UMass on Dec. 1. UMass went 1-2 at the Puerto Rico Tip-Off with losses to N.C. State and Tennessee.

News & Notes

- C Julian Gamble started in place of Reggie Johnson last game as Johnson returned to the lineup after missing one game due to an injured tailbone. "I like having the flexibility to be able to start either one of them," Larranaga said. "Maybe I'll start both of them at some point, I don't know. I just felt that they both played well. Reggie did a great job coming off the bench playing 27 minutes, Julian did a very good job as a starter playing 13 minutes and scoring seven points. Between the two of them they had 14 points and a bunch of rebounds (11), if we can get that every night that would be great."

- C Reggie Johnson has had a slow start out of the gate averaging 11.7 points and 10.0 rebounds while shooting 37 percent from the floor, 60 percent from the free-throw line, and averaging 3.0 turnovers a game. "It's still going to come to me," Johnson said. "I can do more. I can contribute more as far as rebounding more, it's going to come to me. I'm not worried, just teams are pretty good right now."

- C Reggie Johnson and PF Kenny Kadji have a friendly competition amongst each other as to who will get more rebounds each game. So far in the three games they've played together, Kadji has out-rebounded Johnson 2-1. "It's different, last year Kenny rebounded but this year he's making a strong emphasis to get in there," Johnson said. "The last couple of games he's been leading the team in rebounding and I'm happy with that."

- Larranaga had a talk with PF Kenny Kadji last week before the Detroit game and Larranaga was happy with the way Kadji responded scoring 14 points with 11 rebounds. "He played a lot more like we want him to play," Larranaga

said. "He caught the ball and shot it, he dribbled it a little bit, but he was very much under control and very much searching for his jump shot. I was very surprised he missed a couple of those because he's a terrific shooter and a couple of them were wide open looks that Shane Larkin hit him with."

- SG Bishop Daniels did not play last game against Detroit as the odd man out in the rotation with the return of Durand Scott. "It was basically me wanting to give Durand as many minutes as he could handle," Larranaga said. "I didn't plan on playing him 38 minutes, it just happened that way."

- When SG Durand Scott was out of the lineup the biggest thing he noticed from the sidelines was that the team lacked communication and energy, two of his strengths. He scored 15 points on 6 of 9 shooting in his season debut.

- SG Rion Brown has struggled with his shooting thus far making just 2 of 16 shots (12.5 percent) from behind the 3-point arc and 31 percent (9 of 29) overall. "He got some great looks the other day," Larranaga said. "I think shooting is a little bit like putting in golf, it becomes a little bit psychological and you start thinking too much. He shot the ball very well last week in practice, I was kind of surprised he didn't shoot better during the game."

- Against Detroit, Miami played 19 possessions of zone defense, which is the most they've played zone under Larranaga since he arrived last season. With the team struggling to execute his signature Scramble defense and being able to be completely proficient in man-to-man, Larranaga anticipates the team will go to zone more throughout the season than he's accustomed to. "Over the years I would say we've played 85-90 percent man-to-man, but we've used zone especially in certain years and this is going to be one of those years because of how big we are and we don't have DeQuan Jones, he normally gave us an opportunity to match up against an athletic forward," Larranaga said.

Durand Scott's return boosts Miami

ESPN.com

Andy Katz

Nov. 28, 2012

As part of the NCAA's six-game suspension that started in March, Durand Scott was forced to sit out Miami's first three games of this season.

Among those games: a stunning 63-51 loss at Florida Gulf Coast.

Need any more evidence as to how valuable Scott is to the Hurricanes?

"One of the things that he brings is that he's a leader," UM coach Jim Larranaga said. "And he brings a lot of energy, high energy. He's a tough competitor that plays hard. He will talk to his teammates and get them fired up. Without that personality, we have a lot of laid-back guys. We don't have those take-charge kind of people. Having him back dramatically helps our level of energy and helps our defense and rebounding."

Scott, who scored 15 points in his only appearance this season (a 15-point win over Detroit on Saturday), must show up big in tonight's home game against No. 13 Michigan State in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge, especially with Michigan State minus freshman guard Gary Harris (shoulder injury).

Miami's woes in the loss to Florida Gulf Coast weren't all due to Scott's absence. Trey McKinney Jones didn't play well, and shooting 8-for-26 from beyond the arc didn't exactly help the Canes' cause.

The Hurricanes are in the middle of a tough nonconference stretch. They play at UMass on Saturday and can't take Charlotte for granted either, as the unbeaten 49ers are coming off a title at the Great Alaska Shootout. Playing at Central Florida won't be a walk, and then go-

ing to the Diamond Head Classic and opening with host Hawaii -- San Diego State, Arizona and Ole Miss are all possibilities there as well -- means the Canes have the toughest opening draw.

"We're 3-1, and we're a much better basketball team with Durand Scott back," Larranaga said. "But this is a critical time in our schedule."

The Canes were a trendy pick to make the NCAA tournament out of the ACC. They still can with a muddled middle behind Duke and one would assume NC State and North Carolina if both Triangle schools can right themselves. Maryland seems to have moved ahead for now after a road win Tuesday at Northwestern. Florida State slid back with a home loss to Minnesota, a week after winning the CVC in Brooklyn with wins over BYU and Saint Joseph's.

But for Miami to knock off Michigan State, it'll need Scott to play his A-game and Reggie Johnson to be at full speed, knocking Derrick Nix out of the low block. Johnson fell in the Florida Gulf Coast game and didn't start against Jacksonville. He'll likely be back in the starting lineup against the Spartans.

Miami's ACC and national perception will be defined in the next few weeks, possibly as early as Wednesday. Larranaga wasn't pleased he inherited a four-game series with Florida Gulf Coast, including going on the road, but Miami needed to handle that adversity and did not. Tougher venues are to follow. Larranaga cautioned against putting too much stock in one November loss, citing that Florida State lost to Princeton and Harvard last season and went on to win the ACC tournament.

Miami is fully capable of such a run. But if Larranaga is to get the Canes into the NCAA tournament, this may be his best shot. Pitt and Syracuse are coming next season, and possibly Notre Dame as well. This doesn't mean Mi-

ami is off the board in 2014, but 2013 is ripe to grab a spot with such a middling conference.

"The year we went to the Final Four at George Mason, we lost to Creighton by 22 at home and it woke us up," Larranaga said. "We can certainly win Wednesday. We can win in Hawaii. We can certainly have a good season."

One loss to Florida Gulf Coast can be long forgotten deep into the ACC season. But it would be erased almost all together if Miami can make its mark against Michigan State tonight.

Larranaga, players talk Michigan State

CaneSport.com

Staff

Nov. 27, 2012

Coach Jim Larranaga's team faces a big test Wednesday night at the BankUnited Center against No. 13 Michigan State in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge that will be televised on ESPN.

Larranaga says something this team is focused on moving forward is "Making a dramatic improvement defensively. Last week (vs. Detroit) we played 19 possessions of zone defense for the first time since I've been here, and we're going to continue to look at that as an alternative to our man-to-man. Our man-to-man will still be our bread-and-butter, but we need a changeup. We've tried to scramble, are going to hold off on that for a while. Right now the zone will be our alternate defense."

Larranaga added that "it's on national television, so hopefully there'll be a national audience watching. Hopefully recruits watching will be impressed with the way we play. It's important for the ACC because we battle the Big Ten for bragging rights as to who the best basketball conference is in the country every year. And it's also big for future attendance - if we win Wednesday night I think our students and fan base might be excited and turn out in larger numbers to watch us play."

Michigan State (5-1) has 20 turnovers in each of its last two games. Larranaga was asked if UM can capitalize on those struggles.

"We are not a team that forces a lot of turnovers, so it's not going to be all of a sudden we're emphasizing to our team we need to force a lot of turnovers on Wednesday," Larranaga said. "No, we need to focus on defensive conversion, defense on two-point shots and three-point shots, and defensive rebounding."

The Spartans are coached by legendary coach Tom Izzo.

"I know Tom Izzo very well - he's a Hall of Fame coach, has all his teams prepared no matter who they play, where they play," Larranaga said.

Asked how this Hurricanes team might be different compared to the one that lost to Florida Gulf Coast two weeks ago, Larranaga said, "Well, it's the same team, but with a different mindset. Against Detroit (in the most recent game) we got back defensively much better, gave up four points in fast breaks as opposed to Florida Gulf Coast had 18. That's a huge difference."

* Durand Scott is happy to be back on the

court after missing the start of the season due to an NCAA suspension. He returned for the win over Detroit, scoring 15 points.

"It was great to be out there with the coaching staff, teammates, just go out there and do what I love to do," Scott said. "I think I did okay. I wanted to go out there and give effort, that was my main thing."

Looking ahead to playing Michigan State on national TV, Scott said, "It'll be a great experience. If we get the win it'd be a great win for us. We're just going to go out there and give our best effort. Hopefully the results end in our favor."

"They're very aggressive on the defensive end, pressure you offensively as well. We have to be tough, strong, mentally strong as well. We can't afford to turn the ball over against them, give them opportunities to score. Our big guys, guards have to get in there and rebound. Execute the game plan and we'll be okay."

- Scott says a role he sees for himself on this team is as a motivator. He says he thinks the team's struggles early-on were due to "a lack of communication and energy."

- How tough was his six-game suspension dating back to the end of last season?

"It was kind of hard, but those six games of suspension were a time of learning," Scott said. "I got to sit on the bench, see things from the coaches' eyes."

What types of things did he learn?

"Some people tended to be out of position - (didn't) really notice it," Scott said. "As I was sitting on the bench I knew I had to learn stuff like being in the right position, make sure I box out the rebound, talk on defense, make sure I'm running up and down. I learned a few things while I was on the bench."

- Scott says what he thinks he improved most since last season is his outside shot.

"I watched videos, saw what I need in my game - the main thing was my jump shot, perimeter from the three-point line," Scott said. "If I had to pick one thing (he worked on most) it would be my outside perimeter jump shot."

* Reggie Johnson says he thinks this team is "getting there - we're still working. Detroit (a 77-62 UM win on Saturday) was a good game for us to really show how we can play a full game."

Of facing Michigan State, Johnson said, "They can shoot the ball real well, have guards who love to crash the boards. They're a top 20 opponent. If we can beat those guy it'll help our RPI come March."

Johnson says he's healthy now coming off a lower body injury that was bothering him.

"I'm fine, feel good," Johnson said. "I can do more as far as contributing more, rebounding more."

Johnson will be dealing with 6-9, 270-pound big man in Derrick Nix (8.0 points, 7.7 rebounds per game) tomorrow.

"It's going to be a fun matchup," Johnson said.

- Johnson says he and Kenny Kadji have a contest for who can get more rebounds in games, and that he thinks that gives extra motivation to Kadji to crash the boards.

"Last year Kenny rebounded, but this year he's making a strong emphasis to get in there," Johnson said. "That's big for us."

* Kenny Kadji says of facing Michigan State that "It's a big game, a great team coming into our home. This is extra motivation because Michigan State always goes to the Final Four, always has a great team. We want to make a statement, prove we're one of the best teams in the country. To be the best you have to beat the best."

"We're going to show how together we are, how tough we are as a team. ... We know it's a Big Ten team, and (what) they do, they crash the boards. We'll be ready for the game. Detroit was a good win for us, but we know we have to bring 110 percent to prepare for Michigan State. We know if you relax even a little bit (the) team will come and embarrass you."

Kadji said the Florida Gulf Coast loss "was real embarrassing, and people don't want to feel like that. We have six seniors, it's their last year, so we don't want to have that type of season."

- Kadji joked that he's "super happy" that football is over since more fans may come to basketball games now.

"I'm just joking," Kadji said. "You know this is a football school. But now that this is over, people will have to come to the basketball games, don't have anything else. We just hope we can surprise students here and make them come to the games more and more."

- Kadji said Larranaga gave him advice to "don't think, just shoot the ball."

"That really didn't work," Kadji said with a laugh. "But he knows I can affect the games in different ways. I don't have to have a great shooting night to affect the game. Now that I know that, I have to go in the game and give 110 (percent). And I will find a way to help the team win - rebounding, blocking shots, defense."

SG Scott Glad to Be Back

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Nov. 26, 2012

Durand Scott made a successful return to the court after serving a six-game suspension by the NCAA.

Scott scored 15 points with five rebounds and three assists in 38 minutes in a 77-62 win over Detroit Saturday.

"I thought he was terrific," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "Fifteen points, handled the ball very well, rebounded, defended--Ray McCallum has been averaging 21 points a game and he held him six below his average--did a good job at both ends of the court."

Scott, who led the team in scoring last season, was happy to be back on the court after the NCAA handed out a five-game suspension in March for receiving impermissible benefits.

"It felt great to be out there with the coaching staff, teammates, just went out there and did what I loved to do," Scott said. "It was a great experience for me."

Scott was very efficient with a 19.15 player efficiency rating (he had a 14.99 last season) as he shot 6 of 9 from the floor.

"I think I did okay," Scott said. "I just wanted to go out there and give effort, play as hard as I can, not try to do too much and do exactly what the coaches expect of me. I just tried to play the best I could and it worked out for me."

Watching from the sidelines wasn't easy especially watching the team drop a disappointing game to Florida Gulf Coast.

"It was hard, but at the same time it was a time of learning," Scott said. "I got to sit on the bench, see things from the coaches' eye, and then implement to when I got back on the

court. I didn't put my head down or anything like that, I was a cheerleader and grasped some things that I never saw when I was playing."

With the win, Miami improved to 3-1 with a home game Wednesday against No. 13 Michigan State (5-1) as part of the ACC-Big Ten Challenge.

"It's a great experience definitely if we get the win it would be a great win for us, the staff, players, university. We just want to go out and give our best effort. Hopefully the results are in our favor."

Michigan State, led by Keith Appling's 16.8 points per game, comes into the game with a win over No. 10 Kansas on Nov. 13.

"We have got a lot to handle," Scott said. "They're very aggressive on the defensive end and they put pressure on you offensively as well. You have to be tough and strong, mentally strong as well, you can't afford to turn the ball over and give them many opportunities to score."

State of the U catches up with Julian Gamble

State of the U.com
Jerry Steinberg
Nov. 26, 2012

The Miami Hurricanes face a HUGE test Wednesday night against Michigan State. We asked UM big man Julian Gamble about the game, and much more.

6th year senior F/C Julian Gamble averages over 7 points and a shade under 3 rebounds a game. But those who watch him play, know his heart and leadership mean more to the team than his numbers. The 6'10 250 pound Gamble will be counted on heavily in Wednesday night's big time match-up with the Spartans, as well as through out the season as UM strives for a monumental year.

Here is our full Q&A with Julian Gamble:

SOTU: What unique challenges does the game against Michigan State on Wednesday present?

JG: It presents some great challenges and will test some things we have been working on. Especially rebounding as they are one of the top rebounding teams in the country perennially. That and playing against a well coached team with Tom Izzo. They have had a lot of recent success and we really have a good opportunity to get a big win for our team and our program.

SOTU: Coming back off of injury this year how does everything feel? You seem to be a bit more explosive this year.

JG: Everything feels good. I did not go home at all this summer. I made a total commitment to this team, and the coaching staff. I made sure I was ready and worked with our trainer Wes Brown and our strength coach Jim Krumpas.

I worked hard to get my legs right and keep them under me. Going into the season I did not know what to expect but I played real well this summer, and my teammates started showing confidence in me.

SOTU: Along with yourself who are the leaders of the team? Have you made a more conscious effort to be a leader this year?

JG: I have definitely made a conscious effort to be a leader. Having been here for my 6th year now I have seen it all and done it all, and know what to expect. All of our seniors have really show leadership. When we go to center court as captains, all of our seniors go. All of our seniors are leaders in different ways, some vocally and some by actions.

SOTU: Looking ahead, and I know you guys aren't looking past any out of conference games, but can you tell fans who the most difficult player to go against in the ACC is?

JG: That's a great question. I haven't spent a lot of time looking at our ACC opponents. Like you said we are totally focused on our current opponent. But I know NC State being the great team they are, have C.J. Leslie. I grew up with him, and know his game. He has really come along, that team in general is very experienced but they have a good number of young players as well. You also have Mason Plumlee at Duke. There are a lot of very good guys in our league. James Michael McAdoo as well.

SOTU: Interesting about CJ, Kenny Kadji said the same when I asked him.

JG: Yeah, I know CJ really well. He is really athletic and this past season he made a huge leap, which was great to see. We're competitive. We are friends off the court, but on the court we go at it.

SOTU: Who on the team so far this year has surprised you and stepped up?

JG: Bishop Daniels in the early games we didn't have Durand. He came off the bench and really helped us with his energy. Also Erik Swoope coming in and providing all the intangibles we need. He has come in and provided the dirty work since he's been here, so he's not really a surprise but he has stepped up.

SOTU: Lastly, what message would you give to the Miami Hurricanes fans out there?

JG: We need your support. We love your support. That's what we play for. We play for the fans and we play for each other. The more people that come out and support us the better we will be.

Thanks again to big # 45 for taking the time to talk to us. And good luck to JG Wednesday night and all season long. Be sure to check out JG and the 'Canes at the BUC this year.

State of the U catches up with Trey McKinney Jones

State of the U.com
Jerry Steinberg
Nov. 26, 2012

In preparation for Miami's crucial battle with Michigan State we spent a few moments with the Hurricanes versatile wing man, Trey McKinney Jones.

The 6'5 senior G/F is averaging 11.5 ppg, 4.0 rpg, 2.5 apg and 1.5 steals. His ability to do a little bit of everything has earned him the nickname "The Swiss Army Knife." Since transferring from University of Missouri-Kansas City he has been one of UM's best players.

Here is our full Q&A with Trey McKinney Jones:

SOTU: When you decided to transfer from UMKC, what made you choose Miami?

TMJ: Well I was deciding whether to go to Wisconsin in the Big Ten, or Miami in the ACC. I liked what the ACC presented. Especially the amount of success players from the ACC had at the next level. So it was what was best for me, and in the long run being more successful. More people from the ACC then the Big Ten seem to be at the next level.

SOTU: We have really noticed your floor game, specifically passing and handling have improved. Is that something you have worked on, or something that has always been there that we are now just seeing more of?

TMJ: It is something that I have worked to improve on but also always has been there. Growing up I was strictly a point guard, so I'm use to handling the ball. At UMKC I also handled the ball more. It is something that I got a little away from last year. I have made a conscious effort to have that all around game and not just be a shooter.

SOTU: Is there anybody in the NBA, or growing up who you modeled your game after?

TMJ: My uncle Mark (Jones). He had a big part in helping me grow as a basketball player. He played for the University of Minnesota and played overseas professionally, as well as in the NBA for the Magic. I grew up watching him, and he's been training me every off season. My uncle Mark more so then any current NBA player has influenced my game.

SOTU: Very cool. We are going to look him up.

SOTU: Not to look too far ahead, but among the players you went against in the ACC last year, is there anyone who sticks out as a tough match-up?

TMJ: Harrison Barnes last year at UNC. I haven't gotten to see much of the ACC yet. But amongst this year's players, Steph Curry of Duke. He is going to have a big year this year. And of course C.J. Leslie with NC State as well. We have been pretty focused mostly on our non conference schedule. Coach Larranaga is pretty big on not letting us look too far ahead.

SOTU: Can you tell us a little about the Swiss Army Knife nickname?

TMJ: I don't remember who gave it to me. I know Shane said something about it this year.

SOTU: I think actually my (former) Category 6 partner Josh came up with it? Its' an apt nickname for you being able to do a little of everything on the court.

TMJ: Yeah, I like that!

SOTU: Last question for today. What message do you have for Miami Hurricanes fans for Wednesday night and going forward?

TMJ: It is like a new season for us. We have all the pieces in place. The sky is the limit for us. It is going to be a great season. Come out and

support us.

We can't thank Trey enough for allowing us to interview him. We hope the fans follow his advice and Pack the BUC all season long as the Miami Hurricanes strive for an outstanding season.

McKinney-Jones Confident in Canes

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Nov. 23, 2012

The loss to Florida Gulf Coast still resonates with Trey McKinney-Jones who says the team is using it as motivation in moving forward.

The 12-point loss to the Atlantic Sun participants on Nov. 13 was as tough as a loss as McKinney-Jones has had while at Miami.

"Just the team that we lost to was kind of a slap in the face, not to mention the exhibition loss as well," he said. "I think we're going to turn it around, but it was definitely a very tough loss, it was kind of embarrassing. Like I said last week, we're a pretty resilient team and we're going to bounce back and have a great season."

Miami (2-1) bounced back with a win over Jacksonville will host NCAA tournament team Detroit (2-1) Saturday at 2 p.m.

"We still have a long ways to go, but I think our energy is the main difference," he said. "We have pretty much put the loss behind us, but we still have it in the back of our minds to motivate us to work hard every day in practice to keep getting better every day."

McKinney-Jones, a senior swingman from Milwaukee, is averaging a team-high 37 minutes a game and is third on the team in scoring at 11 a contest while shooting 38.5 percent.

"During the exhibition game and our scrimmage I was shooting the ball pretty well," he said. "Since the season went down my percentage has dropped so I've been in the gym shooting trying to get my percentage up to where I think it should be around 50 percent. I'm definitely feeling more comfortable and aggressive, I just need to knock down shots."

With the return of Durand Scott to the lineup, McKinney-Jones is expected to remain a starter.

"I want to be the type of player that coach can't take out of the game helping on the defensive and offensive end just playing my hardest and doing what I have to do," McKinney-Jones said.

Having Scott back should help the flow of the offense.

"It's definitely going to help and open the floor up," McKinney-Jones said of Scott's return. "It's one more person that the defense has to worry about so it's definitely going to open it up for myself and everyone."

Detroit is led by junior point guard Ray McCallum, who is averaging 21 points and 5 assists. McKinney-Jones attended a camp together with McCallum at Indiana when the two were in high school.

"I know a little bit about Ray, he's going to get a lot of shots up so you can't really do anything about that, he's going to shoot the ball either way. They're a great team. Coach mentioned that they like to play one-on-one a lot on the perimeter so we've been working on that in practice."

Miami's Shane Larkin among pleasant surprises in ACC

College Chalktalk
Joshua Parrott
Nov. 21, 2012

The focus of a CollegeChalktalk.com interview in early November with second-year Miami coach Jim Larranaga centered mostly on his potent inside-outside forward tandem of Reggie Johnson and Kenny Kadji.

Given the nature of the story, Larranaga spoke little about sophomore guard Shane Larkin, other than saying that he's a "nice point guard" who would form a quality backcourt this season with senior guard Durand Scott.

Larkin, the son of former Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin, is now standing out on a veteran squad that won 20 games last season and advanced to the NIT.

Through the first three games of this season, Larkin leads the 2-1 Hurricanes in scoring (18.0 ppg) and assists (5.0 apg). His breakout performance came in a 73-57 win over Jacksonville on Nov. 16. Larkin poured in a career-high 27 points on 9-of-13 shooting and added five assists and four rebounds with Miami suiting up only eight scholarship players as Johnson (sore tailbone) and Scott (sitting out last of three-game NCAA suspension) were unavailable.

The 5-foot-11, 176-pound Larkin scored 21 of his 27 points in the second half to help the Hurricanes rebound from a Nov. 13 loss at Florida Gulf Coast. His previous high was 18 points at UNC Greensboro last January.

For the season Larkin is shooting 57.6 percent overall and 41.2 percent from 3-point range. That's a significant improvement from last season when he made the All-ACC Freshman team, ranked fifth in the league in steals (1.6 spg) and averaged 7.4 points but shot just 36 percent from the floor and 32.3 percent behind the arch.

"With a year under my belt I know what's a good shot," Larkin said after the Jacksonville game. "Last year I shot too quickly or forced a shot. This year with watching film and being more comfortable I know where my spots are and getting to my spots is helping me shoot a better percentage from the field."

Larkin, who originally signed with DePaul before citing an undisclosed medical condition to transfer closer to the family's Orlando home, admits to exhibiting better effort and leadership this season. He showed that by contacting his teammates via text message after the FGCU loss in an effort to lift the team's spirits and find out what he could do to improve.

An improved Larkin coupled with Johnson (14.0 ppg, 10.5 rpg), Kadji (10.7 ppg, 8.0 rpg, .364 3PT) and Scott (12.9 ppg, 5.4 rpg, 3.1 apg in 2011-12) could be enough for Miami to make it back to the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2008.

Here is a team-by-team look at some of the other pleasant surprises in the ACC so far this season:

VIRGINIA TECH - Junior forward Jarell Eddie is averaging 17.8 points, 7.8 rebounds and 1.5 blocks while shooting 53.5 percent from the field - a big jump from his numbers as a sophomore (9.1 ppg, 4.8 rpg, 0.4 bpg, 42.5 FG%).

DUKE - Only a freshman, guard Rasheed Sulaimon is second on the team in 3-point shooting (44.4 percent) and assists (3.7 apg) and third in scoring (11.7 ppg) and rebounding (4.3 rpg).

CLEMSON - Sophomore guard Damarcus Harrison, a transfer from BYU, has been efficient, shooting 52.9 percent from the floor while averaging 9.0 points, 4.0 rebounds, 1.5 steals and 1.0 blocks.

GEORGIA TECH - Freshman guard/forward Marcus Georges-Hunt is second on the squad in scoring (12.0 ppg), averages 5.5 rebounds

and 1.0 steals and is shooting 52.6 percent from the field and 80 percent on free throws.

NORTH CAROLINA - Freshman forward Brice Johnson has contributed early despite his skinny frame, averaging 7.5 points and 6.3 rebounds in only 12.8 minutes per game.

FLORIDA STATE - Junior forward Terrance Shannon leads the team in rebounding (6.5 rpg) and is averaging 10.5 points while shooting 70.8 percent overall after receiving a medical hardship last season due to a shoulder injury.

MARYLAND - Sophomore center Alex Len has made a big jump this season, averaging 17.3 points, 8.7 rebounds and 3.7 blocks - up from 6.0 points, 5.4 rebounds and 2.1 blocks as a freshman.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE - Freshman forward T.J. Warren has become the top scorer on a veteran club, averaging 16.5 points on 66.7 percent shooting to go with 4.3 rebounds and 1.3 steals per game.

VIRGINIA - After averaging only 4.1 points and 4.4 rebounds per game last season, junior forward Akil Mitchell is logging a double-double so far this year at 12.4 points and 10.4 rebounds per game.

WAKE FOREST - Freshman guard Codi Miller-McIntyre, who had a career-high 21 points against UConn on Nov. 16, is the team leader in assists (3.0 apg), second in minutes played (29.5 mpg) and third in scoring (9.3 ppg).

BOSTON COLLEGE - Sophomore forward Ryan Anderson averaged 11.2 points and 7.4 rebounds and shot 43.3 percent overall last season and has upped his numbers to 22.7 points and 10.3 rebounds on 54.8 percent shooting this year.

Miami center Johnson slims down for senior year

NewsObserver

Luke DeCock

Nov. 21, 2012

This summer, as a group, Miami's basketball players decided to stay in Coral Gables and train together. For Reggie Johnson, the Hurricanes' gargantuan center, that meant missing out on the usual offseason pick-up games in his hometown of Winston-Salem, where everyone from Chris Paul to Wake Forest's players battle for Triad bragging rights.

So when Wake Forest guard C.J. Harris, another Winston-Salem native, saw Johnson over the summer during a quick visit home, he was as shocked as anyone at how little of him was left – a mere 290 pounds, down from 310 last season and 330 two years ago. (Officially, he's listed at 6-foot-10, 292 pounds.)

"He's been working hard. You can tell," Harris said. "When he's home, we play pick-up all the time. You can tell he's getting more mobile. He's just improved every year."

It hasn't been easy for Johnson, whose bulk has made him one of the ACC's best rebounders over the past three years. When he goes out with his teammates, he has learned to order grilled chicken or salads, water instead of lemonade.

"You have to be dedicated," Johnson said. "You rely on teammates a lot. Sometimes after games, we go to Friday's, and these guys are eating cheeseburgers and stuff. It's about discipline. It boils down to that. I'm a disciplined guy."

He's had a role model in his quest to slim down. Former Miami coach Frank Haith recruited 380-pound Dexter Pittman as an assistant coach at Texas, and he made the introduction between Johnson and Pittman, whose hard work to lose 100 pounds over the course

of his college career landed him in the NBA, and fortuitously enough, with the Miami Heat.

Johnson said the two have become so close since meeting during Johnson's sophomore year that he now hangs out at Pittman's house even when he's on the road with the Heat.

"He's at where I want to be at, so why not listen to him?" Johnson said.

But it didn't take his relationship with Pittman for Johnson to realize it was imperative he lose weight. Even the progress he has made won't be enough for NBA scouts, who will want to see him closer to 280, and there's no telling whether the extra baggage contributed to the knee injury that forced him to miss the first nine games of last season. (He missed another game later in the year because of an eligibility issue with the NCAA.)

Now, he can get up and down the court for all of Miami's two-hour offseason workouts, and Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga said the leaner, swifter Johnson has met his practice standard to have a green light from 3-point range – make 50 3-pointers in five minutes on a regular basis. Johnson was regularly in the 40s last season, but he's been in the 50s in practice this year.

The question is whether the new-look Johnson will improve upon last year's 10.0 points and 7.2 rebounds per game, which were actually a decrease from his sophomore-year numbers (11.9 points, 9.6 rebounds) despite playing more minutes. In two games this season – he missed Miami's last game, a win over Jacksonville, with a bruised tailbone – he is averaging 14.0 points and 10.5 rebounds.

"We don't say anything to him, because we know he has to do what he has to do," Miami guard Durand Scott said. "This year is important to him. He's a senior, and he wants to go out the right way. You have to sacrifice. He's been doing real well with it, obviously, you

can see how he's toned down. Everything he couldn't do last year because of his injury, he's doing this year."

It's a big season for Miami (2-1), with the Hurricanes picked to finish fifth in the ACC and already upset losers at Florida Gulf Coast but loaded with returning starters and talent. About all they're missing from last season is the few extra pounds Johnson is no longer carrying.

Larkin Reviews Career Day

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Nov. 20, 2012

Shane Larkin was disappointed in his team's effort in a loss to Florida Gulf Coast so he put it on himself to help change the intensity on the floor.

Prior to Friday's game against Jacksonville, Larkin vowed to be a better vocal leader as he felt the team was "out-worked and out-toughed" against Florida Gulf Coast.

He responded in a big way scoring a career-high 27 points in a 73-57 win. Larkin also had five assists and four rebounds.

"It was good," said senior forward Julian Gamble of Larkin's performance. "The point guard is an extension of your coach out there on the floor and us seeing him take that leadership role on the floor and lead by example just kind of made us work even harder. We kind of just feed off each other and I think we had really good energy and I think that started with Shane. He had that energy all 40 minutes. Just being out there I didn't really notice all of the points until I looked up (at the scoreboard) at the end, but that's just him flowing in the offense when he shoots."

His 27 points came as a bit of a surprise for Larkin whose previous-high was 18.

"I wasn't even focused on scoring the ball," Larkin said. "I was just focused on bringing more effort. Usually the point guard brings the ball down the court so defensively I was just trying to be loud and communicate with my teammates and tell them that I got ball so they start talking because coach told me I start everything defensively and offensively. I just needed to be more of a vocal leader and I think with me doing that tonight it got the team with better intensity."

Larkin got off to a bit of a slow start scoring six points with one assist in 17 minutes in the first half with Miami leading 27-23 at the break.

He says he didn't take it upon himself to score more in the second half, but that it just happened in the flow of the game. Of his nine field goals made, four came on layups, three on 2-point jumpers, and two on 3-pointers.

"I was just going with what the defense was giving me," Larkin said. "I knew they were switching their bigs on me so I was just trying to penetrate and kick or score the layup if I had the layup. Most of the time they stayed with our bigs because I was dishing to them and they were getting dunks. When they stayed with them I was just getting easy layups so it worked out well."

Larkin turned in a memorable performance on a 9 of 13 shooting against Jacksonville, who had no answer for him in the second half. He made all seven of his free throws and finished with a player efficiency rating (PER) of 30.97. In comparison, LeBron James had a 30.74 PER last season during his MVP season with the Miami Heat.

Through three games he has improved his shooting percentage dramatically shooting 57.6 percent (19 of 33) this season compared to 36 percent last season.

"With a year under my belt I know what's a good shot," Larkin said. "Last year I shot too quickly or a forced a shot. This year with watching film and being more comfortable, I know where my shots are and getting to my shots is helping me shoot a better percentage from the field."

Larkin made it a point to contact his teammates via text after the loss to Florida Gulf Coast, which is something he wouldn't have done a year ago.

"I didn't do that last year," Larkin said. "Being older and more comfortable with your teammates—I have a real close relationship with everybody and I think just having a better relationship with them, I can tell them what I see out there and they can tell me what they see so we can just put together and see what we can do."

Larkin is currently leading the team in scoring averaging 18.0 points and 5.0 assists a game. His 41.2 percent from behind the arc also leads the team.

He'll look to continue his early-season success Saturday against Detroit.

State of the U chats with 'Canes Guard Justin Heller

State of the U.com

Jerry Steinberg

Nov. 19, 2012

Justin Heller may not be a star on the University of Miami's basketball team. But his role is helping prepare his teammates is invaluable.

Walk on athletes are integral and highly underrated. A closer look at walk ons reveals that despite not receiving major playing time, they are often some of the most passionate players on a given team. Today we caught up with UM junior walk on Justin Heller. Justin gave us some insight and how he ended up at Miami, what the team needs to do to improve, and a whole lot more.

Here is the full Q&A:

SOTU: Can you tell us a little about your background and how you ended up at UM?

JH: I'm a local kid, I'm from Boca Raton, Florida. Both of my parents graduated from the University of Miami. I have pretty much always been a fan. Being a walk on, with or without basketball, UM was definitely the number school I wanted to go to.

SOTU: Which players are the most difficult to match up with in practice?

JH: I would say, as a guard, Shane Larkin and Bishop Daniels. The two of them are just so extremely quick. It is difficult to keep up with them.

SOTU: This is a very difficult question, but we have to ask. What has the team been doing to overcome the slow start? Are there any major adjustments or changes we can expect?

JH: I think that Coach Larranaga has been around for a long time and has probably been in these situations before. We just need to listen to him, He has great experience. So not necessarily doing anything different, just re-

main the same and listening better. If we do those things, with our senior leadership, we will get back on the right track.

SOTU: For the fans who wonder what this team is like behind the scenes, can you tell us who is the funniest? The most serious? The leader of the team?

JH: The leader is Durand Scott. He's a senior now and has always been one of the best players on the team. With his passion and his competitive attitude, when you see how hard he works, you want to work just as hard. The funniest guys on the team are probably the freshman, Tonye Jekiri. He's always making people laugh, even the coaches. As far as the most serious, Steve Sorenson the new walk on. He hasn't yet opened up to the team, so that makes him the most serious.

SOTU: As a follow-up to your answer about Durand being the leader, can you talk a little bit about how his return will help the team?

JH: I think that Durand's return will impact the team dramatically. He's just an all around guy and a leader on the court. He has experience and he's one of the key players on the team. With him on the bench, we're just missing a lot.

SOTU: Any message for the fans?

JH: Although we have come out with a rocky start, I still believe this is going to be a great year. We need all the support we can get. When the team comes out to play and its quiet on its home court, it hampers the team. We need the support.

Thanks again to Justin Heller for letting us catch up with him. Let's hope 'Canes fans follow his advice and pack the BUC this year.

Could Erik Swoope be another Jimmy Graham?

State of the U.com
Jerry Steinberg
Nov. 18, 2012

We caught up with Miami's talented 6'6 junior forward Erik Swoope and asked him about the current state of the team, his incredible athleticism, his potential to play another sport down the line, and much more.

Much like Jimmy Graham, Swoope is a high energy player who can guard multiple positions, and play above the rim. Swoope had an excellent performance in Miami's win over Jacksonville Friday night providing energy with 7 points, 2 thunderous dunks, and 2 steals. Additionally he is a very good interview.

Here is our full Q&A with Erik Swoope:

SOTU: We talked with Bishop Daniels a few weeks back and asked him who was faster between Shane and him, and your name came up. So among Shane, Bishop, and yourself, who is the fastest?

ES: Oh man, its very close. If we had a footrace Bishop would win by a very small margin and Shane and I would be tied. We did actually get timed earlier in the summer in three-quarter court sprints, and actually I had the fastest time at 2.99 seconds. Shane was right at 3 flat, and Bishop was at 3.01. I wouldn't mind seeing us do a 40 yard sprint and see.

SOTU: It would be cool to see the three of you on the break and see who gets the alley-oop.

ES: Yeah, exactly (laughs)

SOTU: This is a very difficult question, but we have to ask. What has the team been doing to overcome the slow start? Are there any major adjustments or changes we can expect?

ES: I think we need to just learn what's best for us. We have some new guys in Tanye and Bishop and we're missing Durand as well. Right now we are just trying to build a stronger chemistry. Coach L is doing everything he can to help us understand how important the little things are like winning the free throw battle and boxing out. It is starting to slowly come together. I think between the new guys and all of the seniors we will come together.

SOTU: How do you see your role on this team?

ES: My role is mainly to come in and provide as much energy as possible. I may need to match up with guards, wings, bigs, so I make sure I am prepared to contribute offensively but also guard all 5 positions. I focus on offensive rebounds, and guarding the other team's best guy. Something like a Dennis Rodman,

SOTU: Can you tell fans a little about the mohawk?

ES: Yeah I had never done anything like that before, and I thought would be fun. My family also encouraged me to do something different. I actually just recently cut the mohawk, I'm looking to try some new styles.

SOTU: That's very cool and fits the Dennis Rodman mold just a bit?

ES: Yeah. (laughs).

SOTU: Considering your incredible athleticism, ever consider pulling a Jimmy Graham, and giving football a shot?

ES: That would just depend on if the opportunity came up. That is something I have contemplated. I'd have to talk to my family, but I haven't had any formal communication with the football staff. But yeah, there's maybe a possibility.

SOTU: Hey maybe we can send a note to Al Golden on your behalf. Although Coach L would probably take care of that?

ES: Yeah I'm sure they would.

SOTU: Any final message for the fans?

ES: Come and support the team. It means a lot. We will do everything we can to give them a great show. Going back to last year, when we played Florida State. It was the first sell out of the year. And the team, and the coaches, we really fed off of it. When an opposing team comes in they feel the energy, and we'd like to get that every night.

Well there you have it Canes fans. Erik Swoope and the Miami Hurricanes are looking for you to come out and support them. We certainly appreciate Erik taking the time to do this Q&A with us, and wish him good luck during the season and in all of his endeavors.

NCDS: Miami's Eric Konkol on what drives him to coach

College Chalktalk
Editorial Staff
Nov. 17, 2012

Each morning my three and one-year old boys wake me at the crack of dawn, sometimes earlier, and once they are busy playing and ultimately breaking something, I take a few minutes to check emails and plan my day. Quite frequently, I receive an email from someone who is interested in getting into college coaching. When replying to these emails I'm reminded of why I wanted to get into coaching, why I love what I do, and the people that have helped me tremendously along the way.

During the summers before my junior and senior years in college, I worked basketball camps at my school, the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, and several others around the country. For each of those two summers I worked 10 weeks of camp. After my first week I was hooked. I loved working with the kids, talking hoops with the coaches that had been doing it for years, and seeing just a slight improvement in someone during the week was very gratifying. It was also much more fun than the construction and waiter jobs I had the previous summers!

After college, I started as graduate assistant and was fortunate to work with some great people. Looking back, I was so focused on doing whatever I could to help the coaches win games, secure recruits, and not much else. Being focused is important, but it wasn't until a few years into my career that I realized the greatest satisfaction in coaching – helping our players. The impact we have on our players is tremendous and the amount of development between 18 and 22 years old can be life changing. Helping players improve their game, advising them through adversity on and off the floor, watching them graduate, and staying in touch with them through their adult life is the ultimate for me.

I'm a believer that there is no such thing as a self-made man. You must have help along the way. I have been fortunate to play for and work for great coaches that have helped shape who I am. My high school coach Gregg Jensen, college coaches Bo Ryan and Terry Gibbons, and the head coaches I have worked for in Ed Conroy, Buzz Peterson, Ken Novak, Saul Phillips, and Jim Larranaga. The camaraderie of a team and the friendship you build with the other coaches on the staff makes the long hours and tough losses seem insignificant. I really can't imagine doing anything else.

Thank you to Chris DiSano for allowing me the opportunity to once again take part in the College Chalktalk NCDS to take a few moments, step back, and think about the big picture. Good luck to everyone this year!

Larkin's tenacity energizes Hurricanes

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 17, 2012

Shane Larkin sent his University of Miami teammates a group text message around midnight Wednesday as they got off a long bus ride home after an embarrassing loss to Florida Gulf Coast University. He was feeling "really down" and wanted to know what he could do to energize the group.

Friday night, the sophomore point guard sent out another message with his inspired play.

Larkin scored a career-high 27 points on 9-of-13 shooting, as the Hurricanes defeated Jacksonville 73-57 at the BankUnited Center. His previous high was 18 against North Carolina-Greensboro last January. From the start of the game, it was clear Larkin was in command. He barked out orders, yelled "I got ball! I got ball!" and sparked a team that had lacked focus.

"Your point guard is your leader, the extension of your coach out on the floor and I think us seeing him take that leadership role made us want to work that much harder," said senior center Julian Gamble, who started in place of injured Reggie Johnson. "We had really good energy, and that started with Shane. He had that energy for the entire 40 minutes. I didn't really notice all the points until I looked up at the scoreboard at the end."

Coach Jim Larranaga and his staff have been trying to get all the players to be more vocal. He describes his team as quiet and laid back and had been frustrated that they weren't communicating enough.

"Shane had a great night, not only scoring but controlling the tempo," Larranaga said. "Coaches have asked these guys to be more vocal, and their way of having a conversation is sending a text message. So, it's all right. At least then they're communicating. You can't

be talking at the pregame meal, talking in the locker room, talking back in the dormitories and then all of a sudden get on the court and be quiet. The whole game is about communication."

UM came out with a sense of purpose after the loss at Florida Gulf Coast and a loss to Division II Saint Leo in the preseason.

The Hurricanes raced to an 11-0 lead as Jacksonville missed its first eight shots. Larranaga said they scripted three plays to start the game and executed all three, which got them off to a good start. They led 27-23 at halftime. Their biggest struggle was stopping sharpshooter Dylan Fritsch, who had 15 points at intermission and wound up with 23, including six three-pointers.

Johnson missed the game with a sore tailbone. He fell taking a charge against Florida Gulf Coast and missed two days of practice. He is expected back Tuesday.

Gamble filled in nicely, contributing 13 points, two steals and a block. Erik Swoope added intensity, defense and seven points off the bench, delighting the crowd with two dunks, one a high-flying one-hander. Trey McKinney Jones added 11 points, six rebounds, three steals and three assists.

The Canes shot 63 percent in the second half, and 59 percent for the game. Things went so well for UM that the game ended with walk-ons Justin Heller and Steve Sorenson on the floor, along with 7-foot freshman Tonye Jekiri.

Larkin: Loss Was Unacceptable

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Nov. 15, 2012

The Miami Hurricanes were in a somber mood following a disappointing 63-51 loss at Florida Gulf Coast Tuesday.

"It was not good at all," sophomore point guard Shane Larkin said. "Everybody hates to lose on this team. Everybody is real competitive. On the bus ride home I don't think anybody said anything to anybody, it was real silent. I know I didn't say anything to anybody. We're just looking forward to the next game so we can hopefully play well and get this thought out of our mind."

Larkin scored a team-high 14 points on 5 of 13 shooting in 38 minutes. He also led the team with four assists, grabbed four rebounds and had a steal with three turnovers.

Miami took an early 10-point lead before trailing by seven at halftime, 32-25. The teams were tied at 39, but Florida Gulf Coast controlled the rest of the way in what has been described as their biggest win in school history.

"It was a tough game," Larkin said. "It was a rowdy crowd. They came out in a zone. We actually started the game well, up 15-5 and had the momentum. They called timeout and came out of the timeout in a zone and we just weren't hitting our shots. That zone really messed up our rhythm, they really were denying Reggie (Johnson) in the block. Coach said we didn't get Reggie the ball until five minutes into the game and we need to be more conscious of that because Reggie (Johnson) is pretty much unguardable in the block when they don't double-team him. It was just a tough game, they were making shots, they only hit one 3-pointer so our 3-point percentage was better, but they were just getting more rebounds—most of them were long because they were 3-point shots so it was on

the guards and the bigs. We all weren't boxing out as a group. We didn't collectively play tough enough to win the game."

Down the stretch, Miami was outscored 24-12 as they finished the game shooting 29 percent from the floor.

"I would just say we got out-worked and out-toughed," Larkin said. "We were shooting too many 3s, we needed to get in the paint. The zone that they were playing we just couldn't penetrate the way we needed to or get the ball inside either by dribble penetration or by the pass. You have to give all of the credit to their team, they scouted us well. They just did a great job that night."

It was the most disappointing loss in Larkin's young career.

"Definitely," he said. "That's the first time we've been favored heavily that I've lost since I've been here. I know we lost a couple early season games last year to Ole Miss, Purdue, and Memphis, but we weren't really favored, it was a toss-up game that either team could have come out with the win. You always want to win the games you're supposed to win. even though it's early in the season, every game counts when it comes down to Selection Day and something like that could come back to haunt you. It was a really important game and I just don't think as a team we took it serious enough and played hard enough to deserve that win."

Miami (1-1) returns to the court Friday against Jacksonville, which is also in the Atlantic Sun.

"We've seen that even though a team is in the Atlantic Sun, anybody can come out and beat you on any night," Larkin said. "That wasn't a wake-up call (against Florida Gulf Coast) because (the exhibition game loss to) St. Leo was a wake-up call and we're not as a good as we thought we were at the beginning of

the season. All of the magazines and articles of how could we should be this year and how we should be in the Top 25, but that's all out the window now. We're back at ground zero. I don't see as getting the respect that we thought we deserved because that was just acceptable. They're a great team, I'm not taking anything away from them, but from us, it was unacceptable. We didn't play with heart, we didn't play with passion, and I think these next couple of games we'll see that coming out of us that we know what we have to do know, how hard we have to play, and hopefully tomorrow is just the first step to become a greater team."

Larkin vows to be a more vocal leader than he's been.

"Tomorrow I'm going to come out with a lot of energy and just be loud and get on my teammates," he said. "I don't think I've really done that and been the type to not yell, but be firm with what I'm saying. Like when giving my opinion on what we should do, coach says whatever I see on the court is the right thing so I'm going to try to be more vocal and get on my teammates to try to get pick them up. ... Hopefully they see that I'm going to play as hard as I can so they can hopefully do the same thing. As a team we just need to play with more intensity."

Hoops need not panic despite upset loss

State of the U.com

Jerry Steinberg

Nov. 14, 2012

After an alarming exhibition loss to St. Leo's and huge upset loss to FGCU, 'Canes Basketball fans find themselves puzzled and concerned. But there are still reasons for hope.

ESPN's annual College Basketball Kickoff Marathon featured a number of great games. Talented G Ray McCallum and Detroit gave St. John's all they could handle before succumbing on the road in the 2nd half. Sampson Carter hit a last second three off a perfect pass from Chaz Williams to give UMass a 67-64 victory over Harvard. Michigan State rallied to a victory over #7 Kansas behind Keith Appling's 19 points. And last but certainly not least, Seth Curry and Duke manhandled defending champion Kentucky in prime time.

What do all of these teams have in common, besides boosting ESPN's ratings, and assuring the event becomes an annual fix for the hoops starved basketball junky?

Detroit heads to the BUC in over a week (11/24) to challenge UM, The Minutemen host Miami a week later (12/1), Sparty heads to Coral Gables as part of the ACC/Big Ten Challenge on 11/28, and of course the Dookies get Miami twice (1/23 & 3/2) as part of ACC play.

Long story short, the 'Canes need to figure things out and figure them out fast.

So how concerned should UM Hoops fans be?

While the upcoming schedule is daunting, and the loss to FGCU alarming, it's NOT time to panic yet, and here are the reasons:

Durand Scott's return. Miami is without last year's returning scorer for just one more game. Besides the fact that he takes the ball to the hoop and can create his own shot, Scott

is an underrated defender as well as an excellent passer. Miami has really struggled to get the ball in the post, and has allowed opponents to penetrate far too often in its' first 3 contests (including the exhibition). Scott's presence will help both areas tremendously. More than anything else though, Scott will provide on the court leadership. Coach Larranaga has said on more than one occasion that Durand Scott is the heart and soul of this team. They sorely missed his leadership last night.

Improved Shooting. Through their first two games Miami has shot 41% from the floor, 60% from the line, and just 31% from three point range. There is NO chance this continues. Last year, despite Malcolm Grant's season long slump, Miami finished 43% from the floor, 72% from the line, and 35% from deep. Rion Brown (0-7 from the floor against Florida Gulf Coast), Reggie Johnson (33% FG through 2 games), and Trey McKinney Jones (22% 3P%) are all due to break out. When they do watch out! These are all guys who are proven. There is no reason to anticipate they will do anything other than what their track records indicate.

The Defense will get better. More disconcerting than perhaps anything else in Miami's first 2 games is the fact that Miami allowed Stetson to shoot nearly 45% from the floor, and FGCU a whopping 49%. Miami was 4th in the ACC last season in FG% defense at just under 42%. And this is essentially the same roster. If Miami can hold the NC States, Dukes and UNC's of the world down, you know they have capable defenders. Look for the return of Scott and a re-emphasis on defensive effort to lower those opposing shooting numbers. Wins will follow.

These guys are good. A handful of publications had Miami in their preseason top 25. ACC coaches picked them 4th in the conference. Joe Lunardi has yet to exclude from his brackets. Reggie Johnson didn't suddenly forget how manhandle a Plumlee. Kenny Kadji

is still the same inside-out threat that caught the eye of some NBA scouts. Shane Larkin didn't lose his lightning quick first step. Effort can be increased. Strategy can be altered. Skill and talent do not go away overnight.

Early season upsets happen, it's more important how you finish. How many people remember that defending ACC Tournament Champion FSU lost to Harvard last year?? Big East Tournament runner up and Sweet 16 qualifier Cincinnati took shots to the chin to both Presbyterian and Marshall in its first 5 games last year!!! Vanderbilt lost to Cleveland State as the #8 team in the country early on last year, and Pitt lost to Long Beach State as the #9 team just days earlier. The Hurricanes loss to FGCU, while embarrassing, is not unprecedented. Many a team has recovered from an early major upset to go on and do special things later in the season. Some teams take a handful of games to get into a groove. Better to struggle now than late in the season.

The expectations for the 2012-13 Miami Hurricanes basketball team are justifiably high. Last night's loss was in a word, inexcusable. But there is still a whole lot of basketball left to be played. There's a very good chance by the end of the year the upset loss to FGCU, while not forgotten, will merely be a footnote.

Hoops Buzz: 11/8

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Nov. 8, 2012

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- The Miami Hurricanes begin their 2012-13 season Friday against Stetson with a 5:30 p.m. contest at the Bank United Center.

Miami is coming off a disappointing 69-67 loss to Division II school St. Leo in an exhibition game last week.

"There's a lot of different ways to learn about yourself," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "One is in practice, which we had been I would say lackadaisical in our approach to little things and when you do that in practice, often times it doesn't make an impression. When you do it in a game it makes a huge impression and we've been able to sit and watch tape with our team and with individual on our team that clearly explains the coaches' concern with paying attention to detail. I think every player realizes he has a lot of things to work on to get better and they're doing that. I think we have their attention and they're working hard right now."

Larranaga continued on the loss:

"Here's the funny thing, I think players naturally tend to think, 'I'm good and I play well,' Larranaga said. "They often times judge themselves in one category--scoring. If I'm scoring, I'm playing well and if I'm not scoring, I'm not playing well, which is obviously not true. There's so many aspects of the game. Probably the biggest and most important aspect of the game is conversion. You shoot and miss, you get back defensively and set your defense so your opponent has to face a five-man defense rather than facing one, two, three, or four so that was the first point of emphasis. The second defensively is that as big as we are and as athletic as we can be at times, you have to rebound the ball, but if you don't block out and do the little things well, it doesn't matter how big you are, you're not going to get

the rebound. In that case, St. Leo out-hustled us for a lot of balls that we would have gotten had we boxed out. Then on offense, it is about sharing the ball and getting high percentage shots and we didn't do that. You know we didn't do that is we only had seven assists. If we only get seven assists in a game, we'll probably lose that night."

The first practice after the loss was:

"I'd say serious. A little more sense of understanding. They watched the video tape and saw how we played, I'm sure they were surprised by it. They probably knew we played bad, but didn't realize how many mistakes we made."

Larranaga admitted he was surprised with the way the team played, but now turns their focus to Stetson.

"It's not like a veteran team to start that way, but I've been through this before and hopefully the response will be the same," Larranaga said.

Miami went 20-13 last season while Stetson went 9-20. UM has won the last eight meetings dating back to 2008.

"Stetson has a very, very fine team," Larranaga said. "The first thing we noticed was they were 14th in the country in tempo (according to kenpom.com) so they like to run up and down the floor very well. Their big guys run the floor very well and their big guys can shoot 3s. They're a team that moves the ball on offense extremely well. They back screen, down screen, flex cut in the tapes that we watched and do a very nice job in their half court sets."

News & Notes

- SG Trey McKinney-Jones has earned the nod as a full-time starter in the final open spot with Shane Larkin, Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, and Reggie Johnson. McKinney-Jones led the

team in scoring with 19 points against St. Leo and is expected to handle more of a scoring load after averaging 7.0 points a game last season. "He better, he's someone we're counting on very much," Larranaga said. "He started a good portion of last season, has played very well on the offensive end this preseason and he's got major responsibility of helping us by making 3s, getting out on the fast break and making some layups, playing good defense, and rebounding."

- SG Rion Brown will start for Durand Scott, who will miss the first three games as he finishes serving a five-game suspension handed out by the NCAA last season due to impermissible benefits.

- SG Bishop Daniels (hamstring) did not play in the exhibition game, but is expected to play against Stetson. Daniels resumed to practice on Sunday and was limited on Monday, but has been shooting each night. "We're hoping he'll give us some quality minutes on Friday," Larranaga said.

- Muscle cramps ended PG Shane Larkin's game early as he missed part of the second half. He's expected to play Friday.

- PF Raphael Akpejiori has also been dealing with an injury, but was expected to practice Wednesday. There is no timetable for a return for SG Garrius Adams.

- C Reggie Johnson, who attended Wednesday's Miami Heat-Brooklyn Nets game, struggled against St. Leo with seven points and one rebound in 13 minutes. "He did not have a good matchup," Larranaga said. "That's a concern that anytime you don't matchup properly, one of the things that Stetson is that their two big men, both about 6-9, can shoot 3s and that's an area our big men have to do better helping us out there."

Rothstein Files: Six BCS Teams Primed To Make A Jump

CBS New York
Jon Rothstein
Nov. 7, 2012

Looking for a team from a BCS conference ready to make some noise?

Check out our list below of six schools — one from each major conference — that's ready to make a jump during the 2012-13 college basketball season.

BIG EAST – RUTGERS

The Scarlet Knights had four top 30 wins last season and return virtually every piece of significance except for rugged forward Gilvydas Biruta, who transferred to Rhode Island. Nevertheless, Kansas State import Wally Judge should be able to fill the void left behind by Biruta and possibly give Rutgers more of a legitimate presence at the rim on both sides of the floor. Scarlet Knights coach Mike Rice has a terrific three-guard attack with sophomores Jerome Seagears, Eli Carter and Myles Mack, along with a big wild card in versatile forward Dane Miller. If the 6-foot-6 Miller can keep his engine turned on, he's one of the better intangible players in the Big East, and maybe the country. Rutgers has caught the eye of several coaches in the Big East during the preseason — they're on people's radar. This team went 14-18 last year with a plethora of freshmen, and it says here at the very worst they'll flip that record. That means the Scarlet Knights will be in the NIT or possibly on the NCAA bubble — seriously.

BIG TEN – MINNESOTA

Gophers coach Tubby Smith told me a few weeks ago that this is the deepest team he's ever had in his coaching career — and he won a national championship at Kentucky in 1998. Minnesota returns all the components from last year's group that reached the final of the Postseason NIT, as well as Trevor Mbakwe, who should be this team's sixth man. The key for the Gophers will be consistent guard play from both Andre and Austin Hollins, along

with another strong season at power forward from Rodney Williams, whose game went to another level last year when Mbakwe went down with a knee injury. Keep an eye on skilled big man Maurice Walker, who could develop into a valuable reserve thanks to his high basketball IQ.

SEC – OLE MISS

In six seasons as Rebels head coach, Andy Kennedy has led Ole Miss to five NIT appearances and five 20-win seasons. Kennedy has regularly had the Rebels on the cusp of the NCAA Tournament, and that should happen this season thanks to the enhanced depth in this program. Ole Miss now has seven legitimate perimeter players that can be in their rotation with the additions of freshmen Derrick Millinghaus, Martavious Newby and Anthony Perez, along with junior college transfer Marshall Henderson. Veteran guards Jarvis Summers, Nick Williams and LaDarius White all return along with maybe the most underrated power forward-center combo in America in Murphy Holloway and Reginald Buckner. After Kentucky, Florida, Missouri and Tennessee, this is the team to watch in the SEC.

PAC-12 – USC

The Trojans have no business being picked ninth in the PAC-12 preseason poll — their ceiling is much higher. USC has drastically upgraded their roster from a season ago and they could augment things even more if the NCAA grants Omar Draby, a 7-foot-2 transfer from Rice — a waiver to play immediately. In addition to Draby, Trojans coach Kevin O'Neill might have the nation's deepest frontcourt thanks to three transfers — Eric Wise (UC Irvine), Ari Stewart (Wake Forest) and Renaldo Woolridge (Tennessee). That trio combined with a freshman sleeper in Strahinja Gavrilovic and two savvy veterans in Aaron Fuller and Dewayne Dedmon should make USC one of the tougher teams in America to play against in the paint. Veteran floor general Jio Fontan appears fully healed from last

season's knee injury and should form a potentially explosive backcourt with another Wake Forest transfer, J.T. Terrell.

BIG 12 – OKLAHOMA

What a difference a year makes. Lon Kruger may be only in his second season as the head coach in Norman, but there's a palpable buzz surrounding the Sooners. Oklahoma's three freshmen guards — Buddy Hield, Isaiah Cousins and Je'lon Hornbeak will all see major minutes immediately, and Cousins could be this team's starter at point guard. Hield is the type of microwave scorer that could develop into a lethal sixth man and Wyoming transfer Amath M'Baye is an athletic forward who should form a nice veteran nucleus with upperclassmen Romero Osby and Steven Pledger. Kruger is one of the best tacticians in the business and has nine capable bodies to work with. That should be enough to have the Sooners back to where they expect to be on an annual basis — the NCAA Tournament.

ACC – MIAMI

If the Hurricanes' personnel wore Duke or North Carolina on the front of their jerseys, they'd be the unanimous pick to win the ACC. Miami may have had a small hiccup earlier this week when they dropped an exhibition game to Division II Saint Leo, but they still have all the requisites to compete for a conference title and a bid to the NCAA Tournament. The combination up front of Kenny Kadji and Reggie Johnson is as good of a baseline duo as there is in college basketball, and Durand Scott is a savvy veteran guard that should be an All-ACC caliber player. If sophomore point guard Shane Larkin can become more of a distributor, the Hurricanes should be right in the mix for an ACC title and a trip to the field of 68.

ACC Basketball Preview: No. 5 Miami

News-Record
David Morrison
Nov. 6, 2012

We're in the midst of 12 days of semi-involved previews of all 12 ACC basketball teams, in reverse order from what they were picked to finish by us media schlubs at Operation Basketball on Oct. 17.

MIAMI HURRICANES

Coach: Jim Larranaga (second year, 20-13; 29th year overall, 490-347)

2011-12 record: 20-13, 9-7 ACC

Last NCAA appearance: 2008

Returning starters: 4

One to watch

C Reggie Johnson, Sr., 6-10/280: The Winston-Salem native has slimmed down, worked on his offensive skills and put the knee injury that cost him 10 games last season behind him. His biggest impact will still be on the boards, where he and Kenny Kadji can be game-changers.

Projected starting lineup (star consensus brought to you by VerbalCommits.com)

PG Shane Larkin, Soph., 5-11/160 (3.3 stars, 19 career starts): 7.4 ppg, 1.35 assist/TO ratio, 1.56 spg

SG Durand Scott, Sr., 6-5/202 (4.5 stars, 93 career starts): 12.9 ppg, 5.4 rpg, 3.1 apg, 45.3% from the field

SF Trey McKinney Jones, Sr., 6-5/216 (2 stars, 50 career starts): 7.0 ppg, 3.5 rpg, 37.4% from 3

PF Kenny Kadji, Sr., 6-11/251 (4 stars, 29 career starts): 11.7 ppg, 5.3 rpg, 1.59 bpg

C Reggie Johnson, Sr., 6-10/280 (3.5 stars, 62 career starts): 10.0 ppg, 7.2 rpg, 49.2% from the field

Star/Start averages: 3.46/50.6

Statistically speaking

1,217: Career points for Scott, the ACC's active leader.

What they were good at (complicated stats courtesy of the always vital StatSheet.com)

Protecting the ball: Second in the ACC in turnovers per game (11.6)

Jacking up 3s: Second in the ACC in percentage of points from 3-pointers (32.2)

Offensive efficiency: Fourth in the ACC in points per possession (1.06)

What they weren't so good at

Sharing: Assist percentage (48.2) was 11th in the ACC

Defensive boards: Ninth in the ACC in defensive rebound percentage (67.0)

Overcoming halftime deficits: Were 2-9 last year when trailing at the half

Here's your headline!

'Canes have experience, inside play to turn break into Triangle power structure

Miami set to challenge for ACC crown

FOX Sports South

Andrew Jones

Nov. 6, 2012

Don't get Reggie Johnson started when it comes to the perceptions about Miami's place in ACC basketball.

The Hurricanes' senior forward is fine with Duke and North Carolina serving as the darlings of the conference. He just wishes some other ACC teams would get some respect, too; primarily his Hurricanes.

The thing is, and Johnson is smart enough to acknowledge this, too, is that you must win to get noticed, and Miami has fallen a just short of that in recent years. This season, however, could be very different.

"We're Miami, man," he said. "If our jerseys said North Carolina across the chests we'd be a top-10 team right now, that's how I feel. If it said North Carolina or Duke right here we'd be a top-10 team. But we're Miami.

"Those teams have great traditions as far as going to the tournament and making noise. I feel like we can compete with those guys."

Miami may do more than compete with them. The Hurricanes have the components to soar to the top of the ACC -- if several factors go their way.

UNC is small and lacks depth inside and will start a freshman at point guard, so the Tar Heels could be a work in progress all season. Duke has perimeter shooting issues and not much legitimate interior depth. North Carolina State, which was picked by the media to win the ACC, hasn't done so since 1989, and if unpredictable junior C.J. Leslie is its leader, the Wolfpack can't be seen as a runaway lock.

That leaves the door open for a possible surprise team to pass them all.

Maryland has nice parts and Florida State won the conference tournament last March. But Miami is more experienced and deeper than either, and really, may be the most experienced team in the ACC.

Add in the fact that its second-year coach, Jim Larranaga, is the only coach in the ACC not named Mike Krzyzewski or Roy Williams to lead a team to a Final Four (George Mason in 2006), and you have the makings of a possible ACC champion.

The key is Johnson. A 6-foot-10 load north of 300 pounds for most of his career, he's playing just below 290 now and is moving quicker than ever. Less pressure on his knees could mean Johnson plays a full season, which wasn't the case last winter. He averaged 10 points and 7.2 rebounds per game, but those numbers will be significantly higher if he's healthy.

"I'm moving fine, I am moving so much better," Johnson said. "I am flowing better, and it's making us smoother."

Senior guard Durand Scott (12.3 points per game for his career) said his fellow classmate has never been more impressive than since he lost the weight.

"Reggie has always been very good," Scott said. "He has great hands, a soft touch and feel, but now his footwork is much better and we run a smooth offense with him on the floor. We're a lot better now."

Sophomore point guard Shane Larkin, the son of Baseball Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin, has considerable potential and should build off a quality freshman campaign from last winter.

Then there's 6-10 senior forward Kenny Kadji, who averaged just below 12 points and more than five rebounds per contest last season. Kadji may have the most pro potential of any-

one on the roster, and, when ticking, he and Johnson are quite a tandem, which means Miami can be quite a team.

"If we play to our strengths, then all of those guys complement each other in a very positive manner," Larranaga said. "We can be very good."

Johnson speaks glowingly about his teammates. He believes in them, and he has faith in Larranaga, whom the players took a while buying into. But that's no longer an issue.

And if the Hurricanes fulfill Johnson's vision, getting national respect won't be, either.

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These Hurricanes are worth watching

AP
Steven Wine
Nov. 6, 2012

Like other members of the Miami Hurricanes basketball team, guard Rion Brown lobbies his fellow students to attend games, with mixed results.

"We've been trying to reach out to them," Brown said. "Sometimes they say, 'Is there a game tonight? I didn't know basketball season started.'"

Another season is about to begin, and there should be good reason to watch the perennially attendance-challenged Hurricanes. They're coming off a 9-7 season in the Atlantic Coast Conference, their best showing ever in the league, and return nine players from a team that went 20-13 overall.

Coach Jim Larranaga begins his second season in Miami confident the long-overlooked program is making progress. But can the Hurricanes get South Florida to pay attention?

Last season, the Hurricanes drew an average crowd of 3,936 in their 7,200-seat arena, less than half the league average and well outside the top 100 in NCAA attendance.

"When you're in a place like Miami, there is so much to do," Brown said. "You can't blame people for saying, 'I can go here or there, so why go to the Miami basketball games?'"

But Larranaga believes in his product and knows how to sell tickets. Attendance more than doubled when he coached at Bowling Green and George Mason.

"What we found is that first of all, people want to follow a winner," he said. "Secondly, you've got to do a lot of community service and net-working."

That's why Larranaga sent his players to freshmen dormitories a year ago to distribute pizza and chicken wings, and they'll do it again this season. Larranaga also spoke to fraternities and sororities and at freshmen orientation. He invited children to visit with players after games and receive coaching from them at practice. He organized an adult fantasy camp to cultivate support.

"You've got to build a fan base one fan at a time," he said.

And then win, which Miami expects to do this season. The Hurricanes return players who accounted for 80 percent of their scoring and 86 percent of their rebounds last season.

Among the returnees are guard Durand Scott (12.9 points per game last season), 6-foot-11 swingman Kenny Kadji (11.7) and 292-pound center Reggie Johnson (10.0), all seniors. Each believes the team will benefit from a year under Larranaga, who has 490 career victories and led George Mason to the Final Four in 2006.

"From top to bottom it's a great team," Scott said. "But we'll follow coach. We're just trying to get to where he has been before, which is the Final Four. We know exactly what he wants and how he wants it done. It's just like school — if you follow the teacher, you're going to be able to pass the test."

Larranaga said the Hurricanes are strong at guard and have excellent size. His biggest concern is their lack of a 6-8 ball-handling forward, which could create mismatch issues.

"If we can find a way to hide that weakness, we can be very, very good," he said.

The opener is Nov. 9 against Stetson. The Hurricanes play Michigan State at home Nov. 28, and also have home games against Duke, Florida State and North Carolina.

"I don't know if that has ever happened before here, where you have four potential sellouts," Larranaga said. "Those are all Top 25 teams. Hopefully the community and students will get behind us."

UM eager to rebound after setbacks last season

South Florida Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Nov. 3, 2012

Hurricanes boast a senior-heavy team eager to make most of Jim Larranaga's second year leading the program

This is the year.

Miami basketball had the talent in the past, but circumstances varying from injuries to NCAA investigations kept the Hurricanes grounded. The clouds effectively parted in the offseason and the team is as healthy as it's been.

So they're confident.

"I'm sorry if I sound cocky or whatever, but I think we're going to win big," center Reggie Johnson said. "That's my mindset. I think practices are harder than the game right now."

Picked fourth in the ACC by the coaches and fifth by the media, Miami cracked at least one Top 25 ranking in preseason magazines. If there's a time for the Hurricanes to strike, it's now.

2011-12: 20-13 overall, 9-7 in ACC

Postseason: Lost in second round of NIT

The Starting Five

PG Shane Larkin: A year older and wiser, the sophomore has more confidence in the game plan and more chemistry with teammates.

G Durand Scott: Will miss first three games with NCAA suspension, but teammates have raved about improvements made over the summer. Should make big impact after return.

G: Rion Brown: The only non-returning starter has a 3-point shooting touch and averaged 7.2 points a game

F Kenny Kadji: Dropped more than 20 pounds, will play with more athleticism in final Miami season.

C Reggie Johnson: Healthy again, the 6-10 big man worked hard to develop a jumper to complement physical play in paint.

Others to watch

G Trey McKinney Jones: He could challenge Brown for a spot in the lineup after scoring 7 points a game and starting 12 times. It's his second Miami season after transferring from UMKC.

F Julian Gamble: The oldest player on the team coming off a medical redshirt for a torn ACL. The NCAA granted the former starter a sixth season after the injury.

Three keys to success

1. It sounds obvious, but failure to stay healthy made the biggest difference a year ago. The win at Duke showed what was possible when all was in line.

2. Get everyone involved. The Hurricanes are as deep as anyone in the ACC. Using that bench and wearing down the opposition with full-court pressure could make the difference late in games.

3. Feed Reggie. The 6-foot-10 senior Johnson is healthy and not lacking confidence in any way. Get him involved down low because few can match him physically.

Three must-see games

Nov. 28 vs. Michigan State: In what could be the biggest home non-conference game in memory, the Spartans will bring a strong early indication as to how the Hurricanes will fare in the ACC.

Jan. 10 at North Carolina: The first ACC road test will air live in prime time on national television. The nation will see if they're for real or not.

Feb. 2 at NC State: The homestretch begins with the preseason favorite to win the conference. Johnson pointed to this game before practice started as the game he's anticipating the most.

2012-13 forecast

The second year of the Jim Larranaga era opens with as much promise as this program's had in recent years. The depth will be a strength with four starters returning from a team that ultimately under performed a season ago.

Having six seniors, most of whom will contribute a large share of production, means the time to win is now with rebuilding job on the horizon. Improvements in conditioning (Kadji) and shooting (Larkin) made the summer a productive time for the Hurricanes.

Now they just have to do it when it counts with the rest of the country watching.

ACC HOOP PREVIEW: Miami

StarNews Online
Brett Friedlander
Nov. 2, 2012

Coach: Jim Larranaga (2nd season)

2011-12 record: (20-13, 9-7 ACC)

Postseason: Lost to Minnesota, NIT second round

Projected finish: 5th

Returning starters (4): Durand Scott, 6-5, senior, guard (12.9 ppg, 5.4 rpg); Kenny Kadji, 6-11, senior, center/forward (11.7 ppg, 5.3 rpg); Reggie Johnson, 6-10, senior, center (10.0 ppg, 7.2 rpg); Shane Larkin, 5-11, sophomore, guard (7.4 ppg, 2.6 apg).

Returning lettermen (6): Rion Brown, 6-6, junior, guard (7.2 ppg, 2.8 rpg); Trey McKinney-Jones, 6-5, senior, guard (7.0 ppg, 3.5 rpg); Garrius Adams, 6-6, senior, guard (4.1 ppg, 2.5 rpg); Eric Swoope, 6-6, junior, forward (2.3 ppg, 1.7 rpg); Raphael Akpejori, 6-10, junior, forward (1.6 ppg, 1.5 rpg); Julian Gamble, 6-10, senior, center/forward (4.0 ppg, 3.5 rpg in 2010-11).

Newcomers (2): Bishop Daniels, 6-3, freshman, guard (18.0 ppg, 4.0 apg at Word of God Academy, Raleigh); Tonye Jekiri, 6-11, freshman, forward (20.0 ppg, 12.0 ppg at Champagnat Catholic School, Hialeah, Fla.).

Outlook: Ask any coach or television commentator worth his salt and he'll tell you that the secret to success in college basketball is seniors. The Hurricanes have six of them. It also doesn't hurt to have a strong point guard-big man combination, as Miami does in senior center Reggie Johnson and sophomore playmaker Shane Larkin. If that's enough, the Hurricanes also have a coach in Jim Larranaga who took George Mason to the Final Four in 2006.

In other words, all the elements are in place for Miami to have a breakout season.

Because of the depth and diversity of the veteran roster, Larranaga has plenty of flexibility to fit any circumstance.

He can go big with a frontcourt that includes a slimmed down Johnson, third-team All-ACC selection Kenny Kadji and a healthy Julian Gamble, who missed all last season with a knee injury. He can go small and quick with a stable of guards led by sophomore point Larkin, the son of baseball Hall of Famer Barry Larkin, slashing senior Durand Scott and highly touted freshman Bishop Daniels.

Larranaga also has the luxury of dialing up some instant offense off the bench in junior sharpshooter Rion Brown or turning to a shutdown defender in Trey McKinney-Jones.

It's the kind of roster that, if it lives up to its potential, might finally get people talking about college basketball in South Florida. At least, when the NBA champion Miami Heat isn't at home.

Quotable quote: "We've got a heck of a team, and I mean that with passion. I get chills just thinking about it. We're going to be scary good, as long as we come to work. At every position we have, we're deep. Practice is a war, which is the way Coach L likes it." Senior center Reggie Johnson.

Projection: If you're searching for a dark-horse pick in the ACC this season, look no further than the Hurricanes. Think last year's championship Florida State team.

Like the 2011-12 Seminoles, Miami has an abundance of experienced talent and depth at every position on the floor. It has potential stars in Johnson, Kadji and Larkin, to go along with a bevy of solid role players. It also has a successful veteran coach whose system is now fully installed.

About the only thing that stands in the Hurricanes' way of contending for an ACC title and an NCAA tournament bid is themselves.

Though they've won 19 or more games in each of the past five seasons, only once during that time have they made it into the field of 68. If Larranaga can develop some chemistry among all those talented players while finding a way to avoid Miami's customary slow start in league play, this could finally be the year the Hurricanes get over the hump.

An unusual refrain: NCAA Tournament or bust

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 2, 2012

A year ago at this time, the University of Miami men's basketball team was just figuring out its new coach, Jim Larranaga.

The hyper-energetic New Yorker with his motivational quotes, professorial style and complex scramble man-to-man defense took some getting used to after years under Frank Haith, a more mellow Southern big brother figure who preferred playing zone.

Larranaga had to get to know the players he inherited, too.

He learned that although Kenny Kadji is 6-11, he is more comfortable facing the basket than backing up to it. In fact, Kadji was asked to drop 20 pounds this off-season — from 262 lbs. to 242 — because he will be asked to run more and to guard 6-7 and 6-8 forwards on the wings.

He learned how to motivate 292-pound Reggie Johnson and 176-pound Shane Larkin. He learned how to best utilize guards Trey McKinney Jones and Rion Brown. He realized that Durand Scott is a fierce competitor. And he discovered during the past few months that 6-10 senior Julian Gamble, finally healthy, is a heady tough-nosed rebounder who should contribute more than Larranaga initially thought.

Six seniors are back from the Hurricanes team that finished 20-13 last year, fourth in the Atlantic Coast Conference (9-7). That team reached the second round of the NIT, which left the players and coaches wanting more.

"Tournament and make noise," Johnson replied, when asked his preseason goals. "I definitely want to make noise in the NCAA Tournament, no ifs, ands or buts. Forget the

NIT. Forget all that. I'm telling you right now. Sorry if I sound cocky...Some of you probably think, 'Oh, he's crazy,' but I'm telling you right now what's going to be this coming season."

Johnson predicted the Canes would finish top three in the ACC.

UM cracked the national Top 25 in a few preseason magazine polls and received eight votes in the AP poll. The addition of 7-foot freshman Tonye Jekiri of Hialeah's Champagnat Catholic School should help, as he is quick for a big man and a good shot blocker.

Larranaga said this year's team has a much better grasp of his system after a year of instruction. He no longer feels he has to win his players over. They are on board and ready to follow his plan.

"We should be able to do things in November and December that we couldn't even think about doing at any time last year," Larranaga said. "You'll see us pressing more, running more."

The Canes had a pair of signature wins last season — at Duke and at home against Florida State. They are hoping for more this year.

Larkin vowed to be more aggressive offensively than he was as a freshman. He won't be as deferential as he was a year ago.

"Hopefully we can build on what we started last year and make the NCAA Tournament this year," Larkin said. "I'll look to break out a little more. I don't feel we get the respect we deserve. Winning at Duke shows what we can do, but we need to do more of that."

Gamble agreed.

"I'm definitely hungry after having to sit out the entire season and seeing ups and downs, seeing adversity," Gamble said. "This is my last chance, the last shot for half our team

to go out and make history, make the Tournament. We haven't been since 2008, my freshman year.

"We're not leaving anything to chance. We're going to do everything in our power to make the tournament. There's no excuse with the amount of experience and talent we have. We can't blame it on the coaching staff because they're doing everything they can to help us. We are an NCAA Tournament team and we just have to go out and show it. We've talked about it long enough."

EARLY START

The Hurricanes will play their first exhibition at BankUnited Center on Friday at 7 p.m. against St. Leo.

SG Scott Has Great Expectations

InsideTheU
Rudy Rodriguez-Chomat
Nov. 2, 2012

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- The University of Miami men's basketball team is an experience group coming into the 2012-13 season that starts up tonight with an exhibition game against St. Leo in Coral Gables.

With six seniors returning from a 20-13 team that advanced to the second round of the NIT last season, the expectations are high in Coral Gables, a rarity in basketball, but a true reality.

The leader of the team is senior shooting guard Durand Scott who will be handling the ball most of the season and creating the havoc the team expects to bring. But it's started with creating a family environment.

"Coach encouraged us, everybody on the team to stay this Summer and try to get on the same page, try to be together, try to get more closer knit and which everybody did and that worked out for the better of us," Scott said.

For Scott though, it was about improving a jump shot that can make him a much more dangerous weapon for the 'Canes. Scott has always been able to get to the hoop, but his jumper hasn't always been the best.

"Personally, I wanted to work on my jump shot. That was my main focus. My jump shot especially from the three-point line was my main focus. Not saying that I am going to go out there and shoot a bunch of threes, but I am feeling more confident in that and when I am open I will surely take the shot," Scott said.

And it's not simply to shoot the ball, but it will create lanes for him or give him passing lanes to find teammates when he's covered tightly. It can also allow him to use his ability to get to the rim when he's crowded.

"That will help me a lot. That would stop people from going under the screens. People will have to play me much closer and I can use my speed to get to the basket if I need to. So it plays both ways. Hard work pays off and hopefully that will correlate to the game," Scott said.

Confidence though is a key for the team. Scott says the team is very confident with all the seniors returning, including himself, Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadji, Garrius Adams, Julian Gamble and Trey McKinney-Jones.

"Obviously, we got the head of the class with the six seniors. We're all confident, stronger, mentally ready. If we all put it in one basket we'll be fine," Scott said. "From top to bottom it's a great team, we're just going to follow Coach L. He's the leader. We're just trying to get where he's been before which is the Final Four. I think if we just listen to him we'll be in a great position to win some ball game."

Scott also raved about a couple of freshman and a senior that missed last season. Bishop Daniels redshirted last year. Tonye Jekiri is expected to play as a freshman and Gamble is returning for a sixth season after injuring his knee last year.

"You didn't get to see them all (Bishop Daniels and Julian Gamble), and our freshman Tonye (Jekiri). Those are new faces you'll be able to see on the court and obviously we have Reggie (Johnson) who sat out a few games and me with my suspension. Everybody is on the court this year. They (Daniels and Jekiri) are going to play a major role this year. They make our team bigger and fast. Bishop is quick. Julian is the highest I've ever seen him jump. We got

Tonye who is another freshman, a big body, can block shots and run the floor like a deer," Scott said.

Scott though will have to continue with his suspension that began last year in the ACC Tournament. He will have to sit out three more games, all three which Miami should win, even without him.

"It's tremendously difficult because it was the ACC Tournament, a game that we needed, they sentenced me for what they needed to do. I just moved on. There is nothing I can do about it now. I think with all that we have in place, we'll be fine," Scott said. "--It's definitely a big deal. I want to play every single game at the University of Miami."

However, don't think there aren't big goals for this team going into its season under Jim Larrañaga.

"We got our second year under his belt. We know exactly what he expects, exactly what he wants. He's been there before. It's just like school, if you follow the teacher, you'll be able to pass the test. That's exactly what we are going to do," Scott said.

It's not simply making the NCAA Tournament, something that Scott has never experienced. He's looking at an ACC Championship, a Final Four, a National Championship.

"It would mean a lot. I know I've never been there. That's a goal for me, but not just getting there, win an ACC Championship, win an NCAA Championship. I think we're a great team that will be able to play against the best. We'll just battle and do the best we can," Scott said. "We're very strong in every position. If you look down the line, we have so many exceptional players. I guess that would give us the confidence with Coach L and with the seniors coming back and we're a close team, we've formed a friendship with all these years."

College Basketball's 10 Best in the ACC

SI.com

7
Durand Scott
Miami

Stats to know: 12.9 ppg, 5.4 rpg, 3.1 apg
In a league with a good deal of inexperience at the point, it's nice to have a senior there. It's also nice when he knows how to get good big men involved, and Miami has two of those, too. If Scott rediscovers his three-point stroke, all the better.

Top 10 Three-Point Shooting Bigs in CBB

BleacherReport.com

It's always great to have players who can stretch the floor with their three-point shooting ability.

It's even better if those players are some of your bigs who can step out and knock down shots from beyond the arc.

Power forwards and centers who can hit three's add a whole other dimension to their team's attack.

By being able to face up and hit the pick and pop, these players of length create matchup madness for their opponents.

Here is a list of the top 10 three-point shooting bigs (players 6'8" or taller) in CBB.

8. Kenny Kadji, Miami
Kenny Kadji is a rare player of size (6'11", 250 lbs).

The rising senior is just as comfortable stepping out to the three-point line as he is posting up on the block.

Kadji hit 41.8 percent of his shots from beyond the arc in 2011-12, many off of a pick and pop.

He hit four-of-five three's in Miami's upset win over Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium this past February.

Watch for the Hurricanes to have one of their best recent teams—it will feature 10 upper classmen.

#35 Miami Hurricanes: College Basketball 111 in 111

The Sports Bank

Welcome to The Sports Bank's third annual college basketball season preview series. Two years we looked at 99 teams in 99 days. Last year, we were slightly more aggressive and expanded to 111 teams in 111 days and will do so again as we look ahead to the 2012-2013 season.

We will rank the 75 power conference teams and top 36 mid-majors in reverse power ranking order. We'll break down rosters, transfers, incoming freshmen, non-conference schedules, and pick a player to watch for each team.

There have to be some bold predictions in my rankings or else I'd be boring. One of those is that the Miami Hurricanes will have a firm grip on being the fourth best team in the ACC since six of their top seven scorers are back from last season.

MIAMI HURRICANES

Last Season: T-4th, 9-7 in ACC, 20-13 overall

Predicted ACC Finish: 4th

Projected Depth Chart

C: Reggie Johnson (Sr)/Julian Gamble (Sr)/Tonye Jekiri (Fr)

PF: Kenny Kadji (Jr)/Erik Swoope (Jr)/Raphael Akpejiori (Jr)

SG: Trey McKinney-Jones (Sr)/Garrius Adams (Sr)

SG: Durand Scott (Sr)/Rion Brown (Jr)

PG: Shane Larkin (So)/Bishop Daniels (Fr)

Gone: SF-DeQuan Jones, PG-Malcolm Grant
2012-2013 Outlook:

In his second year as head coach, Jim Larranaga returns some more than capable scorers on the wing led by Durand Scott. The 6'5" combo guard didn't make the leap many expected him to as a junior but should certainly be motivated to make the most of his senior campaign. There is terrific depth on the wing with Trey McKinney-Jones, Rion Brown, and Garrius Adams who were all valuable contributors a year ago.

With Malcolm Grant graduating, Shane Larkin takes over as the full-time point guard. After choosing to stay in home state rather than attending DePaul where he originally committed, the son of former Reds shortstop Barry Larkin was named to the All-ACC Freshman Team. Combo guard Bishop Daniels who redshirted last season due to a foot injury could see some time at the point and Scott is capable of running the show as well.

The Hurricanes also have quality depth and balance inside led by the physical Reggie Johnson. He missed the first nine games of last season due to a knee injury and proved to be a force in the paint when healthy. Florida transfer Kenny Kadji made the most of his first season at Miami, bringing more size inside but also the ability to stretch defenses with his outside shooting. At 6-10 and 6-11 respectively, Johnson and Kadji are a tough match-up for any opposing frontcourt.

Miami will also get a boost off their bench with the return of 6-10 Julian Gamble who started thirteen games as a junior but sat out all of last year due to a torn ACL. Juniors Erik Swoope and Raphael Akpejiori provide more depth at the forward while seven-foot freshman Tonye Jekiri doesn't figure to make an immediate impact though with his size and upside has the potential to be the center of the future for the Canes.

There are no real question marks for Miami this season. They have a solid, experienced starting five with quality depth all across the roster. Now the pressure is on for Larranaga and company to pull it all together and make the most of their talented collection of players.

Player to Watch: Durand Scott

Since they solid balance across their roster, Miami doesn't need Scott to have a monster senior year. The one positive about Scott is that he can still impact the game without needing to shoot the rock. With that being said, showing more of a killer instinct will only increase the chances of the Hurricanes being able to compete with the likes of N.C. State,

Duke, and North Carolina in the ACC.

Key Non-Conference Games:

11/24 vs. Detroit

11/28 vs. Michigan State (Big Ten/ACC Challenge)

12/1 at UMass

12/14 vs. Charlotte

12/18 at UCF

12/22 vs. Hawaii (Diamond Head Classic)

12/23 vs. Arizona/East Tennessee State (Diamond Head Classic)

12/25 vs. San Diego State/San Francisco/Ole Miss/Indiana State (Diamond Head Classic)

Preview: Miami Hurricanes

CBSSports.com

Shawn Krest

Oct. 31, 2012

Last year: 20-13 overall, 9-7 ACC (fourth), NIT second round

Coach: Jim Larranaga (second year, 20-12; twenty ninth overall, 485-342)

Projected starters: PG Shane Larkin, Soph. (7.4 ppg; 2.5 apg, 1.6 spg); G Durand Scott, Sr. (12.9 ppg; 5.4 rpg; 3.1 apg); G Garrius Adams, Sr. (4.8 ppg; 2.1 rpg; 0.9 apg); PF Kenny Kadji, Sr. (11.7 ppg; 5.3 rpg; 1.6 bpg); C Reggie Johnson, Sr. (10.0ppg; 7.2 rpg)

Top newcomers: G Bishop Daniels. The 6-3, 176-pound redshirt freshman was a top 50 recruit last year, according to ESPN and Scout.com and was rated the number four dunker in the class. He sat out the season with a foot injury after averaging 18 ppg, 5 rpg and 4 apg as a senior at Raleigh's Word of God High School.

Key losses: G Malcolm Grant was the Hurricanes' third-leading scorer last season with 10.8 ppg. The senior also led the Hurricanes with 68 3-pointers.

What you need to know: In their second-to-last regular season game, the Hurricanes lost by four at NC State. Miami players consider that game to be an elimination game between two NCAA bubble teams. The Hurricanes went to the NIT, while NC State had a Sweet 16 run in the Big Dance and are now the conference favorites. Miami considers itself to be four points away from the Wolfpack and a dark horse in the conference.

Mark the calendar:

Dec. 23 in the Diamond Head Classic semifinal or consolation game: Assuming the tournament seeds hold, Miami should face No. 12 Ari-

zona in the semifinals. Miami's frontcourt will be tested by Solomon Hill and two McDonalds All Americans in Brandon Ashley and Grant Jerrett.

Feb. 2 at NC State: The Hurricanes will get a rematch with the Wolfpack in Raleigh. The teams match up well. Johnson and Kadji will try to shut down C.J. Leslie, while Larkin and Scott square off with Lorenzo Brown.

March 2 at Duke: Miami upset the Blue Devils at Cameron Indoor Stadium in overtime last season. With two regular-season games to go, this will be one of the Hurricanes' last chances to impress the selection committee. Biggest question: Can Miami take the step up that Florida State took last season? The Hurricanes have one of their most-talented teams since joining the conference. Johnson and Kadji are an imposing front line, and Larkin, Scott and Rion Brown give the Hurricanes shooting and driving threats in the backcourt. They look good on paper, but the Hurricanes will need to defeat the conference bigwigs to move into the upper echelon.

Best-case scenario: The Hurricanes' talent and hunger, combined with a soft non-conference schedule create a deep, confident team entering ACC play. The Hurricanes' belief that they're a few points away from being NC State is well-founded, and Miami competes for the ACC regular season and tournament titles.

Worst-case scenario: Scott's three-game suspension to start the season leads to Miami dropping a game they have no business losing. Johnson, Daniels, and Adams, who have all battled foot or leg injuries in the past, can't stay healthy, and the Hurricanes remain on the wrong side of the NCAA bubble for another year.

Reality: There's no reason why this shouldn't be a tournament team and an under-the-radar threat in the conference. Johnson, Kadji, Larkin, and Scott will get more votes for

postseason ACC honors than they did in the preseason.

Season opens: vs. Stetson, Nov. 9, 5:30 p.m. ET, ESPN3.

Countdown Player Profile and Q&A, Kenny Kadji

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 30, 2012

Kenny Kadji established himself as one of the premier front court players in the ACC last year. What does the 6'11 big man have in store for an encore?

Last season is his first year at Miami after transferring from UF, Kadji averaged 11.7 points, 5.3 rebounds, 1.6 blocks, and shot 42% from downtown. He seemed to get better as the season progressed, and has worked really hard this summer to get even better.

Here is our Q&A with the exceptional senior forward:

SOTU: Where did you learn to shoot like that? Are you now the best 3-point shooter on the team?

KK: Actually I learned from my dad, and I realized I could shoot that well freshman year of high school. I liked it so I kept doing it. I would say I am top two on the team, between me and Rion Brown.

SOTU: We've heard you have dropped 20 pounds, how will this change/improve your game?

KK: I think I will be more of an athlete. Shooting threes will not be my only attribute, I will do other stuff, like running the floor, finishing under the basket better. I can jump higher and run faster, which will help me guard quicker players and quicker forwards.

SOTU: Which returning player in the ACC is the most difficult to match up with?

KK: I think, (Kadji pauses) C.J. Leslie from NC State. He's tall, quick, he has a small forward body but at 6'9 has the size too.

SOTU: Which teammate has really impressed you so far in practice?

KK: I would say Reggie is playing well. But Julian Gamble is playing well too. Coming off an injury I didn't expect everything he is doing. But he is playing really well.

SOTU: Coach L mentioned you in the same breathe as Chris Bosh. Is there a pro player you feel your game is reminiscent of? Or an NBA player you model your game after?

KK: I like Chris Bosh. I like Lamar Odom as well. I think Odom is the guy I model my game after. He is a forward who can do a lot of things. He's been my favorite player for a long time.

Thanks to big # 35 for letting us catch up with him. This season promises to be a huge one for Kadji. Be sure to check him out in action starting November 9th, and through out the season.

Opponent Q&A: Talking Miami with State of the U

Streaking the Lawn

Tim Mulholland

Oct. 29, 2012

Streaking the Lawn got together with Jerry Steinberg from SBN's State of the U to discuss the Miami Hurricanes as we head into basketball season.

Streaking the Lawn got together with Jerry Steinberg, a fellow SBNation writer covering the Miami Hurricanes for State of the U. We wanted to see what he had to say about his team heading into the start of basketball season. Let's take a look!

Streaking the Lawn: What are your thoughts on Jim Larranaga after his first year in Coral Gables?

State of the U: Last year, Coach Larranaga did a fantastic job working around injuries (Reggie Johnson, Julian Gamble, Garrius Adams, Bishop Daniels), suspensions (Johnson and Durand Scott), deaths in the family (Malcolm Grant), and all while implementing a new system, and still had Miami within 1 game of an NCAA Tournament. I'd say I was rather impressed. This year the team appears to have supreme confidence. Coach L is a big reason why.

STL: What was your biggest loss from last season's team?

SOTU: Malcolm Grant struggled through a very trying personal year, and it showed on the court. When his older brother passed, his game took a big hit, understandably. Despite his off year, Grant's leadership and shot making ability will be missed.

STL: Who is the freshman that you think will make the biggest impact this year?

SOTU: Miami only has one true freshman, Tonye Jekiri. Jekiri is a 7 foot athlete, who runs the floor well, and should contribute

immediately behind Johnson, Kenny Kadji, and Julian Gamble. Redshirt freshman guard Bishop Daniels could also see a lot of playing time this year as a combo guard.

STL: The Hurricanes were picked to finish fourth in the league this year. Fair? Not Fair?

SOTU: Absolutely. The 'Canes have 4 players in Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadji, Durand Scott, and Shane Larkin who should vie for All Conference honors. Add to mix the depth they have in proven swingmen Trey McKinney Jones, Rion Brown, and Garrius Adams, depth in the front court (Gamble, Jekiri), and talented athletes (Daniels, Erik Swoope) and you have a very versatile and dangerous squad. Plus they are in year 2 under Larranaga and should have a better feel for his system.

STL: Who does Virginia need to watch out for most this year?

SOTU: Well I think Virginia fans are already familiar with Kenny Kadji, but he is 20 pounds lighter this year and really running the floor well. Coach L has compared him to a right-handed Chris Bosh. Of course a healthy Reggie Johnson is always a concern for any opponent. Shane Larkin and Rion Brown really came on last season, as the season progressed. I suspect UVA will have their usual lock down defense. Most likely the size and skill of Kadji would give them the most trouble.

STL: Which of Virginia's players gives you the most concern?

SOTU: We know Joe Harris wasn't himself at the end of the season and expect big things from him now that his hand has healed. Jontel Evans can go an entire game with out scoring then suddenly make a clutch one. The big freshman Mike Tobey and the sharp shooting new comer Evan Nolte are also a concern, as we have yet to see them in action. More than anything the team defense of the Hoos concerns me, anytime Miami plays them.

Larranaga Sees Progress

**CaneSport
Staff
Oct. 28, 2012**

Coach Jim Larranaga says his team's practices are going well.

To the point that he ended one early-season practice early.

"We were scheduled to go from 2-4, and we went for about an hour and 10 minutes and I stopped practice and sent them home because we were doing so well I wanted to end on a very positive note," Larranaga said. "We had accomplished everything we wanted to accomplish."

Asked if it's common for him to end a practice early, Larranaga said, "I think it's the first time in my coaching career I did it so early. In fact there were times in February we were still going two-and-a-half to three hours, and I would tell the team we should have been done in an hour-and-a-half, but we couldn't get it right."

Larranaga said in the team's first scrimmage he could tell players were fatigued.

"We're practicing very hard - you have to know how much you can push your team and at what point you need to back off," he said.

Because of that Larranaga said the team won't be practicing five days in a row at any point.

How different are things now vs. when Larranaga took over a year ago?

"I think Reggie Johnson said it best (in an interview) - they asked 'What's the difference between last year and this year?'" Larranaga said. "And he said 'Last year we were used to doing it one way, then we were asked to do it another way. But this year we know we do it just one way, and that's the Miami way.' It

was great that we have now that understanding that we're not trying to do it to please one player or a group of players; we're trying to do it in such a way that it can be a consistent brand of basketball."

Larranaga added that overall "I'm very pleased with how our guys have been practicing."

* Asked about the battle for playing time between Trey McKinney Jones and Rion Brown, Larranaga said, "I just want them to play like they're playing. They're both great. (They are) two high quality performers. Trey has a little more versatility, can play the 1, the 2, the 3 and the 4. But Rion is also playing at a very high level. The two of them will play in the game a lot along with Durand Scott and Shane Larkin. Three of them will be out on the floor together a lot."

* Of Kenny Kadji's progress after losing 24 pounds this off-season, Larranaga said, "What I want him to be is an athlete. He's a very skilled player, can really shoot the ball. But at 262 pounds (last year) he didn't run the floor consistently well. (Now) he can get out and finish on fast breaks at a much higher rate. When we extend the defense he's going to be expected to sometimes be on the ball, pressure full court. At 262 pounds, once they beat the press he'd be out of the play, trailing and no help for us. (Now) he can spring back and be a major factor."

* Larranaga said the team will miss DeQuan Jones "because we don't have that 6-7, 6-8 versatile athlete who can play the 3 and 4."

Larranaga said McKinney Jones may wind up guarding players three or four inches taller that Jones covered a year ago.

* Asked about freshman center Tonye Jekiri, Larranaga said, "I really like the progress Tonye is making. We've worked very exclusively on him developing a great jump-hook.

I think that will be his greatest weapon throughout his college career. He's got a nice jump shot, but a guy of his size (6-11) with his versatility in and around the basket, to be able to just jump-hook over people would be very, very effective. He's working hard to develop that shot as his bread-and-butter move."

* Larranaga recounted his in-home visit with Bishop Daniels (currently hampered by a hamstring injury) that helped convince the then-early signee to remain a Cane.

"When I first got the job, actually during the process of looking at Miami and seeing they had signed Bishop Daniels, I spoke to my son Jay, who is now with the Boston Celtics - he said to me 'If you get the job and take the job, you need to immediately get on an airplane and go see Bishop Daniels because you'll love him,'" Larranaga said. "I told Bishop that. I said 'I haven't seen you play, but my son said you're great, loves your athletic ability and knows that I love athletes like you.' I think that made an impression on Bishop and his parents."

Daniels is hoops' speedster, high flier

CaneSport
Staff
Oct. 27, 2012

Hurricane redshirt freshman guard Bishop Daniels was in sixth grade when he dunked for the first time.

All 5-foot-9 of him.

It was the beginning of a high-flying prep career that now has him coming off the bench at the 1, 2 and 3 for UM ... when he gets healthy from a hamstring injury.

"I'll be giving breaks to everybody - more the 1 and the 2 than the 3," said Daniels, now a 6-foot-3, 176-pounder.

When healthy, Daniels flies up and down the court - teammates call him the fastest player on the team.

Daniels' take on the roadrunner hype?

"I've always been quick and fast," he said. "I've been pretty fast all my life."

And Daniels was fast to ask UM to pull his letter-of-intent once former coach Frank Haith - who recruited him - left the program two years ago.

UM declined to release him from the scholarship, and once Jim Larranaga was hired everything was smoothed out in one in-home visit. Daniels says if it hadn't work out with Miami that he would have gone to either Tennessee or Rutgers.

"I signed in the early period, and when Haith left they held me, had no AD, asked me to wait to see who the new coach would be," Daniels said. "So I stuck it out and coach L came to my house and we sat down. I realized that coach L might have been one of the best decisions I could make to better me as a man and a player.

"Coach L, what sold me wasn't anything in particular, just him knowing a lot about life and what he takes from his life experiences and puts into the game is remarkable. Everything he does is well thought out. I just felt like that was the best thing for me. I told him 'Yeah, I'm going to stick it out with Miami.'"

Daniels redshirted last year and says that was "frustrating."

"Half the season I was injured with a fractured big toe, couple of torn muscles on the bottom of my foot," Daniels said. "I just wanted to be out there, especially seeing all my teammates play, I felt there were times I could have helped them."

Daniels arrived at UM rated the No. 46 shooting guard in the nation by ESPN. He was rated the No. 4 dunker in the 2011 class by Rivals.com.

As a senior at Raleigh (NC) Word of God High School he averaged 18 points, five rebounds and four assists per game, helping lead his team to a 23-3 record and state semifinals appearance.

He played for the same high school as John Wall, the No. 1 draft pick in 2010 by the Washington Wizards.

And the two stay in touch.

"I was in the back court with him - I talk with John every now and then," Daniels said. "He helps me a lot, breaks things down for me."

How talented is this year's Hurricane team?

"We're real talented, have a lot of experience," Daniels said. "Everyone on the team can play; everyone knows their role and they do it well. The biggest thing for us is as a team we've grown together, know what it's going to take and what we have to do to make it to the

tournament. I think we'll do real well."

For his part, Daniels says he's particularly improved one aspect of his game entering this season: "I always had a mid-range jumper, but the three-point shot wasn't always the best for me," Daniels said. "I've been working on that a lot throughout this past year and this summer. I think I've gotten better at that. And I have a better IQ of the game."

While Daniels has high hopes for himself and the team, he also is out to prove just how fast he can go.

"Me and (fastest Cane football player) Phillip Dorsett joke about it all the time - I don't know if we'll race," Daniels said. "If we do, I'll put up a good run for it."

* Daniels' real first name is Delante. He says he got the nickname Bishop, which is his middle name, from a movie.

"It's a movie called Juice, and Tupac (Shakur)'s name in the movie was Bishop, and my dad was real heavy on Tupac," Daniels said. "So he gave me that name."

Kadji: Diet was 'awful'

CaneSport

Staff

Oct. 27, 2012

Big man Kenny Kadji played at 265 pounds last season.

This year?

A svelte 241.

It's all part of the plan to make Kadji able to run up and down the court better, helping him work into the scramble defense and lead fast breaks. Kadji said coaches told him to start losing weight right when last season ended.

"I feel way better," Kadji said. "I have more energy, can run up and down for a longer period of time. I lost a lot of weight, but I still bench the same, even more, than when I was 265."

Kadji says he lost weight by going on a diet that excluded his favorite things to eat - fast food, soda, ice cream ... and his favorite breakfast food, bacon.

"It was eating differently," Kadji said. "It's more vegetables, things like that, and you have to eat everything plain - chicken (with) no sauce."

Kadji says now that he's attained his goal weight he's able to add some of his favorite foods in moderation. He says the off-season diet "was awful - I wanted to quit every day."

Are there any concerns that with the lost weight he could get pushed around down low?

"I got stronger this summer, lost the weight but replaced it with muscle," Kadji said. "And I have to go against Reggie (Johnson) every day. If I do well against him I'll be fine."

What does Kadji want to improve in his game this season?

"Definitely rebounding," he said. "I'm trying to be more of an energy guy, like Durand (Scott), play harder defensively. And now I know I have the energy to do that, to run the floor, block shots. When I get on the court you can feel the difference just with the energy."

Kadji says this year's team is "so much different than last year. At practice everybody knows what they have to do, and that's because of coach L (Jim Larranaga). He gives you so much confidence. You know if you do what he says you'll wind up being a good team, a good player."

* Kadji said last year under a new coach "was like learning basketball again. When he was here last year - you had coach (Frank) Haith who played mostly zone. Last year we played mostly man, press. He said 'If you listen to me, do what I say, it might not be this year, but next year, the year after we'll be a way better team.' And we're starting to see that."

Countdown: Player Profile and Q&A, Rion Brown

**State of the U
Strauzer
Oct. 26, 2012**

We had a chance to talk to super Canes hoop-er Rion Brown to hear what to expect from UM this year on the court and what he's learned from Coach Larranaga.

Rion Brown came to UM in 2010 a 4 star recruit from Hinesville, GA the son of former Georgia Tech star Tico Brown who later went on to become the all-time leading scorer in the CBA. Rion is listed as a 6'6" guard but frequently played the 3 slot for the Canes last year.

Known for his shooting and athleticism, Rion was the second best 3 point shooter on the team last year hitting 41-104 (39.4%). Rion made many highlight reels last year with his high flying power dunks (watch him dunk on Reggie Bullock below) and should play a critical role on the team this year. We caught up with #15 recently.

SOTU: What is the biggest difference heading into this season vs. last now that you've had a year with Coach Larranaga?

RB: He doesn't spend so much time teaching every philosophy he has, we know them from first year. It's much more about basketball now.

SOTU: Can we expect more of a fast paced tempo from the Canes this year?

RB: Oh yes, expect a lot more pressing and more layups and open threes (in transition).

SOTU: Who are the leaders this year?

RB: Julian, Durand and Reggie but Julian has been around for a long time, he's the old man and he's been there for 6 years. He has seen a lot of different things and had a lot of different experiences so its good to have a guy like him around.

Durand is like a coach out on the floor, if we can't hear Coach L we look to Durand and Shane to be the leaders out there.

Reggie's been here 5 years and he always helped me out and even now is always in the big guys ears to help them out.

SOTU: What has been your focus this off-season?

RB: Working on my driving ability, everyone knows I can shoot. I want to be a threat to drive and kick and also have good handle on the ball.

SOTU: What is your favorite Coach L-ism?

RB: "practice doesn't make perfect, perfect practice makes perfect"

SOTU: Who in the ACC was toughest to guard last year?

RB: Harrison Barnes, he was the hardest player to guard since I've been here.

SOTU: Any message for Canes fans?

RB: PACK THE BUC!! We need all the fans we can get, were going to be a special team this year I just want everyone to be a part of it and be able to experience it because we are going to do really big things this year.

Thanks again to Rion Brown for taking time out of his busy day for us. Watch out for this sharpshooter when the "Canes open the season November 9th, and through out the season.

Brown: I want and ACC Championship Badly

CaneSport
Staff
Oct. 27, 2012

Junior guard Rion Brown will compete with Trey McKinney Jones for playing time this season.

And he says he's focused on "having a really good season."

"We lost two seniors, Malcolm Grant and DeQuan Jones," Brown said. "We have basically everybody back, and we were a really good team last year in our first year under coach L (Jim Larranaga). We had a lot of learning to do, and that learning curve has happened already and we can just focus on becoming a better team; he doesn't have to concentrate so much on teaching. It's 'Okay, this is what I need you guys to do. Just work hard, play hard.' So that's going to make us a better team. We're definitely playing a lot better together, cohesiveness."

What has he improved in his own game from last season?

"I'd say ball handling, being able to drive a lot more," Brown said. "I want to be an all-around player, not just a shooter - get my teammates some balls and just make offensive plays, period. Not just shooting out there, shooting threes. I want to be an all-around player."

Why wasn't this team able to live up to its potential a year ago?

"There were a lot of other things outside of basketball going on," Brown said. "When that happens you can't really get a togetherness all year like you want, really build and become a team. We had guys in and out of the lineup. I don't even know how many times we changed the starting lineup - guys weren't really comfortable all year. We'd have a stretch where we got comfortable, were playing well, and then something else happened where we have

to rearrange this, move this person there. This year we have a lot more stability knowing this is how it's going to be - hopefully it stays this way."

Brown has set the team's goals high.

"I want an ACC Championship, want it bad, and this is definitely the year to get it," he said. "And I'm looking at Sweet 16. Of course, I don't want to just stop there. But that's the least I can see happening."

* Brown says in an effort to get fans in the stands this season players may wear T-shirts that say "Game Day Today."

"Coach (will have) us handing out fliers to games - we're doing things to reach out (to fans)," Brown said. "'I hope they pack the BUC."

Countdown to Hurricanes Hoops: Bishop Daniels

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 26, 2012

One of two newcomers this year, the combo guard from Raleigh, North Carolina could be one of the 'Canes most exciting players.

Bishop Daniels came to Miami with a lot of promise. Unfortunately his freshman year ended before it started due to a foot injury. This year Daniels is determined to make up for lost time. The 6'2 guard is an electrifying athlete who can turn any play into a highlight reel.

Daniels has been slowed recently by a pulled hamstring, but is progressing nicely.

Here's our Q&A with the super quick redshirt freshman:

SOTU: Any new status on the hamstring? Are you fully practicing?

BD: I am back, participating in practice. Not fully, but I would say I will be back before any games start. Nothing serious, just precautionary.

SOTU: Besides dealing with not being able to play, did you gain any new perspective on the game watching from the bench last year? Did you get to practice at all?

BD: To answer the second part first, I did practice. I didn't start practicing until December last year, because of the foot injury. What I gained last year was I learned a whole lot of things. First of all, everything Coach L runs. What he does and doesn't want us to do. I was learning from players and coaches both how to be a lead guard. You have to know your personnel on the court. Who can do what on the floor and who can't.

SOTU: Do you see yourself more as a point? 2 guard? or combo?

BD: I am a combo guard. I'm not a shooting guard but then again I'm not a true point guard. I wouldn't say I'm a Chris Paul or anyone like that right now. But I could see myself making that transition as I develop.

SOTU: This may be the hardest question you have to answer this season, Who is faster, you or Shane Larkin?

BD: (Bishop laughs) I'd say in different areas, he's faster then me, in different areas I am faster then him.

SOTU - Being a little diplomatic on that one? (BD laughs) We also heard Erik Swoope is pretty fast?

BD: Oh yeah, he's real fast. He can get up and down the floor!

SOTU: Who is the most challenging player to match up with in practice?

BD: For me, because I play against them at my position everyday, Durand Scott and Shane Larkin. We battle it out. We make each other better. We go at each other so hard, we know we make each other better.

Thanks again to Bishop Daniels for letting us catch up with him. Watch out for the high flyer when the "Canes open the season November 9th, and through out the season. Here's a little taste of his explosiveness:

Hoops Buzz: 10/26

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Oct. 26, 2012

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- The Miami Hurricanes basketball team are continuing their preparation for the 2012-13 season, which begins in two weeks.

Miami will face South Florida in a closed scrimmage on Sunday and will host St. Leo in an exhibition game on Nov. 2 before beginning their season against Stetson on Nov. 9 at the BankUnited Center.

"We have a veteran team of five seniors that are going to lead us to possibly the best season in Miami history," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "If we can stay healthy we have a chance to compete with the best teams, not only in our league, but around the country. We want the fans to join us early and often and get on board so we have that preverbal sixth man cheering us on."

Larranaga has been pleased with the team's efforts in practice thus far.

"I get on them because I want to know how much I expect of them, but I am very pleased with the efforts," head coach Jim Larranaga said.

News & Notes

- The team's two undisputed leaders, SG Durand Scott and C Reggie Johnson, were switched to the depleted second unit in a practice last week as a challenge by the coaching staff. In a surprise, they were able to lead the green team to a win in practice. "It was because Reggie and Durand were so dominant," Larranaga said. "Reggie was unstoppable near the basket and Durand was unstoppable on the perimeter."

- During Wednesday's practice, Trey McKinney-Jones did a nice job finding his stroke from distance and should have plenty of opportunities to shoot the ball again this season with the attention to Johnson down low.

- SG Bishop Daniels (hamstring) has been limited in practice since suffering the injury the second day of practice, but has been able to do side and individual work. Daniels says that he will play in the opener. "If he's healthy when we open the season Nov. 9, he's going to play," Larranaga said. "He knows well enough what we're doing. We don't do anything too complicated and he's out there at practice seeing what we do. We don't have to worry that he's going to be so far behind that he can't contribute. What we do have to concern ourselves with is keeping him healthy once he gets back."

- Assistant coach Chris Caputo joked with Shane Larkin and Rion Brown before Wednesday's practice about the two being excited about playing the up-tempo style Larranaga prefers when he took over the program, but the staff hasn't seen it enough from the guards.

- C Tonye Jekiri is the lone true freshman on the squad and continues to make strides with his game. "I like the progress Tonye Jekiri is making," Larranaga said. "We have worked exclusively on him developing a great jump hook because I think that will be his greatest weapon throughout his college career. He's got a nice jump shot, but a guy with his size and versatility in and around the basket, to be able to just jump hook over people would be very, very effective and he's working very hard to develop that shot as his bread and butter move."

- With Daniels and Garrius Adams (knee) out, more pressure is placed on walk-on guards Steve Sorenson and Justin Heller in practices. "It makes it challenging for our two walk-ons--Steve Sorenson and Justin Heller--who

do a terrific job to go against guys like Shane Larkin, Durand Scott, and Trey McKinney-Jones every day. It's tough enough if you're a scholarship player, but if you're someone new to the game and new to college like Sorenson is and face that kind of pressure every afternoon."

- Former Hurricane Guillermo Diaz (2003-06) practiced with the team on Thursday. Diaz ranks 10th on UM's all-time scoring list with 1,477 points and fourth with 174 3-point field goals. Diaz, a Clippers second round pick in 2006 who played six games in the NBA, has played professionally in the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, and Puerto Rico as well as earning a silver medal for Puerto Rico in the 2009 FIBA Americas Championship.

- Former Hurricane DeQuan Jones continues his strong case to land a spot on the Orlando Magic as he's averaged 9.6 points and 3.3 rebounds while leading the team in minutes during the preseason. Jones was a bench player for the Hurricanes last season finishing eighth in scoring averaging 5.9 points a game. When Larranaga was asked if he was surprised with Jones' success, he responded: "I guess I would say that I'm just happy. He is someone that is a great kid. He's a hard worker and last year he listened attentively to the things we were asking him to do and made a lot of serious adjustments to his game. When we first got here I think he saw himself as Kobe Bryant, a lot of fadeaway jumpers and a lot of complicated difficult moves and we tried to make him a little more fundamentally sound and a better defender and rebounder."

Gamble back, better than ever, ready to lead

CaneSport
Staff
Oct. 25, 2012

Julian Gamble is the oldest member of the Hurricane basketball team, and he remembers his freshman year when the team went to the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

So how does this year's team stack up to that one?

"Talent from top to bottom I'd say this has to be the best, but it might be second-best because it is hard to compete talent-wise and physically with a team where you had Jack McClinton with Jimmy Graham and Dwayne Collins and Lance Hurdle, really freak athletes like that," Gamble said. "But our roster now from top to bottom we have those same type of athletes, a lot of athletes. So talent-wise this may be the best team if not a close second."

Gamble took a medical redshirt last season after a knee injury.

And he says now he's back at 100 percent ... or better.

"I'm jumping higher than (before the injury)," Gamble said. "It's crazy to think about it because usually when guys come back you don't see that. But now I'm the guy they're throwing all the lobs to and I can do all the crazy, fancy dunks and all that.

"It feels great to be back. It's been a long road."

Larranaga has said he sees a sizeable role for Gamble, who will play off the bench behind Kenny Kadji.

"Now playing as well as I have (in practice) I know I can provide depth for the front line, a little bit of versatility where I can execute at the 4 spot," Gamble said. "I feel I'm a pretty

good dribbler and I can pass."

The oldest player on the roster, Gamble says he's also taking on a leadership role.

"Being here as long as I've been here and watching these guys come in and grow, I think I'm kind of appointed as a leader," Gamble said. "I enjoy that, accept that challenge. I just want to do everything I can for them. I've been around for a very long time, know what to expect before it happens. I'm hoping that my experience and me being a little charismatic can trickle down to my teammates."

* Gamble says he's not surprised at the NFL success of former teammate Jimmy Graham.

"Not really, because he kind of had football aspirations while we were playing basketball," Gamble said. "We would joke around and talk about it. Just to be able to see him get to where is and will be, it's really amazing. But I'm not surprised because I know the type of guy Jimmy is."

Countdown to Hurricanes Hoops: Tonye Jekiri

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 25, 2012

Miami has only one true freshman scholarship player on the roster, but he is a 7 footer, and a good one.

#23 Tonye Jekiri is an exceptional young man, who came to Miami from Nigeria just 3 short years ago. Jekiri quickly assimilated to his new surroundings and especially excelled on the court. Tonye averaged 20 points, 12 rebounds and 5 blocks per game as a senior in high school and was rated the 17th-best center in the country by ESPN.com and No. 13 by Scout.com. Tonye has been described as student of the game and an exceptional athlete. Jekiri is expected to provide immediate depth behind seniors Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadji, and Julian Gamble.

Coach Jim Larranaga already loves his game.

"He's the most gifted in terms of speed and quickness of any frontcourt player we have," Larranaga said.

Here is our Q&A with the talented young man:

SOTU: Whats it like banging in practice with Big Reggie? Have you dunked on him?

TJ: It is difficult. But it is good because there are a lot of players in college basketball from other schools just like him. As far as dunking on him, no (Tonye laughs).

SOTU: What is the biggest adjustment from high school to division I?

TJ: Well in college you go from the weight room to practice, from practice to class, from class to study hall. It's not quite like that in high school. Also as far as the game, it is the speed. Everything is faster. Nothing is slow. So you have to make the adjustment. Managing your time and the speed of the game are the two biggest things.

SOTU:Scouting reports from your high school coaches praise your athleticism and ability to run up and down the floor. Do you anticipate getting out and running a lot this year?

TJ: Yes. yes! That is my number one weapon which I have, so everyday I have been working on it.

SOTU: As a true freshman on a senior laden team, how do you see your role?

TJ: Actually I am trying to learn as much as I can from Reggie and Kenny and Julian. Stuff like setting picks. Also to provide depth and be ready when my time comes. As a freshman I feel I am ready to go. And do my best to play defense and eat up space.

SOTU: Who is the funniest guy on the team?

TJ: (Tonye laughs). I would have to say Reggie or Julian. One of them!!!

Thanks again to Tonye Jekiri for taking the time to let us get to know him a bit better. Watch out for the big man wearing #23 come November 9th when the 'Canes open the season, as well as through out the season.

Canes practice for upcoming exhibitions

The Miami Hurricane

AJ Ricketts

Oct. 24, 2012

The days until the BankUnited Center opens its doors for basketball once more are dwindling.

With eight days until the Miami basketball team's first exhibition against St. Leo, and 15 until the season kicks off against Stetson, coach Jim Larranaga is pleased with how his team is progressing. Miami received two votes in the preseason USA Today Coaches Poll, the team's first time receiving votes in that poll since the 2008-2009 season.

Larranaga met with members of the media on Wednesday to give updates from the second week of practice.

Senior guard Garrius Adams and redshirt freshman Bishop Daniels have been unable to practice recently due to injury. Daniels suffered a pulled hamstring the second day of practice and has not participated since.

"Bishop knows what we're doing well enough," Larranaga said. "We don't have to worry that he'll be so far behind because of the injury. If he's healthy, he'll play the first game."

Larranaga is high on true freshman Tonye Jekiri, a 7-foot center who is projected to pick up decent minutes this season.

"Tonye is a student of the game. He is willing to learn and get better," he said.

The coaching staff is working with Jekiri on his jump hook – a move they want to become his go-to shot.

Reggie Johnson and Durand Scott have been very impressive in workouts. For Miami practices, the team is split into two squads – white being the starters, and green the backups.

During a scrimmage when the green unit was struggling, Larranaga moved Scott and Johnson from white to green, and noted how neither could be stopped, each helping the green team win the scrimmage.

"He's doing so well on his post moves," Larranaga said of Johnson. "You can't tell whether he's right- or left-handed on his hook shots."

Larranaga, who had offseason hip surgery himself, joked on the status of his recovery.

"I've been working on getting my 40-inch vertical back. I'm about 36 inches there," he said. "My game is kind of like DeQuan Jones – I'm a high flier."

Larranaga ended the press conference with some strong words that should excite everyone on campus. In a year in which expectations for Hurricane basketball are as high as they've ever been in Coral Gables, Larranaga realizes that this team has an opportunity to have a special season.

"Our fans need to come out early in the season and cheer our team on," he said. "We have a veteran team that can possibly lead us to the best season in Miami history. If we're healthy, we can compete not only with the top teams in the conference, but the country."

Miami will open up the regular season Nov. 9 at 5:30 p.m. against Stetson at the BankUnited Center. Student admission, as always, is free.

Countdown: A Conversation with Trey McKinney Jones

**State of the U
Strauzer
Oct. 24, 2012**

As we countdown to the first tip of the college basketball season we are going to provide a brief look at all the players on the Miami Hurricanes men's Basketball team. The first in this series is Trey McKinney Jones.

Help us countdown to hoops season! We here at SOTU plan to publish a player profile for each roster member of the Canes men's hoop squad. Today #4 is our first in this series.

Trey McKinney Jones, often referred to by fans as "TMJ," joined the Canes as a transfer from University of Missouri- Kansas City in 2010. After sitting out the required season in 10/11 he saw his first action as a Junior last year for Miami. He quickly found a home on the court under Coach L's system which utilizes athletic, quick shooters like Trey playing in all 33 games. He averaged 7 points and 3.5 rebounds and shot 72% from the FT line and 47% from the field.

We had a chance to speak with Trey recently and he said in the off season he has been working on "coming off the dribble and getting to the basket," to compliment his outside shooting ability. Last year Trey started 12 straight games and once Reggie Johnson returned to the lineup he gave the team valuable depth off the bench being able to spell both the guards and forwards. This year one of Trey's personal goals is to be a "player coach can't take out of a game."

We look for Trey to play a more expanded role in Coach L's up tempo game. When asked about the biggest difference from this year to last Trey said simply "more experience (under Larranaga) and a veteran team." He said the team's conditioning has greatly improved and that has allowed them to work on "the scramble a lot more in practice early and that

is going to be a big part of our defense, getting up and down the court for quick layups and open 3's in transition."

Trey's message for the fans? "It's going to be an exciting year!"

Interesting factoids on Trey, his aunt Esther won Olympic gold as part of the 4X100 relay team in 1992 for the US and his uncle Mark Jones played basketball professionally in the NBA and overseas.

Durand Scott showing off improved jumper

CaneSport.com

Oct. 24, 2012

Guard Durand Scott says he spent a lot of time this off-season improving his jump shot.

"That was my main focus," he said. "My jump shot especially from the three-point line was my focus, and I made a tremendous leap in that. I feel more confident - when I'm open I'll surely take the shot.

"That will help me a lot because people will have to play me a lot closer and I can use my speed to get to the basket if I need to. Hard work pays off, and hopefully that will correlate to the games."

Scott has high hopes for the season.

"Despite all the obstacles we faced last year, this year is the first time we've got everybody on the court," he said "I'm really excited about that. The suspensions, injuries, redshirting are all in the past. I feel like we're all confident. Everybody is stronger, mentally ready, smarter. If we all put it into one basket we'll be fine."

Scott will serve a three-game suspension to start the season stemming from NCA infractions - he started serving the suspension during the ACC Tournament last year.

"It's definitely a big deal (missing the start of the season) - I want to play every single game," Scott said. "It's unfortunate I'll be missing these three games. I'll go out there and cheer for my team and I think we'll do just fine. I'll be happy after those three games."

How difficult was it when he found out about the suspension last year?

"It was tremendously difficult," he said. "It was ACC Tournament, a game that we needed. But they sentenced me for what I needed to do and I pretty much moved on."

The ultimate goal this season?

"We're just trying to get where (coach Jim Larranaga) has been before, which is the Final 4," Scott said. "If we listen to him we'll be in great position to win some ball games.

"I've never been (to the NCAA Tournament) before. That's a goal for me, but not just to get there. Our goal is to win the ACC Championship, win the NCAA Championship. We just have to go out there and work hard, compete and battle. I think we're a great team that will be able to play against the best."

* Scott said in the second year under Larranaga "We know exactly what he expects, exactly what he wants, how he wants it done. All we have to do is follow him. He's been there before, knows exactly how to get there. It's just like school - follow the teacher, you'll be able to pass the test. That's exactly what we're going to do."

* Scott breaks down what he sees on this team: "We're very strong at every position," he said. "We have Shane (Larkin) who is a very fast point guard who can shoot the basketball, get inside the line, can play defense. It's hard to guard him, for someone to go behind him. You look at Reggie (Johnson), he's a big body inside. He wears people down and uses left hook, right hook. And we have Kenny Kadji who can stretch a 4 man out who can also handle the basketball and bring it up the court. Then we also have shooters in Trey McKinney Jones and Rion Brown. Up and down the chart we have so many exceptional players."

Tonye Jekiri at home on basketball court

CaneSport.com
Staff
Oct. 24, 2012

The culture shock for Hurricane center Tonye Jekiri when he arrived in Miami from Nigeria three years ago?

All it took was the twist of a shower handle.

"I remember I took a shower, was wondering where the water was coming from," the freshman Jekiri said. "In Africa you go fetch it with a bucket, or you see a tank that stores the water at the back of the house. Over here I was asking where the water was coming from. I kept looking because I'd been in the shower for so long and the water just kept coming out, didn't run out. That was one thing I was shocked about it."

Another shock (literally): Nonstop electricity.

"I kept waiting for it to be turned off at some point," Jekiri said. "Certain hours of the day it would come on back home."

Other adjustments: Air conditioning and supermarkets with fresh produce. Jekiri was used to roadside markets and people running up to the family car hawking fruit and vegetables.

"The supermarkets there sell things like cologne, no food," he said, adding that "It was a change in food here. My native food I would normally eat soup ... and the way the rice was made with spices was way different - it was a change. It was difficult for me those first months. I had to adapt to everything."

"Even the roads - in Africa they have potholes, and you only have one major road that will take you to your office and everything is on it; you're stuck in traffic for an hour or two."

Jekiri's road to Miami began at age 16 when one of his soccer coaches said based on his

size he could be a basketball player in the States. Arrangements were made for him to be evaluated at an American camp.

"It was because of my height," Jekiri said. "One of my soccer coaches started working with me on fundamental things like catching the ball, dribbling."

Soon after Jekiri packed his 6-foot-11 frame into a coach seat for the 19-hour flight in hopes a high school coach would take a chance on him. On day 1 of the camp he got his first five-on-five real game experience.

"I was just running the floor and getting rebounds, that was it," Jekiri said. "Coaches liked me because of my energy. They said I ran nonstop."

A coach at Hialeah (FL) Champagnat Catholic asked him to attend the school, and Jekiri and his mother agreed.

"It was a small private school, and we liked that," Jekiri said. "The coach was there watching me, said he'd love me to come to their school. When I went back home my mom decided that would be good for me."

When Jekiri moved to Miami for good, he faced a big academic challenge.

"It was difficult - the first months I was struggling with the educational system," Jekiri said. "So many classes I hadn't taken in my country I had to take like history, and I didn't know much about the United States. And I had to take Spanish."

The transition on the basketball court wasn't much easier. Starting out as a junior he struggled.

"I couldn't even make a layup then," he said. "On game time I had butterflies bad, struggled for seven to eight games. After that I had a good season just running the floor and get-

ting rebounds. I had little schools looking at me then, like FIU."

As a senior he made big strides, opening eyes by averaging 20 points, 12 rebounds and five blocked shots. It all started clicking for him, and he wound up rated the nation's No. 17 center prospect by ESPN.

"Miami, they came by during my senior season, watched me play and offered me a scholarship during the season," Jekiri said.

He wound up with 17 scholarship offers and took visits to George Mason, Clemson and Miami before settling on the Canes.

He says he chose UM because "The weather is the same as in Africa, warm. I've never experienced coldness, how that would affect my breathing. That was one reason I love Miami and decided to stay. Miami was my third visit, was the place I wanted to be and play ball."

Now Jekiri is focused on making a sizable impact when he's in games.

"I'll come off the bench, will help the team - I know I'm going to have a big role to play," Jekiri said. "I'll be getting rebounds, blocked shots."

He adds "I'm really happy to be a Hurricane. Putting on the jersey with my name on it, I was really happy. I just thank God for everything."

Brown Looking to Carry Over Success

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Oct. 24, 2012

If Rion Brown can duplicate his success at the end of last season, he would give the Miami Hurricane another threat on the court.

Brown, a 6-foot-6 junior shooting guard, averaged 12.8 points and 4.7 rebounds in Miami's final six games of the year. He shot 51 percent from the floor knocking down 15 3-pointers during the stretch.

"Honestly I think it was more so just the minutes," Brown said. "Durand was out and somebody else had to step up in that role. If you have something happen where you have to do it, I just stepped into that role. This year I'm trying to stay in that role. Malcolm is gone so we do need someone to step up in that role. That's my mindset right now."

More minutes were a factor as he averaged 28 a game compared 18 in the first 25 games. However, he was far more productive averaging 18.4 points per 40 minutes compared to just 12.9 before.

"It definitely gave me a lot of confidence and made me work harder this year to continue that good paly just to help the team out," Brown said.

Brown is currently in a battle with senior Trey McKinney-Jones for a starting role as both players have been praised for their work in practices thus far.

"Rion is stronger (than last year), jumping better, he's just playing really well," head coach Jim Larranaga said.

Brown and McKinney-Jones were similar scorers in their roles last year with Brown averaging 7.2 points on 43 percent shooting in 31 games while McKinney-Jones averaged 7.0 points on 47 percent shooting in 33 games.

"It's definitely a battle right now, but me and Trey are having fun with it," Brown said. "We know either way that we're going to get around the same minutes. It's just a matter of who is in the game at the beginning. Even if you look at last year we both were pretty much in at the end of the game and that's what really matters in that coach trusts you to be in. I would say that I'm not concentrating too much on starting. I just want to continue my good play whether that's coming off the bench providing a spark in keeping the offense going when those other guys come out, I can accept that. I hope Trey can too."

Miami returns a number of key players including six of their top seven scorers from last season's team, which finished 20-13 and 9-7 in the ACC, which was the best in school history.

"It's really exciting," Brown said. "Practices have been really fun. We go in there screaming and yelling all over the place. This is the first year that I've really seen that kind of energy in practice so I would definitely say this will be a good year."

Brown's goals for the upcoming season?

"Honestly, no less than Sweet 16," Brown said. "That's my mindset right now. Of course we want to get to the national championship, but as a realistic goal I definitely want to get to the Sweet 16 and I definitely want to win an ACC championship before I leave here."

Miami begins their season Nov. 9 against Stetson.

Countdown: The ACC's Best Individual Match-ups.

State of the U

Jerry Steinberg

Oct. 22, 2012

In Boxing, styles make fights. Basketball is a team sport, but like the "sweet science", individual styles do make for intriguing match-ups.

Today we breakdown the one-on-one battles that we most look forward to in ACC play.

Here they are:

Durand Scott, Miami Vs Michael Snaer, FSU

The Skinny: Scott gets the nod in slashing ability and as a passer. Snaer is the superior shooter and defender, and also has a better knack for game winning shots. Leadership ability is a draw.

The Numbers: Scott 12.9 ppg, 5.4 rpg, 3.1 apg - Snaer 14.0 ppg 3.8 rpg 1.9 apg 40% 3P%

The Edge: Snaer takes it, because of his incredible crunch time ability.

Calvin Leslie, NC State Vs Devin Booker, Clemson

The Skinny: Leslie has developed into one of the best players in the conference, regardless of position. He is too athletic for power forwards, and too strong for wings. Booker has the ability to dominate but has yet to show the consistency.

The Numbers: Leslie 14.6 ppg, 7.3 rpg 1.3 blks - Booker 10.5 ppg, 7.0 rpg, 45% FG

The Edge: Leslie. They have similar back to the basket games, but the big difference is Leslie plays with more confidence and passion.

Travis McKie, Wake Vs Joe Harris, UVA

The Skinny: Harris played a good part of last season with a broken left hand, showing tremendous toughness. Harris is the better pure shooter of the two. McKie has a far more versatile game, and does a great job on the glass.

The Numbers: McKie 16.1 ppg, 7.0 rpg, 1.1 apg, 38% 3P% - Harris 11.3 ppg, 3.9 rpg, 1.7 apg, 39% 3P%

The Edge: McKie. We love Harris' game, but few players in the conference do as many things for their team as McKie.

Rodney Purvis, NC State Vs Rasheed Sulaiman, Duke

The Skinny: Here we have two of the most highly touted freshmen SGs in the nation. Purvis makes his living off slashing moves and athletic finishes. Sulaiman has a polished medium game, and loves to pull up and shoot.

The Numbers: Purvis 25.4 ppg in H.S. - Sulaiman 25.8 ppg in H.S.

The Edge: Purvis has NBA ready athleticism and looks to be the more developed of the two right now. Unless one or both leave early for the NBA, this could be a fun match-up for years to come.

Richard Howell, NC State Vs Mason Plumlee, Duke
The Skinny: Both Howell and Plumlee rarely step outside 7-10 feet from the basket. Howell uses pure strength whereas Plumlee uses his athleticism, but both are fierce on the boards and both finish strong when they get the ball deep.

The Numbers: Howell 10.8 ppg, 9.2 rpg, 49% FG - Plumlee 11.1 ppg, 9.2 rpg, 1.6 blks, 53 % FG

The Edge: Plumlee by the narrowest of margins. Coach after coach mentioned Plumlee as one of the most respected players in the conference, during last week's media day in Charlotte.

Kenny Kadji, Miami Vs James Michael McAdoo, UNC

The Skinny: In his first year at UM Kadji emerged as invaluable inside-out weapon, and a decent defender. Rebounding appeared to be a weakness. Playing behind John Henson and Tyler Zeller kept McAdoo from making a huge impact as a freshman, but he clearly has big time talent.

The Numbers: Kadji 11.7 ppg, 5.3 rpg, 1.6 blks, 42% 3P% - McAdoo 6.1 ppg, 3.9 rpg, 43% FG

The Edge: Kadji. McAdoo is expected to make a huge leap in production this year, and certainly the ability is there. He will get the opportunity to be the go-to guy this year as well. But Kadji is ALREADY one of the better players in the conference. Few remember that coming out of high school, the UF transfer was a top 30 prospect.

Jontel Evans, UVA Vs Erick Green, Va Tech

The Skinny: The pure scorer Vs the hard nosed defender. Both guys are underrated. Green can score in bunches, while Evans keys one of the best defensive teams in the nation year in and year out.

The Numbers: Evans 7.3 ppg, 3.9 apg, 1.6 stls - Green 15.6 ppg, 3.3 rpg, 2.8 apg, 1.3 stls.

The Edge: Green takes it here based on production. Evans deserves more credit than he gets for Virginia's stifling defense.

Reggie Johnson, Miami Vs Shaquille Cleare, Maryland

The Skinny: Two big wide bodies. Johnson, a senior, has the big edge in experience. The freshman Cleare, appears to be a better athlete. When these two collide, it could knock the Earth off its axis.

The Numbers: 6'10 290 Vs 6'9 275. Oh yeah Johnson averaged 10.0 ppg and 7.2 rpg last year, while Cleare averaged 26.5 ppg and 10 rpg as a senior in H.S.

The Edge: Big Reg. Johnson is underrated as a passer, and has improved his outside shot significantly. Now healthy, there is no better space eater in the ACC. Cleare looks like the heir apparent to take over the roll of hardest to match up with, and perennial tormenter of the Plumlee brothers.

C.J. Harris, Wake Vs Seth Curry, Duke

The Skinny: Both guys are lethal from downtown.

Both also move well with out the ball. Harris looks more comfortable of the two as a play maker. When you need a big bucket, you can't go wrong with either guy.

The Numbers: Harris 16.7 ppg, 3.1 rpg, 2.5 apg 42% 3P% - Curry 13.2 ppg, 2.6 rpg, 2.4 apg, 38% 3P%

The Edge: Harris. Curry maybe the better pure shooter, but Harris is the more skilled when it comes to everything else.

Shane Larkin, Miami Vs Marcus Paige, UNC

The Skinny: Larkin is already one of the faster and more athletic guards in the country. If his floor game catches up with his sparkling athleticism, he will be a superstar. Paige is a pure scorer who despite his diminutive stature, should flourish in Roy Williams' up tempo offense.

The Numbers: Larkin 7.4 ppg, 2.5 rpg, 2.5 apg, - Paige 26.9 ppg and 3.3 apg as a high school senior.

The Edge: Larkin showed great promise as a freshman, and is a menace defensively. Paige, and his pretty left-handed stroke, will eventually be the much better scorer of the two. Larkin is the better player overall, for now, but Paige will be a lot of fun to watch.

Rion Brown or Trey McKinney Jones, Miami Vs Scott Wood, NC State.

The Skinny: Wood is one of the premier shooters in the country, and can make shots even when contested. He does an excellent job moving with out the ball and is lethal from the charity stripe. Brown and McKinney Jones are interchangeable and pretty good shooters themselves. More importantly, they are both solid defenders. Brown can really finish above the rim as well.

The Numbers: Brown 7.2 ppg 39% 3P%, McKinney-Jones 7.0 ppg 37% 3P% - Wood 12.4 ppg 41% 3P% 91% FT

The Edge: Brown and McKinney Jones are better defenders, better ball handlers, passers, and finishers. But Wood gets the slightest of edges via his world class shooting ability.

Ian Miller, FSU Vs Lorenzo Brown, NC State.

The Skinny: NBA scouts have compared both to Oklahoma City Thunder All Star Russell Westbrook. Some have also mentioned Brown in the same breathe as Rajon Rondo. Brown is by far the best PG in the ACC but Miller is pretty good too. Both are athletic and fearless, but LBrown is far more advanced distributing the ball.

The Numbers: Brown 12.7 ppg, 4.5 rpg, 6.3 apg, 1.8 stls. - Miller 10.9 ppg, 2.0 rpg, 1.3 apg 1.3 stls.

The Edge: Brown wins handily. Miller will get more chances to shine this season, and can give Brown a battle heads up, but Brown does it all. Few can match up with him in the country.

Reggie Johnson, three-point threat?

CollegeBasketballTalk

David Harten

Oct. 22, 2012

Apparently, Miami's big man has been getting up some shots in the offseason for Jim Larranaga's Hurricane squad.

The info comes from this story by The Sporting News' Ryan Fagan who wrote about how Larranaga's message of continuity has spread, and it may be one of the keys that determines where Miami finishes this season in the ACC.

A large portion of that burden falls on Johnson, a wide body who plays right at the rim and has apparently become adept at hitting both the right-handed and left-handed hook shot, Fagan writes.

But the most interesting part of the article is what comes at the end. Apparently, Johnson, along with the rest of the team, has taken part in a drill where they shoot as many threes as possible in five minutes. Hitting less than 40 means that player isn't allowed to shoot them in the game, 40-50 means a player is limited in the amount they can take and 50 or more splash-downs means he gets the all-clear to shoot. Johnson has routinely been in the 40s and hit a personal-best 59 last week. Johnson was just 4-11 from deep last season.

Will he get to hoist it like Jimmer?

The Hurricanes will need someone to, even if it is Johnson. Gone is leading three-point shooter Malcolm Grant (68 makes last season). Though, Trey McKinney Jones (40 makes) and Rion Brown (41 makes) return, along with Shane Larkin's 32 three's from last season.

So maybe it's not a necessity that Johnson develop a stroke from the outside. But hey, the world needs more big-guy three's. They're the college basketball equivalent to fat-guy touchdowns in football.

Jones seizes opportunity with Orlando Magic

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Oct. 19, 2012

There is a price to pay for being a rookie in NBA training camp.

DeQuan Jones, the former University of Miami forward, learned that as soon as he joined the Orlando Magic as an undrafted newcomer a few months ago. He has had to carry luggage for the veterans, make CVS runs to buy Old Spice body wash for the team and stop at Target to pick up a stepladder for captain Jameer Nelson, who at 6 feet needs a bit of help to reach the top shelf of his locker.

Jones is so accustomed to the rookie ribbing that he thought it was another joke when coach Jacque Vaughn on Sunday called his name to join the starters in the team shoot-around before the game against the Cleveland Cavaliers.

"Coach Vaughn always starts practice at the baseline, and on Sunday he said, 'I want the first five out here, and started listing off the names ... Jameer, D.J.' I was thinking, 'D.J.? That's me. Was that a typo?' Coach looked right at me when he said it, but I was hesitant to walk over because I've experienced all the rookie pranks and I thought maybe this was another trick. So, I just stood there until I realized it was for real."

Vaughn opted to rest J.J. Redick that night and wanted to see Jones in the starting lineup to evaluate how he would respond, and how he would do guarding the Cavs' better players. Jones didn't disappoint. He finished with seven points and nine rebounds.

He did well enough to earn a second start on the road against the Detroit Pistons on Tuesday night.

Before the game, Nelson, who has been particularly helpful to Jones, approached the

rookie and said: "This is your chance. Take advantage of the opportunity."

Jones took the advice. He scored a game-high 22 points on 9-of-13 shooting. He also did a standout job defending the Pistons' wings and made highlights nationwide with an acrobatic dunk over Detroit's top pick, 7-foot center Andre Drummond. During camp, Jones has impressed coaches, teammates, executives and fans with his explosiveness, athleticism and versatility. He has looked equally comfortable as a forward and a shooting guard.

The former Cane also has wowed fans with spectacular dunks that are circulating on YouTube and Twitter.

As a result, Magic coaches and executives find themselves in a DeQuandary. They have 20 players on the roster, and only 15 make the final cut the first week of November. Jones is likely battling Justin Harper, Ish Smith, Josh McRoberts, Armon Johnson, E'Twaun Moore and Christian Eyenga for one or two spots.

"I came into camp with no expectations," Jones said by phone. "I was just excited for the opportunity to finally live my dream and be part of an NBA organization. I sat around the TV for three hours during the NBA Draft, enduring the reality that I was not being drafted. I was down, but the next day, after a good night's sleep, I told myself, 'Stay focused. The ball's in your court. Don't give up.'"

The Magic called the following day, and Jones has exceeded expectations.

Not bad for a guy who averaged just 5.9 points per game his senior season as a Hurricane. Jones' last year at UM was hardly what he had anticipated when he signed with the program four years earlier as a much-hyped Atlanta high school and AAU star.

He was suspended by UM for the first 11 games of his senior season because his name was

implicated in the Nevin Shapiro booster scandal, an allegation he and his family vehemently denied. The school, unable to produce any evidence against Jones, reinstated him Dec. 21, 2011, after he retained an attorney to challenge the suspension.

Through it all, Jones kept a positive attitude and took advantage of the time on the bench to become a better student of the game. He paid close attention to advice from then-new coach Jim Larranaga and assistants Eric Konkol, Chris Caputo and Michael Huger. The lessons have served him well in Magic camp. Larranaga and his staff continue to text Jones several times a week with tips and encouragement.

"My introductory meeting with Coach L when he was hired, he told me the key to success was to utilize my strengths and hide my weaknesses," Jones said. "He broke my game down for me in a way nobody ever had, and taught me how to utilize my strengths in every situation, how to best cover a great shooter, how to guard a penetrator. He helped me understand how I can best make an impact with my energy and athleticism. Almost every day I reach back to a lot of what he and the other UM coaches taught me, and it still applies."

One of the few gaffes Jones has made in Magic camp came just before his first start. During pregame introductions, he jogged over and shook the hands of the referees, a college custom. The veterans immediately mocked him.

"Jameer was cracking up, told me that was a rookie move," Jones said, laughing. "Those are moments you take with you for a long time. I'm just soaking it all in, playing my game and hoping for the best."

Johnson shows leaner body, meaner game

The Sporting News

Ryan Fagan

Oct. 17, 2012

CHARLOTTE—Reggie Johnson's maturation into an elite player capable of leading his Miami Hurricanes deep into the NCAA Tournament took a giant step forward when he finally changed his socks last season.

Jim Larranaga, then in his first year with Miami, didn't want Johnson to alter the fabric of the socks or the cushion of the socks or the support of the socks.

He had to switch the color of his socks. Yeah, it sounded crazy to Johnson, too.

"I was like, 'I gotta wear white socks to practice? C'mon, Coach L, that's too much,' " he said with a laugh Wednesday at ACC media day. "But now I understand. Together, we can do damage, versus me wearing black socks and everybody else wearing white socks. That won't work."

The socks—and travel suits and matching shoes and so many other little things, as Johnson points out—were part of the three stages of growth Larranaga preaches. The first stage is dependence, where people rely on others. The second is independence, where people want to do their own thing—that's where the Hurricanes lived when Larranaga took over the program last year.

Then, there's interdependence, where people in a group rely on each other.

"With that, we need to be uniform," Larranaga said. "We need to believe in the same things and carry ourselves the same way. We want the socks to be uniform. We want the shoes to be uniform. But it's not so much that everything has to be exactly alike, but we can't have guys going independently on their own thinking, 'This is my thing.' There can only be one way, and that's the Miami way."

On the growth scale, Larranaga says, his team is past Stage 2 and heading toward Stage 3. Now ... "If he says wear the same socks this day, we just do it," Johnson said.

Entering his senior season, Johnson is healthy—a welcome development after he missed the first nine games last year recovering from a knee injury—and determined to finish his career strong. A 6-10 center, Johnson has dropped down to 290 pounds and added muscle definition to a body that was often termed "pudgy." His goal is to average 13 rebounds per game, and he won't snag many of them high above the rim.

Larranaga said he used to consider Jai Lewis—the rebounding machine on George Mason's Final Four team in '06—the best no-jump rebounder he ever coached. Now, Johnson is challenging that distinction. And, yes, that's a compliment.

"He's not a high-riser who plays above the rim," Larranaga said. "He's a guy that actually plays basketball the way it was intended to be played -- by position, using your body to get the right angle on a defender so that you can score without hardly jumping at all."

Johnson didn't only use his rehabilitation time to get in better shape. He developed his lefthanded jump hook, to the point where he says he is shocked how naturally he shoots with that hand.

"He really does play like he's ambidextrous," Larranaga said. "Over the years, I've coached a lot of very good big men, very skilled big men—Ralph Sampson, for one, and Olden Polynice. Reggie's the first big guy I've had that's equally adept at using his right hand jump hook or his left hand jump hook. That's a great weapon."

The 3-point shot is a weapon, too. Larranaga's players do this drill where they try and make as many shots from beyond the arc as possi-

ble in five minutes. Those who regularly make fewer than 40 have the red light in games. From 40-50, it's a yellow "make sure you're wide open" light. At 50 or more on a regular basis, it's a green light.

Last year, Johnson was consistently in the 40s in practice and he made 4-of-11 during the season. Two days ago in practice, Johnson made 59.

"That's a new record for him," Larranaga said. "As you make more shots, you develop more confidence."

What's the common thread with the new physique, the newfound range and the ambidextrous hook shot?

It's gotta be the socks.

Miami hoops player's diet: 'I'm a big fan of water now'

USA TODAY

Nicole Auerbach

Oct. 17, 2012

Reggie Johnson weighed 330 pounds when he arrived at Miami (Fla.) four years ago.

Now, the senior center says he's down to 290, five pounds off the weight he'd like to be this season.

"You've got a better chance at going into the draft at 285 than 330," Johnson said at Atlantic Coast Conference men's basketball media day Wednesday. "The way the game is played right now it's up and down. ... The more I lose weight the better the chances I can up my stock and get drafted."

Shedding pounds has been tough for Johnson.

"Sometimes, after a game you want to go to Friday's," Johnson said. "(My teammates) eat cheeseburgers. It's about discipline. It boils down to that. I'm a disciplined guy."

While friends and teammates order their burgers, Johnson orders salads or grilled chicken sandwiches.

"These guys keep me disciplined," Johnson said. "They know what it takes. They tell me, 'Reg, don't eat that. You don't need that.' I drink water instead of lemonade. I get water. I'm a big fan of water now. At first, I hated water. Now you see me, and I've got water in my hand."

A couple of years ago, then-Miami coach Frank Haith introduced Johnson to Dexter Pittman, who weighed more than 380 in high school. Pittman has since lost more than 100 pounds and was taken by the Miami Heat in the second round of the 2010 NBA draft.

Johnson said he and Pittman are good friends — "like brothers" — and they spend time together in south Florida. Pittman's weight loss has motivated Johnson.

"Big Dex had the same problem in college, and he looks awesome," Johnson said. "I can see myself doing the same exact thing."

"I see him doing it, man. He's at where I want to be at. He's in the NBA."

FSU, Miami picked behind Carolina trio in ACC

FOX Sports Florida
Bob Ferrante
Oct. 17, 2012

Florida State is defending its first Atlantic Coast Conference tournament title.

Miami is coming off its first winning record in ACC play since joining the conference in 2004.

And while both lose some key pieces, the basketball prospects for both programs are looking good for the 2012-13 season.

The Hurricanes were picked to finish fourth and the Seminoles fifth in polling by the ACC coaches on Monday. Two days later, the ACC media had Florida State fourth (with six first-place votes among the 53 ballots) and Miami fifth.

The coaches and media picked North Carolina State as the conference favorite, followed by Duke and North Carolina. It is the first time NC State has been picked as the media's pre-season favorite since the 1974-75 season and only the second time in the past 16 years that neither Duke nor North Carolina were picked to win the league.

Florida State, which enters the season No. 24 in the Coaches Poll, went 25-10 last season and made a stunning run to the ACC tournament title by winning games on consecutive days against Miami, Duke and North Carolina. The Seminoles lost six seniors from that team, including guards Luke Loucks and Deividas Dulkys and forward Bernard James — all starters.

Though the Seminoles may not be as deep as they were last season, they still have plenty of talent and return four of their top five scorers. Returning is guard Michael Snaer, who led the team in scoring (14 points), made clutch 3-pointers to beat Duke and Virginia Tech and is considered one of the league's top

defenders. Snaer was chosen as a first-team All-ACC preseason pick on Wednesday.

The Seminoles also return guard Ian Miller (10.3 points), and forwards Okaro White (7.7 points, 4.4 rebounds) and Terrance Shannon (8.3 points, 4.4 rebounds).

But the big key for Florida State will be replacing leading rebounder and shot blocker in James, who is now playing for the Dallas Mavericks. The team has three 7-footers on the roster — Kiel Turpin, Michael Ojo and Boris Bojanovsky — but none have played a game of Division I basketball.

"We do have a core of experienced guys," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. "If we are going to have the type of success that we think we are capable of, a lot will have to do with how fast we are able to bring our inexperienced players along. We are pleased with the skills they have and the potential and talent, but there's a learning curve."

Miami went 20-13 in coach Jim Larranaga's first season in South Florida. The Hurricanes went 9-7 in the ACC, stunning Duke in overtime on the road and beating Florida State in Coral Gables.

There is plenty of optimism for Year 2 of the Larranaga Era. Miami returns four starters, including guards Durand Scott (12.9 points, 5.4 rebounds and 3.1 assists) and Shane Larkin (7.4 points), forward Kenny Kadji (11.7 points, 5.3 rebounds) and center Reggie Johnson (10 points, 7.2 rebounds).

Larranaga likes the balance, experience and depth of the Hurricanes, which features a roster that includes six seniors and three juniors. He's especially pleased with the play of Scott, who led Miami in scoring and assists a year ago.

"Durand is a tremendous competitor," Larranaga said. "When we first got to Miami last

year, I honestly didn't know what to expect from him. But he made a great transition. More than him learning our system, I learned what he was all about. We were able to tweak our offense to give him a chance to do the things he does so well, which is take the ball to the basket and be creative."

Both teams will also be helped by players that were injured for significant portions of last season. Florida State welcomes back Shannon, who played in just seven games after suffering a shoulder injury in November.

"I can't tell you how much we missed Terrance last year," Hamilton said. "Terrance is just the ultimate competitor. He loves to do all of the dirty work. Terrance is a handful for most people because he just gives tremendous effort and he plays with such fire."

Miami returns Johnson, who Larranaga said was playing at just 60-70 percent after returning from December knee surgery.

"He spent all offseason at Miami getting stronger," Larranaga said. "He's going to be one of the strongest men in the country this year. He's running and jumping much better."

Both teams open the regular season at home on Nov. 9. The Seminoles play South Alabama and Miami takes on Stetson.

Top 68 Team Previews: #32 Miami Hurricanes

The Hoops Report

Stan Lloyd

October 14, 2012

Last Season: 20-13 (9-7)

Key Losses: Malcolm Grant & DeQuan Jones

Head Coach: Jim Larranaga

Projected Starting Lineup

G: Shane Larkin 5-II So.

G: Durand Scott 6-5 Sr.

G: Rion Brown 6-6 Jr.

F: Kenny Kadji 6-II Jr.

C: Reggie Johnson 6-10 Sr.

Key Reserves:

G Trey McKinney Jones 6-5 Sr.

F Garrius Adams 6-6 Sr.

F/C Julian Gamble 6-10 Sr.

G Melvin Johnson 6-3 Fr.

Last season was full of surprises for Miami and first year coach Jim Larranaga. It all started in the summer when star center Reggie Johnson injured his knee. Julian Gamble, who was Johnson's backup, then injured his knee. And as if the offseason couldn't end soon enough, the Canes were informed that DeQuan Jones would be suspended. Finally the season started and surely the madness was over. Wrong. The team's third knee injury in less than six months would sideline former starter Garrius Adams. The end of the season didn't go much smoother when leading scorer Durand Scott was suspended for the ACC Tournament and subsequently, the NIT.

The good news for the Hurricanes is that the road between the frustrating start to their season and the crushing end of it was full of promise. With all the turmoil the team faced, they still managed to go 9-7 in one of the toughest conference. During one stretch, they managed to win five straight ACC games, including three on the road. One of those wins was a 78-74 win over the 5th ranked Duke Blue Devils in Cameron Indoor. This year, Miami returns with most of last year's team in-

tact and with any luck, will be much healthier. This will be a very balanced team, both in the backcourt and the frontcourt.

The backcourt is full of talent, even though they lost Malcolm Grant. The depth at guard will be noticeable from day one. All-ACC candidate Durand Scott, who missed the last three games last year, will also have to sit out the first three games this season. In his absence, look for Shane Larkin (ACC All-Freshman selection) to step up. During the stretch at the end of the year when the Canes were without Scott, Larkin and guard Rion Brown averaged 12 and 15.7 points per game respectively. Also, Miami will be getting back Garrius Adams who can play any backcourt position.

The frontcourt will be stout if Reggie Johnson can return to the beast he was during his sophomore year. Two years ago, Johnson was unstoppable. He seemed to pick up double-doubles as often as Dwight Howard. However, he never seemed the same after the knee injury and managed just one double-double. He is joined in the frontcourt by former Florida transfer Kenny Kadji. Kadji gets it done on both ends of the court. Last season, he connected on 41.8% of his 3-point attempts and recorded 1.6 blocks and 5.3 boards per game.

The Hurricanes return to an ACC that, by most accounts, is up for grabs after the departure of several UNC, Duke, and FSU stars. What do the Hurricanes bring to the table this year? They return six of their top seven scorers, eight of their top nine rebounders, sixth year senior Julian Gamble, and a really good recruiting class. The ACC better take heed of the warning sirens now, because the Hurricanes are poised to storm through the league and leave a path of destruction behind them.

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TheHoopsReport.com

By Stan Lloyd

Oct. 14, 2012

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Jekiri Looking to Fill Role

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Oct. 12, 2012

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Tonye Jekiri is Miami's lone true freshman and is looking to be a key role player this season.

Jekiri is a 7-foot, 227-pound shot-blocking center and solid rebounder originally from Nigeria before he moved to Miami and played two seasons at Champagnat Catholic.

As a senior, he averaged 20 points, 12 rebounds, and five blocks per game leading his team to a Class 2A state final.

"The biggest adjustment (from high school to college) was going from weightlifting to practice, it's not the same in high school," Jekiri said. "In high school I never lifted weights and went to practice. From weightlifting to practice to class to study hall, it was really tough for me. But I've kind of gotten used to it."

Head coach Jim Larranaga has been impressed with Jekiri's progress since he arrived in the summer.

"I like the progress Tonye Jekiri is making," Larranaga said. "We have worked exclusively on him developing a great jump hook because I think that will be his greatest weapon throughout his college career. He's got a nice jump shot, but a guy with his size and versatility in and around the basket, to be able to just jump hook over people would be very, very effective and he's working very hard to develop that shot as his bread and butter move."

Since arriving at UM, Jekiri has been praised Larranaga and the players for listening to instructions without any questions.

"With me playing basketball I'm still trying to learn because it is my third year playing basketball," Jekiri said. "I'm trying to learn rather than talking. I really believe you learn

more when you listen instead of talking more. There's not too much I can say because they have been in the game more."

Jekiri is one of five post players on the team with three—Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadji, and Julian Gamble—leading the way as seniors.

"They really have showed me what it really takes to be a Hurricane player and how hard it is going to be for me even when I go ahead with more expectations when they leave, the coaches will be looking for me to step up and take that role," Jekiri said. "They have been really pushing me when it comes to practice and weightlifting. They have also told me about their past experiences and how they fought through all of the things, they have been a big help for me."

Jekiri is making sure he's improving daily not just for a role this season, but in the future when he'll have a larger role after the seniors depart.

"I really do think about that right now," he said. "Even when I come off the bench, it's still a big role for me. I always think about when I come into the game and how I'll have to step up. I always think about that and the future too when I'll have a bigger role."

To help Jekiri learn the game more, he spends time watching NBA and college games. In particular, he likes watching Kevin Garnett and Dwight Howard play.

"I like how they play, how they are leaders on their team and have really learned from them," said Jekiri, who also liked watching Thomas Robinson and Jared Sullinger in college.

Miami hosts St. Leo on Nov. 2 at 7 p.m. in their lone exhibition game. Regular season action begins Nov. 9 as the Hurricanes look to make a run towards an NCAA tournament appearance.

"As a team my expectations is for us to get to the NCAA tournament and the Sweet 16, 8, or 4 and I think we have weapons to get there, we just have to put ourselves together," Jekiri said. "Mostly we want to win back our fans because we need our fans to support us in every game. As a player my expectation is stepping up in every game, filling the roles, and being aggressive in every game."

Larranaga, players talk as practice begins

**CaneSport
Staff
Oct. 12, 2012**

With the bulk of the Hurricanes' men's basketball team from a year ago returning - the only losses are Malcolm Grant and DeQuan Jones - hopes are high.

Practice begins today, and center Reggie Johnson in particular can't hide his enthusiasm.

"We'll win big - I'm sorry if I sound cocky, but I think we're going to win big," Johnson said. "That's my mindset. We're going to win big."

"(We want to go to) the (NCAA) Tournament and make noise. Forget the NIT. I'm telling you right now what it's going to be for this upcoming season. ... It's going to be a fun season. Barring injuries we're going to be a heck of a team, a top three team in this league."

The returning starters are Johnson (10 ppg, 7.2 rpg), Kenny Kadji (11.7 ppg, 5.3 rpg), Shane Larkin (7.4 ppg, 2.5 apg) and Durand Scott (12.9 ppg, 5.4 rpg).

Garrius Adams (4.5 ppg, 2.1 rpg) is coming off a leg injury and won't start practice with the team at the start of the year (Larranaga says he could be back in a few weeks). There's good depth regardless of Adams' status with Julian Gamble back off a knee injury along with Rion Brown (7.2 ppg, 2.8 rpg), Erik Swoope (2.3 ppg, 1.7 rpg) and Trey McKinney Jones (7.0 ppg, 3.5 rpg).

Redshirt freshman Bishop Daniels had a foot injury that cost him last year but is expected to have a big role, and true freshman center Tonye Jekiri is a new addition.

Coach Jim Larranaga shared his thoughts on several of the players:

* Larranaga points to Daniels as someone who can help fill the loss of Grant.

"We lose Malcolm, but he's replaced by Bishop who is an outstanding athlete," Larranaga said. "He can't shoot like Malcolm, but he's fast."

* Larranaga said Kenny Kadji has dropped from 262 pounds last year to 242.

"We want him to run the floor better, be in better shape," Larranaga said. "More importantly, without DeQuan Jones we need someone to guard those stretch swingmen. He's going to need to guard a perimeter four man. That's quite a challenge for him. Losing the weight will help (and) he's stronger than a year ago."

* Larranaga said Gamble, who is coming off a knee injury that cost him last year, "has impressed me as much or more than anybody on the team, primarily because after his injury he couldn't practice for a very long time. I did not have a vision of what he was going to be like. Then in February when he came back and started practicing he labored at everything we did. I thought he'd have a very hard time contributing. During the summer he was in the weight room conditioning, getting stronger, and these last four weeks he's been very impressive running the floor, rebounding on both ends, being a heady player. He's going to fit very much into our rotation."

* Of Johnson, Larranaga said, "Reggie has learned more about what it takes to be successful in the game of basketball as he's gotten older. He's also learned a lot about the new coaching staff and what pleases us and doesn't please us. He's very focused on having his best year ever and we're very comfortable he's capable of doing that."

* Scott is out three games due to the remainder of an NCAA suspension

"The thing I was most impressed with Durand last year was his competitive drive," Larranaga said. "He's a tough hard-nosed competitor. I think he's going to have a sensational year, will be our true leader and I'm excited about the improvement he made in his game - he's shooting the ball better, has always been a solid three-point shooter and layup maker but now he's hitting a lot of 15-foot jump shots. He's making plays that I think will lead us to a lot of terrific wins."

* Larranaga said he expects Larkin "to take on more of a leadership role this year."

He said Shane "was one of the top stealers last year (and) I think can very easily lead the league in steals now" because of the style of defense Larranaga will implement with more experienced players.

He added that "We really like the improvement and confidence being shown by Trey McKinney-Jones and Rion Brown. There were times last year when both played well, but most of the time it wasn't at the same time."

Larranaga said of Jekiri that he's "very different than anybody we have. He's much faster, he's very active in his game, is very inexperienced right now so he's foul prone. But we instituted a new rule that we hope will improve fouling."

That rule?

"We just started it and it was very effective immediately - the moment you foul, if a coach calls a foul on you, you have to do 10 pushups right then and there," Larranaga said.

Last year this team finished with a 20-13 record and made the NIT.

"We have a veteran team, six seniors," Larranaga said. "Our goals never change - our goal is to be the best that we can be; everyone else thinks we can be very good, which is a good thing. Last year we came very close to reaching our full potential when we were healthy; we had a very hard time staying healthy, had some suspensions."

Asked how much more he can do with the team now as opposed to when he took over in terms of trying to install a new style of play, Larranaga said, "We're going to be far different at least to start the year. We're going to evaluate the month of November and December so we have a good game plan going into the ACC. ... we should be able to do things in November and December that we weren't able to think about doing at any time last year. You'll see us pressing more, running more than we did last year."

* With six seniors to replace in recruiting after this year, Larranaga was asked about the importance of this recruiting class.

"It's huge," he said. "We've been out there beating the bushes for a very long time. We feel good about where we are. But recruiting is not a science. It's really a crap shoot. It's often difficult to know or understand what someone else is thinking because one kid will leave campus telling us he's coming, and the next week he'll commit to someone else."

JOHNSON HAS HIGH HOPES

Johnson says "this is the biggest season yet for me and the seniors - it's going to be a good season for us."

Johnson says he thinks the team can finish in the ACC's top three and make a run at NCAA's.

"We're getting recognition, but I see us getting overlooked a lot," Johnson said. "I love it - it just makes us play harder."

Why does he think the team is being overlooked?

"I mean, we're Miami," Johnson said. "If we were North Carolina or Florida State we'd be top 25 without a shadow of a doubt. We're Miami, so that's that."

Johnson says he's playing the best ball of his career. He was hampered by a knee injury that cost him part of last season and says "I'm back at 100 percent."

"I feel 100 percent better - my jumping ability, being able to cut and guard," Johnson said. "Having the whole summer to get better definitely paid off for me."

"My junior year was supposed to be my bigger year but I got hurt - I rebound better, see myself getting all the loose balls."

Johnson says he's worked hard to develop a couple of aspects of his game.

"Really my jump shot - coach L wants me to shoot that shot," Johnson said. "And then my left hand - I find myself going to my left hand hook more than my right hand, so that's kind of crazy."

* Johnson broke down what he sees for the ACC race this year, saying "People are picking NC State to win it, and I can see why. But don't (overlook) us. That's all I'm going to say about that."

* Asked how much last year's struggles were based on the team working to learn Larranaga's system, Johnson said, "A lot. Going from coach (Frank) Haith to coach L, that's two different coaching styles. Coach Haith was a zone; coach L was straight man. It was different, but toward the end of the year we started to get it."

* Johnson says Julian Gamble has stepped up a lot coming off injury.

"Julian has really stepped up, become a factor," Johnson said. "When I go out, Kenny goes out there'll be no fall-off."

LARKIN FOCUSED ON NCAA TOURNEY

Larkin says of this year's team that "We have a lot of veterans, so hopefully we can just build on what we started last year in coach L's first season and make the NCAA Tournament this year."

Larkin says he "feels more comfortable" this year.

"This year I'll look to break out a little more," he said. "I'll be more aggressive offensively. I know I can do more offensively than I did last year."

Larkin says despite losing Grant that he thinks Daniels will be a big asset.

"Bishop is fast as I don't know what - when he gets going up and down he's too fast," Larkin said. "It's just exciting to play with him. This year me and him together, I'm really excited for that."

"He's a crazy athlete, will show everyone this year."

He adds that "We have shooters everywhere. Everybody just got a lot better (from last year), will be able to produce this year."

Larkin sees a big difference in the offensive play.

"Last year we were stagnant on offense; this year we're getting ball movement," Larkin said.

The bottom line?

"I don't feel we get the respect we deserve," Larkin said. "I just believe in my team, and hopefully we can do well this year."

"It's going to be a good year."

SG Daniels Ready to Make Impact

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Oct. 12, 2012

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- Bishop Daniels has countless highlight-reel dunks painted throughout YouTube world.

They are impressive for any player, but especially for a 6-foot-2, 170-pound high schooler.

Because of the electrifying dunks, Daniels has been labeled as "just a dunker"--a label he plans to erase this season.

"I've had people tell me all I could do was dunk," Daniels said. "I know that wasn't right. They had never seen me in person so you couldn't tell. I think that's what's going to show on the court a lot this year. If you haven't seen more than the highlights, then you haven't seen any of us play, especially me."

He may not have a jump shot like Ray Allen, but he does have speed, quickness, and other offensive skills that will enable him to score the ball. While scoring receiving more headlines, it's defense that Daniels takes pride in.

"I understood coming into college that defense is what is going to put you on the court," Daniels said. "Everybody in college can play offensively--they wouldn't be here if they couldn't--so I took pride in every day getting after it on defense because I know if you're playing defense and have a good offense, it's going to take you to that next level. And I want to win. I take pride in my defense because I don't want anyone to embarrass me."

Teammate Durand Scott has noticed Daniels' defensive prowess.

"He definitely has the potential especially on defense," Scott said. "I know when defense is needed, he's going to be someone to be called on because he's very fast, can lock up, is athletic, can block some shots, get some hands on some balls, he can press and things like that so he's definitely going to be needed on the floor."

Daniels has been slowed by a hamstring injury during preseason practices, which he suffered on the second day of practice.

"The last couple of weeks I've been in and out due to a minor tweak in my hamstring," Daniels said. "It's getting better. I've been watching practices, being active, and being involved in some of the dummy drills. I will be back before the first game comes, but the last couple of weeks has been learning for me."

The injury has come at a bad time for Daniels, who is looking to stake his claim on a

veteran team with six seniors after he missed last season due to a foot injury.

"Of course it's frustrating," Daniels said. "I can't really show it though and can't let it get to me. My confident has to stay high because I've been through this before. I was hurt all of last year. It's frustrating, but I'm going to get through it. I've got good support in teammates, coaches, family at home just telling me to keep going."

When Daniels arrived at UM last season, he was expected to bring energy and athleticism off the bench. However, the foot injury derailed those plans and he was redshirted. He returned to practice in December and practiced throughout the duration of the season without any other issues.

"Last year was a struggle for me," Daniels said. "I wasn't ready for what I was put in being hurt and having to sit the whole season and watch my team go out there in and out fighting and I couldn't be a part of it. This year I'm coming in with a new mindset, ready to play. There's no sitting out for me, no more time to be wasting. I'm coming out there ready to play the first game. I'm not missing no games. It's a protection issue. I don't want to be injured or go back out there and re-hurt anything. I'm just chilling right now until I get back 100 percent where I can go every day."

After the season, the team collectively agreed to stay in South Florida for the summer as opposed to returning home to work on their games on their own.

"The whole team realized the potential of what we can actually do this year so we decided to stay and do four-man workouts, individuals, going at each other hard, playing pick-up, just getting better and grinding every day," Daniels said.

By staying in Coral Gables, Daniels passed on an opportunity to play in the tradition-rich North Carolina Pro-Am, which has featured NBA players Jerry Stackhouse, John Wall, Austin Rivers, and Brandon Jennings as well as collegiate players.

"I would have loved to have played, but I had to stay and handle some real business," Daniels said.

Daniels was able to squeeze in one appearance in the league this summer during a short trip back.

"It's a big deal," Daniels said. "It's something that we can come back and show how good we've gotten. The league is big, it's a great league."

Connection to John Wall

Growing up in basketball-driven Raleigh, N.C., Daniels, who was named after Tupac Shakur's role in "Juice", played with and against a number of talented players throughout his childhood.

One of those guys is Washington Wizards guard John Wall.

"Me and John have a great relationship," Daniels said. "I see him all of the time in the summer time. Every time I get to go home, I see him. He's a close friend of mine. We joke around, kid, stuff like that. He helps me out. It's a regular relationship, nothing out of the ordinary. That's my boy. We've known each other since we were little kids so that relationship is always going to be there."

Daniels and Wall played on season together at Word of God High School when Wall was a senior, Daniels a sophomore. Daniels has seen Wall's development over the years.

"Out of anybody that we were all close with when we were little, his mentality was probably the strongest," Daniels said. "He has a killer mentality. Whatever it takes to get it done and get the win, he's going to get it done."

In addition to Wall, Daniels also grew up with N.C. State's C.J. Leslie and Maryland's Dez Wells.

Season Opener Nears

Daniels will be looking to make an impact when the season kicks off Nov. 9 against Stetson with whatever role he is given.

"To be honest I just want to do whatever it takes to," Daniels said. "Whatever my role is, I'm going to do it day in and day out. Every night that we play we're going to be out there fighting hard and I'll be playing my role in that game."

After a year in college, Daniels believes he can have some of the same success he had in high school.

"I do think I'll be able to do some of things I did in high school," Daniels said. "Me being the player I am, I am going to have confidence I can whatever I want to on the court. There's nothing that's going to be able to stop me from doing what I did in high school because I'm not going to be playing against anyone different than I did in high school. It's just we are all getting bigger, stronger, and faster, and at the same I'm getting bigger, stronger, faster so I can do the same thing too."

Hoops Buzz: 10/12

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Oct. 12, 2012

The Miami Hurricanes basketball team kicks off the 2012-13 season with their first practice Friday.

Practice is scheduled to begin at 5:30 p.m. as schools around the country are allowed to start official practices.

The team has been able to be in the gym with certain limitations leading up to Friday's first official practice.

Head coach Jim Larranaga is back for his second season after going 20-13 last year.

"We're going to be far different at least to start the year," Larranaga said. "We'll continue to evaluate how we do the month of November and December so that we have a good game plan going into the ACC. We look at our team, we lose Malcolm Grant, who is an outstanding shooter, but he basically gets replaced by Bishop Daniels, who is an outstanding athlete, but can't shoot the ball like Malcolm, but is very, very fast. We also have a more experienced Shane Larkin, we expect Shane to take on more of a leadership role this year. We really like the improvement and confidence shown by Trey McKinney-Jones and Rion Brown."

Look for Miami to run more of Larranaga's signature "Scramble" defense this season as the team has made strides in improving from when he first took over. The Scramble defense is a man defense that implements a number of trapping principles designed to create turnovers.

"We were not able to do that; I don't think the guys picked it up very well at all during last season," Larranaga said, "but we've been able to continue to build on it and adding a

guy like Bishop Daniels—you need speed and quickness if you're going to trap one guy, that means somebody is open. You have to have the ability to rotate and cover that guy very, very quickly or you'll give up a lot of easy shots or very good offensive rebounding position. We know that from our experience so we're trying to teach our players how to do it correctly. We're getting better. We're not there yet."

News & Notes

- PF Kenny Kadji (11.7 ppg, 5.3 rpg) and C Reggie Johnson (10.0, 7.2) should provide the Hurricanes with a formidable frontcourt duo as Johnson is fully healthy heading into the season. "It's going to be dangerous," Johnson said. "It's going to be dangerous because teams can't double me as much as they want to. If they do, Kenny can burn them with the shot. I've got great shooters around me like Trey and Rion, those guys know how to move around me when I've got the ball in the post. It's going to be fun season. I think my assists will go up this season."

- PF Julian Gamble looks like he will fill a key role as the top post player off the bench in his sixth season. Gamble, who has averaged 3.4 points and 3.0 rebounds in 93 games, has made great strides recovering from knee surgery. "Jules has came back and put on a lot of strength," Larkin said. "His knee is a lot better. I didn't get to see him play before because I wasn't here, but from what I heard he's increased his play and intensity by a lot. He's great on the offensive boards and one of the smartest players on the team. He can bring a lot to our team this year."

- C Reggie Johnson has added a left-handed hook to his array of post moves, which he has found himself using more than his dominant right hand.

- With the graduation of DeQuan Jones and no replacement, UM lacks a versatile forward, which concerns Larranaga. "We'll have some

size, but my major concern is that we're a team that's big without a lot of versatility up front," Larranaga said. "We don't have guys that are 6-6, 6-7, 6-8, we have guys...that are 6-9 to 6-11 so we're big, which is good and going to be very good some nights, but it's also a major concern that we're not as versatile as we'd like to be." Jones is currently on the Magic's preseason roster.

- Freshman C Tonye Jekiri is battling for playing time with Raphael Akpejori to be the team's fourth post player. "Tonye is making strides," Larkin said. "He's only been playing basketball for a couple years, but he's making big strides. He's now getting a patented hook shot. He's really coming along so he'll be able to provide some depth of the bench for us."

- SG Bishop Daniels continues to get praised for his speed as he posted the lowest time in lane agility (9.10 seconds) during the pre-season testing. "Bishop is fast as I don't know what," Larkin said. "Everybody says I'm a blur on the court, but when he gets going up and down the court, he's too fast. It's just exciting playing with him because there's two of us out there instead of it being just one running up and down. This year, me and him together, I'm really excited about that."

- The 2013 recruiting class is an important one for Larranaga and his staff as the team will be looking to replace six seniors. Larranaga has only brought in three players since he took over the program—Larkin, Daniels, and Jekiri—so this is his opportunity to put his stamp on the program. Currently, UM has received two verbal commitments in the class: SG Davon Reed and PG Deandre Burnett. "It's huge," Larranaga said. "We've been out there beating the bushes for a very long time. We feel good about where we are, but recruiting is not a science and really a crapshoot. It's often difficult to know or understand what someone else is thinking. One kid will leave campus telling us he's coming and the next week he'll commit to somebody else."

Miami Hurricanes Basketball: Hoops Chatter, 10/12

CanesWarning
Matthew Osborne
Oct. 12, 2012

The Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team will officially begin practice on Friday. The team has been ranked No. 24 by the Blue Ribbon Yearbook and is coming off of a 20-13 record during head coach Jim Larranaga's first year.

The 'Canes will lose SG Malcolm Grant, but he is to be replaced by SG Bishop Daniels, a 6-3, 175 pound redshirt freshman from Raleigh, North Carolina. Daniels was named the No. 4 dunker in the 2011 class by Rivals and was ranked among the nation's top shooting guards (No. 29 – Scout, No. 46 – ESPN). He was recruited by Purdue, Tennessee, North Carolina State and Rutgers, to name a few.

Notable UM Returnees:

- PF Kenny Kadji (Sr.), Selected to third team All-ACC in 2011-12; 2011 Orange Bowl Basketball Classic Game MVP

- G Durand Scott (Sr.), 2011-12 All-ACC Honorable Mention; 2010 ACC All-Rookie Team; 2010 ACC-All Tournament First Team; 2010 Four-time ACC Rookie of the Week

- G Shane Larkin (So.), 2011-12 All-ACC Freshman Team; ACC Rookie of the Week Dec. 5

- C Reggie Johnson (Sr.), 2011 All-ACC Honorable Mention; 2010 ACC All-Tournament Second Team; ACC Player of the Week Feb. 6, 2012, College Sports Madness ACC Men's Basketball Player of the Week Dec. 19, 2011

Last month, Miami received their second verbal commitment from SG Davon Reed. Reed (6-5, 195) chose Miami over Xavier and Wake Forest. He is an ESPN Top-100 prospect and is looking to bring additional talent to UM in SF Reggie Cameron (6-7, 200), SF Josh Hart (6-5, 196) and PF Austin Colbert (6-9, 205). Miami lost out on 2013 recruit SG Kameron Williams (6-2, 175), who chose Ohio State over Miami, Wake Forest, Marquette and Syracuse. PG Deandre Burnett (6-1, 190) from Opa Locka, FL. became the 'Canes first 2013 verbal commitment.

Reggie Johnson expects 'Canes to make noise

FOX Sports South
Chris Perkins
Oct. 12, 2012

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Today is the day it all gets started, the first day of college basketball practice. And to hear senior center Reggie Johnson talk about the University of Miami basketball team, great things are about to happen for the Hurricanes.

Johnson predicts Miami, which returns four starters from last year's 20-13 team that narrowly missed the NCAA Tournament, will finish in the top three in the Atlantic Coast Conference, a league that has three teams — North Carolina State, Duke and North Carolina — in almost everybody's preseason Top 25.

"We're going to win big," said Johnson, who averaged 10.8 points and 7.2 rebounds per game while battling a knee problem last season. "I'm sorry if I sound cocky or whatever it sounds, but I think we're going to win big. That's my mindset."

And what, exactly, does "win big" mean?

"(NCAA) Tournament and make noise," said Johnson, whose Hurricanes lost in the second round of the NIT last season. "I definitely want to make noise in the Tournament, ain't no ifs, ands or buts about the Tournament."

"Forget the NIT, forget all that. I'm telling you right now. Some of you guys probably think, 'He's crazy.' But I'm telling you right now what it's going to be for this upcoming season."

Johnson has reason for optimism. UM's four returning starters all have legitimate credentials. And the 'Canes return six of their top seven scorers and eight of their top nine rebounders.

Among the returning starters — aside from the 6-foot-10 Johnson — the Hurricanes welcome back are:

— 6-11 senior power forward Kenny Kadji, a third-team All-ACC selection (11.7 ppg, 5.3 rebounds, 1.6 blocks, which ranked sixth in the ACC).

— Senior shooting guard Durand Scott (12.9 ppg), the team's leading scorer and an All-ACC honorable mention.

— Sophomore point guard Shane Larkin, the son of Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin and an All-ACC Freshmen selection who averaged 7.4 ppg and 2.5 assists.

As for key reserves Miami has junior guard Rion Brown (7.2 ppg) and senior guard Trey McKinney Jones (7.0 ppg), who are both capable scorers. Also back are senior guard Garrius Adams (4.5 ppg, six starts) and junior forward Erik Swoope (2.3 ppg, eight starts). Senior big man Julian Gamble (4.0 ppg, 3.4 rpg), who missed last season with a knee injury, also returns.

Overall, the Hurricanes bring back nine scholarship players from last season, a year in which they finished tied for fourth in the ACC (their best finish since joining the league in 2004), beat Duke at Cameron Indoor Arena for the first time and defeated ACC champion Florida State.

Coach Jim Larranaga, who took over last year after a successful 14-year run at George Mason that included a 2006 Final Four appearance, didn't totally support Johnson's outlook, but he didn't shoot it down either.

"Reggie has been around a long time," Larranaga said, "he's a very experienced player, he knows the league very well, so he knows we have a veteran team -- six seniors -- and he has confidence in his teammates as well as himself."

"It's good to believe in yourself."

UM opens the season Nov. 9 with a home game against Stetson and soon afterward gets its first major test as it hosts Michigan State (Nov. 28), a pre-season Top 25 on almost every list.

On the down side for the Hurricanes, Scott, a three-year starter, will miss the first three games while serving a NCAA suspension and Adams will miss a few weeks while recovering from last month's knee surgery.

Still, Johnson is excited.

"Barring injury," he said, "we're going to be a heckuva team."

Larkin to Be Better As a Sophomore

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Oct. 11, 2012

Shane Larkin knows what is expected of him in his sophomore season.

The 5-foot-11 point guard who took over the starting duties mid-way through last year is reminded constantly.

"Get to the basket, get everybody involved, and use your speed," head coach Jim Larranaga instructs Larkin during workouts.

Larranaga had a meeting with Larkin Wednesday to re-iterate the goals for the son of the Baseball Hall of Famer.

"That's something I'm really going to try to do this year," Larkin said.

Larkin admits he was just trying to blend in at times during his first year in college and struggled with his shot selection.

Through experience and watching film with Larranaga, Larkin feels he has improved on those areas.

"I feel more comfortable with everybody," Larkin said. "So definitely with comfort you get to play your game more. I'm more comfortable so this year I look to break out a little bit more."

Larkin played in 32 games, starting 19, averaging 7.4 points, 2.6 assists, 2.5 rebounds, and a team-high 1.6 steals a game. This year he believes his added comfort will help him improve on offense.

"Just being more aggressive offensively," he said. "I know I can do more offensively than I did last year. I'm still going to play the same defense, reading the passing lanes, same on-ball defense, just be more aggressive on offense to look to get passes in the lane or

shoot the 3."

Larkin shot 36 percent from the floor, which was second-to-last on the team, and a number he'd like to improve on.

"Just get shots up," Larkin said of how to improve on the mark. "Coach L always tells us to get shots up before and after practice. During practice we get a lot of shots up too. Shooting is the only way to get better so that's what I'm doing."

Watching film with Larranaga has helped Larkin improve on his shot selection, which will help his shooting percent.

"Being a freshman just coming in not knowing what is a good shot," Larkin said. "Coach L has taught me a lot. We've watched a lot of film so I just know what's a good shot and what's a bad shot, when to shoot, when not to shoot, and that's going to help me out."

Miami went 20-13 last season, 9-7 in the ACC, but failed to make the NCAA tournament for the fourth straight year. The Hurricanes return six seniors and nine players who started games last season.

"We have a lot of veterans so hopefully we can build on what we started last season, coach L's first season, and make the NCAA tournament this year," Larkin said.

Larkin doesn't feel Miami gets the respect it deserves.

"I don't feel we get the respect that we deserve, but if we are sneaking up on people, then that's what we're going to do," Larkin said. "I just believe in our team and hopefully we can do well this year."

Playing in the ACC gives the Hurricanes plenty of opportunities to change the perception of the team.

"Beating the so-called big teams when we play them, like a signature win at Duke last year," Larkin said. "It shows what we can do, but we need to do more of that this year so people can see what we're about."

Miami hosts Michigan State, Duke, North Carolina, and Florida State as well as playing a mid-season tournament in Hawaii as part of their schedule this year.

"It's a great schedule, a lot of good games, just looking forward to going out and playing the best competition every night," Larkin said.

Larkin will resume the starting point guard duties with double-digit scorers Durand Scott (12.9), Kenny Kadji (11.7), and Reggie Johnson (10.0) also returning.

"Everybody can pretty much do everything from 1-2-3, Kenny is a stretch 4 so he can do a lot with the ball," Larkin said. "We can go four out and one in with big Reg and once Reggie gets it down low, it's pretty hard stopping without double-teaming. We have shooters everywhere. D-Scott has really been working on his shot. He's shooting a lot better. Everybody just got a lot better and everybody will be able to produce this year."

Miami averaged 70.7 points a game while shooting 43.1 percent as a team. Larkin believes the team will be better offensively in their second year under Larranaga.

"Offensively last year we were really stagnant and not moving, but this year we are getting better ball movement," Larkin said. "Everybody knows their roles and everybody knows what coach L is looking for. You can tell in practice we're scoring a lot easier. It's going to be a good year."

Miami having 48 guests at its 1st practice weekend

AP
Tim Reynolds
Oct. 11, 2012

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Practice opens at Miami on Friday, when 48 hopefuls will hit the floor trying desperately to impress Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga.

None will make his team. They'll all have packed up and left by Monday. And they paid handsomely for this privilege.

When the Hurricanes start practice for the coming season, they won't be alone. Larranaga is marrying the formal start of Miami's workouts with a fantasy camp for adults, and believes there are many benefits to running the events simultaneously. Larranaga's players will draft and coach the 48 adults, splitting the group into six teams of eight players.

The campers will also be invited to watch Miami practice.

"Players tend to play better in front of audiences," said Larranaga, whose Hurricanes were 20-13 last season and are expected to contend in the Atlantic Coast Conference this year. "They tend to play harder. I was at a high school gym last week and the football team stayed around because they couldn't get on the practice field. The level of intensity increased dramatically because of the way the football players responded. The same happens with our players."

The cost: \$2,500, which might be considered a bargain in this growing fantasy-camp world.

Other schools that offer the experience to fans at various times during the year include Duke, Syracuse, Kentucky, West Virginia and Kansas. Michael Jordan offered one in Las Vegas for years; Dwyane Wade has lured people to spend \$12,500 to play with him and his friends for a few days in Miami over the past two summers.

Several of the campers who paid to be with Miami this weekend also signed up for most, if not all, the other major camps offered this year, treating it all like a circuit.

"These guys know their basketball," Larranaga said. "And for the players, it makes you aware that the things that you're doing, people are evaluating you all the time. No matter what you do, you're almost always being observed."

When Larranaga coached George Mason into the Final Four, he met one of the prerequisites for getting into what was then the can't-miss fantasy camp, the one Jordan hosted in Las Vegas. Only certain coaches are invited to work that camp, and getting to a Final Four earned Larranaga his call from Jordan to be part of it all.

Larranaga was hooked. He developed contacts, saw how the campers used the weekends to interact with one another, and quickly realized it's about more than basketball. He's worked plenty of camps since, and is a key part of how Wade operates the day-to-day schedule at his fantasy camp.

"These guys are in business with each other, they become very good friends," Larranaga said. "Our players see that."

It's loaded with perks for players. At Kentucky, coach John Calipari gives out \$150 Armani ties to all campers, some games are held at Rupp Arena and members of the winning team win \$2,500 Armani suits. At Syracuse, Jim Boeheim made sure campers got something they surely needed after Day 1 — massages. At Kansas, there's a huge photo of a businessman named Rick Schnall talking with Jayhawks star Thomas Robinson on the school web site; Schnall will be one of the players at Larranaga's camp this weekend as well.

"They all love it," Larranaga said. "They're serious about it."

Larranaga's "real" players may just put on a show for the campers as well. Miami has big expectations coming into the year, and senior center Reggie Johnson isn't shy about saying the Hurricanes expect to be an NCAA tournament team.

He thinks there's a simple reason why many may be overlooking the Hurricanes at this point.

"We're Miami," Johnson said. "If we were at North Carolina or Florida State, we'd be a Top 25 team, without a doubt. But we're Miami, so that's that."

UM men's basketball team has high expectations

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Oct. 11, 2012

It remains to be seen how the University of Miami men's basketball team will fare this season, but one thing is certain heading into Friday's official first practice: Senior center Reggie Johnson is thinking big.

"Tournament and make noise," he replied, when asked his preseason goals. "I definitely want to make noise in the tournament, no ifs, ands or buts. Forget the NIT. Forget all that. I'm telling you right now. Sorry if I sound cocky. ... Some of you probably think, 'Oh, he's crazy,' but I'm telling you right now what's going to be this coming season."

The Hurricanes finished 20-13 last season, were fourth in the Atlantic Coast Conference (9-7) and reached the second round of the NIT.

Nine players return from that team, including six seniors. The team boasts five players 6-10 or taller, speedy guards Shane Larkin and Bishop Daniels, and versatility in Durand Scott, Trey McKinney Jones and Rion Brown. UM cracked the Top 25 in a few preseason magazine polls.

"Barring injuries, we're going to be a heck of a team, top three in ACC," Johnson said.

Kenny Kadji, Johnson's frontcourt mate at 6-11, shed 20 pounds to become a more mobile big man at 242 . pounds. Seven-foot freshman Tonye Jekiri of Hialeah's Champagnat Catholic School is quick and can block shots.

Julian Gamble, a 6-10 senior who missed last season with a knee injury, has been impressive in preseason workouts.

"Julian has impressed me as much as or more than anybody on team," second-year coach Jim Larranaga said. "After his injury he

couldn't practice for a very long time. I did not have a vision of what he was going to be like. In February, when he came back to practice, he labored at everything we did. I thought, 'He'll have a very hard time contributing.' In the summer, he was in the weight room conditioning, getting stronger. These last four weeks of practice he has been very, very impressive running the floor, rebounding at both ends, being a heady player. He's going to fit very much into our rotation."

UM's home schedule includes games against Michigan State (Nov. 28), Duke (Jan. 23) and North Carolina (Feb. 9). The first exhibition is Nov. 2 against St. Leo, and the regular-season opener is Nov. 9 against Stetson.

Hurricanes' big man predicts huge season

Palm Beach Post

Jorge Milian

Oct. 10, 2012

CORAL GABLES — University of Miami center Reggie Johnson is back healthy and fully confident in his team's ability to have a big season.

"We will win big," Johnson said Wednesday. "I'm sorry if I sound cocky or whatever it sounds, but I think we will win big."

Asked what winning big meant, the 6-10, 292-pound senior said: "[The NCAA] tournament and make noise. I definitely want to make the tournament. There is no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Forget the NIT. Forget all of that. I'm going to tell you right now, and some of you (the media) might think, 'oh, he's crazy,' but I'm telling you right now what it's going to be for this upcoming season."

The Hurricanes' last NCAA tournament berth was in the 2007-08 season. UM finished 20-13 and narrowly missed out on an NCAA berth last season in Jim Larranaga's first year as Miami's coach, then was ousted in the second round of the NIT by Minnesota.

Johnson missed the first two months of last season while recovering from knee surgery and also served a one-game NCAA suspension for accepting impermissible benefits. He came on to average nine points and seven rebounds per game.

- Guard Durand Scott will miss the first three games of the season while completing his NCAA suspension for accepting impermissible benefits. Scott will be eligible to make his season debut Nov. 24 against Detroit.

- Forward Garrius Adams had knee surgery in early September and is likely to miss the early part of the season.

Hoops Buzz: 10/10

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Oct. 10, 2012

The Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team begins official practice Friday with the 2012-13 season just around the corner.

Jim Larranaga is back for his second season as the head coach after going 20-13 last season and is looking to lead a team with six seniors to the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2008.

"Our goals never change," Larranaga said. "Our goals are to be the best that we can be. I thought last year we did a good job coming very close to reaching our full potential when we were healthy. We had a very hard time staying healthy. We had a lot of injuries prior to the season, had some suspensions during the season and it's difficult to develop chemistry especially with new coaches and players trying to learn a new system. I thought the guys did a very, very good job and this year our goal will be the same—to be the best that we can be. I think everyone else thinks we can be pretty good, which is a good thing."

Friday's practice, which is scheduled to begin at 5:30 p.m., is the first day of preseason practices in the NCAA. It will be closed to the public.

"If we can keep everybody healthy with the roster we have now, we should be able to do things in November and December that we couldn't even think about doing at any time last year," Larranaga said. "You'll see us pressing more, running more than last year."

Miami has an exhibition game on Nov. 2 against St. Leo before beginning regular season play on Nov. 9 against Stetson.

News & Notes

- SG Durand Scott will miss the first three games of the season due to completing his suspension handed out by the NCAA at the end of last season. Scott will be eligible to make his season debut Nov. 24 against Detroit. "The thing I was most impressed with Durand Scott last year was his competitive drive," Larranaga said. "He is a tough, hard-nosed competitor and whenever he is on the floor he is going to give it 100 percent. I think he's going to have a sensational year and be our true leader. I'm excited about the improvement he's made in his game. He's shooting the ball better. He's always been a solid 3-point shooter and lay-up maker, but now he's hitting a lot of 15-foot jump shots. He's making plays that I think will lead us to a lot of terrific wins." Scott led the team

in scoring last year averaging 12.9 points a game. In his career, Scott has scored 1,217 points, which ranks 21st on the school's all-time list with a shot of cracking the top eight.

- PF Kenny Kadji has dropped 20 pounds and is now 6-foot-11, 242 pounds. "The reason why we wanted Kenny to lose weight was because we wanted him to run the floor better, have him in better shape so he can play more quality minutes, and very importantly without DeQuan Jones, we need someone to guard these stretch 4-men the 6-7, 6-8 athlete. Kenny is 6-11 and is more suited to guard a post player, but he's going to need to go out and guard a perimeter 4-man and that's quite a challenge for him. Losing the weight will help and he's much stronger than he was a year ago."

- C Reggie Johnson is back healthy and fully confident in his team's ability to have a big season. "We will win big. I'm sorry if I sound cocky or whatever it sounds, but I think we will win big," Johnson said. He added that winning big means: "Tournament and make noise. I definitely want to make the tournament. There is no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Forget the NIT. Forget all of that. I'm going to tell you right now, and some of you (the media) might think, 'oh, he's crazy', but I'm telling you right now what it's going to be for this upcoming season." Larranaga said that he saw Johnson dunk just one or two times from December to March, but during practice and drills he's dunked the ball 10-15 times.

- Miami returns nine players who started games last season including: Durand Scott (30 starts), Kenny Kadji (28), Reggie Johnson (22), Shane Larkin (19), Trey McKinney-Jones (12), Erik Swoope (8), Garrius Adams (6), Rion Brown (3), and Raphael Akpejori (3).

- PG Shane Larkin says he feels more comfortable in his second year after averaging 7.4 points and 2.5 assists while making 19 starts as a freshman. Larkin would like to improve on his 36 percent shooting from a year ago, which was second to last on the team. The key to improve is to "just get shots up. Coach L always tells us to get shots up before and after practice. During practice we get a lot of shots up too. Shooting is the only way to get better so that's what I'm doing." Larkin also said as a freshman that at times he didn't know what was a good shot and credits Larranaga for helping him understand what a good shot is.

- SG Bishop Daniels is fully healthy and ready to make an impact this year after redshirting last season while dealing with a nagging foot injury. Daniels has been praised by his teammates for his

speed and explosive ability. "He's a crazy athlete so he'll definitely show everybody this year," Larkin said. "I can't even explain how athletic he is, it's crazy."

- PF Julian Gamble is back for his sixth season and had a strong offseason. "Julian Gamble has impressed me as much or more than anybody on the team," Larranaga said. "Primarily because after his injury he couldn't practice for a very long time. I didn't have a vision of what he was going to be like. In February when he came back practicing he labored at everything we did. I thought he'd have a very hard time contributing. In the summer he was in the weight room conditioning, getting stronger, and these last four weeks practicing since school began, he's been running the floor, rebounding the basketball at both ends, being a heady player so he's going to fit very, very much into our rotation."

- Swingmen Trey McKinney-Jones and Rion Brown will once again be in a heated battle for playing time as the two both showed last year of being productive players in spurts. McKinney-Jones averaged 7.0 points and 3.5 rebounds while shooting 46.7 percent in 33 games, making 12 starts while Brown averaged 7.2 points and 2.8 rebounds shooting 42.7 percent in 31 games, three starts. "Last year there were times when both of them played well, but most of the time it wasn't at the same time," Larranaga said. "Trey played very well and Rion did not, and then Rion played great for a while and Trey did not. By the end of the season they were both begging to feel good and play well. Right now they are both practicing very hard, very well, and I expect them to step up."

- SF Garrius Adams had knee surgery in early September and there is no timetable for his return. "If you asked me three weeks ago, I'd say probably in a month, but maybe now it's six or eight weeks now," Larranaga said. The eight-week mark would be the first part of November.

- C Tonye Jekiri is the only newcomer on the team. The 7-foot, 227-pound Nigerian is a shot-blocking specialist with raw skills. Recently the emphasis for Jekiri is to limit his fouling. One way the coaches have emphasized this is that all players must do 10 push-ups on the spot of each foul during practice. "He's very different than anybody we have," Larranaga said. "He's much faster, very active in his game, he's very inexperienced right now so he's foul-prone, but we have implemented a new rule that we hope will improve his defense without fouling."

UM hoops ready to sneak up on 'so-called big teams'

Sun Sentinel

By Michael Casagrande

October 10, 2012

Oh, Reggie Johnson is feeling it.

The senior Miami basketball player isn't sorta excited about the upcoming season. He's all the way jacked as practice opens Friday.

"I'm sorry if I sound cocky or whatever, but I think we're going to win big," the 6-10 center said. "That's my mindset. I think practices are harder than the game right now."

The Hurricanes have some preseason hype to go with it. They are cracking a few top-25 rankings thanks to their depth and health. Johnson is all the way back from his knee injury and has a prediction for the postseason.

"Forget the NIT. Forget all of that. I'm telling you right now," Johnson said. "Some of you think, oh he's crazy, but I'm telling you right now what it's going to be for this upcoming season."

"We are Miami," he said. "If we wore North Carolina or Florida State, we'd be a top-25 team without a doubt. But we're Miami, so that's that."

Point guard Shane Larkin feels the same way.

"I don't feel like we get the respect we deserve, if we're sneaking up on people, that's what we're going to do," Larkin said.

The recipe to that isn't complicated.

"Just beating the big teams," Larkin said. "Or the so-called big teams when they come here or we play them — like a signature win like Duke last year showed what we can do."

Basketball Team Testing Results

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Oct. 1, 2012

The Miami Hurricanes basketball team has completed their fall testing in preparation for the 2012-13 season.

Strength and conditioning coach Jim Krumpas has helped improve the team's strength since being hired May 2011.

According to assistant coach Eric Konkol, since Krumpas became the strength the coach, the max bench team average has improved from 231 to 270 in 17 months and the 185 bench press rep test average went from 9.1 to 12.8.

The Hurricanes, which are ranked 24th in the Blue Ribbon preseason poll, begin their season on Nov. 9 against Stetson. Walk-on tryouts will be held on Oct. 10. Fall practice begins on Oct. 12.

Here's a look at the top performers in the vertical jump, bench press max, bench press reps, and lane agility drill:

Vertical Jump

- Shane Larkin, 42.5 inches
- Bishop Daniels, 40.0
- Trey McKinney-Jones, 38.0
- Erik Swoope, 36.0
- Rion Brown, 35.5
- Raphael Akpejiori, 34.5
- Kenny Kadji, 34.0
- Garrius Adams, 33.0
- Julian Gamble, 32.5
- Tonye Jekiri, 31.5
- Durand Scott, 28.0
- Reggie Johnson, 25.5

- Bench Press
- Erik Swoope, 340 pounds
- Reggie Johnson, 320
- Trey McKinney-Jones, 300
- Durand Scott, 285
- Julian Gamble, 275
- Raphael Akpejiori, 270
- Shane Larkin, 270
- Rion Brown, 245
- Garrius Adams, 235
- Tonye Jekiri, 235
- Kenny Kadji, 235
- Bishop Daniels, 220

Bench Press Reps at 185 Pounds

- Reggie Johnson, 23 reps
- Trey McKinney-Jones, 23
- Erik Swoope, 21
- Durand Scott, 19
- Julian Gamble, 18
- Raphael Akpejiori, 16
- Shane Larkin, 14
- Garrius Adams, 13
- Rion Brown, 12
- Kenny Kadji, 9
- Tonye Jekiri, 9
- Bishop Daniels, 4

Lane Agility

- Bishop Daniels, 9.10 seconds
- Durand Scott, 9.26
- Kenny Kadji, 9.35
- Rion Brown, 9.41
- Trey McKinney-Jones, 9.63
- Shane Larkin, 9.66
- Erik Swoope, 9.73
- Julian Gamble, 10.02
- Garrius Adams, 10.30
- Raphael Akpejiori, 10.33
- Tonye Jekiri, 11.10
- Reggie Johnson, 11.36

Countdown: ACC Center/Power Forward Rankings

State of the U Jerry Steinberg Oct. 1, 2012

Today in the final installment of ACC positional rankings and analysis, I break down centers and power forwards. Not every team in the conference has a classic center, so I will rank the two positions as a unit.

The ACC has no shortage of talented and imposing big men. Miami returns a trio of seniors in Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadji, and Julian Gamble that could be as formidable as any in the country. Around the league, UNC's James Michael McAdoo looks to be the Tar Heels next star, the Plumlee Brothers at Duke promise to be tough, and Maryland's Alex Len is an intriguing prospect to keep an eye on.

With out further delay here are my ACC team center/power forward rankings for 2012-13:

#1 Miami.

The key to the entire season for the talented 'Canes could come down to the health of 6'10 285 pound C Reggie Johnson. When healthy, there is no worse match-up nightmare in the ACC then the big body and soft touch of Johnson. Last season with the exception of a huge game against Duke on Super Bowl Sunday (27 points 12 rebounds), Big Reg did not look 100% (10 ppg & 7.1 rpg for the season).

Fortunately for UM and Coach Jim Larranaga, Johnson appears to be healthy.

"He's so much better than he was at any point last year," Larranaga said of the 6-10 Johnson.

"Reggie is 50% better a player than he was at any point last season. He's more agile. He's quicker. He has a chance to have a special season."

When Johnson isn't causing nightmares down low, 6'11 Kenny Kadji (11.7 ppg 5.3 rpg 42% 3P%) is a versatile big man who can score on the block or from downtown. The scary part for the rest of the ACC is that Kadji is only getting better.

"He looks like a right handed Chris Bosh," Larranaga said of Kadji.

"He's running the floor incredibly well and he's dropped weight. He's down to 242 from 262."

In addition to Johnson and Kadji, 6'9 sixth year senior Julian Gamble returns from injury. Gamble may not be the type of player to put up big numbers, but his intangibles and leadership should not be undervalued. Raphael Akpejori is a 6'10 junior who provides depth. Overall Miami's big men will be a load for any team in the county, and Johnson and Kadji should be All ACC candidates as individual performers.

#2 NC State.

When he's on, Calvin Leslie has the ability to dominate a game like no other player in the ACC, and few in the country. Leslie averaged 14.7 ppg, 7.6 rpg, and 1.6 blocks, but amped his game up to even higher levels last season during the Wolfpack's runs in the ACC and NCAA tournaments. The 6'8 Leslie is too strong to be guarded by wing players and too quick and explosive for power forwards. Already an established star, look for Leslie to accomplish tremendous things this year and possibly work his way into the NBA lottery. While not as versatile as Leslie, 6'8 250 pound senior Richard Howell (10.8 ppg 9.2 rpg) is an effective player from 8 feet in, and a monster on the glass. 7'1 Australian junior Jordan Vandenberg who comes off a lost season due to injury, should provide depth in limited doses. Leslie and Howell will rival Johnson and Kadji frontcourt duos as the best in the conference.

#3 North Carolina.

The losses of John Henson and Tyler Zeller would leave nearly any other program in rebuilding mode. The Tar Heels however, simply re-load. No big man in the ACC or the country is poised for a bigger break out season than James Michael McAdoo. McAdoo - averaged 6.1 points, 3.9 boards and 19.0 minutes per game last season, which projects out to 15.5 points and 9.9 boards over 40 minutes. The numbers could work out to be even better with McAdoo inheriting the go-to role in Chapel Hill. 6'9 Freshman Brice Johnson is a lean, athletic prospect who will need to develop physically to become a force in the ACC. Nonetheless look for Johnson to contribute immediately as a shot blocker and finisher. Another freshman, 6'10 260 pound Joel James should also see the floor early and often, and provide a much needed physical presence for UNC. Desmond Hubert is a 6'10 sophomore who may not play much but has potential.

#4 Maryland.

If the Terps can get consistency out of 7'1 230 pound Alex Len, (6 ppg, 5.4 rpg last season) their front court will be special. Len showed promising ability as an offensive weapon in spurts as a freshman, and is also a deceptively good shot blocker (2.2 per game). This season the Ukraine native should have plenty of help up front in the form of 6'9 275 pound incoming freshman Shaquille Cleare. The big-bodied Cleare comes to Maryland with a polished low post game, including the ability to drop step from either side and a nice baby hook shot. Cleare also plays with the kind of force that makes his first name appropriate. Depth should be no problem as senior James Padgett is a hard working power forward who contributed 8.8 ppg and 5.8 rpg last year, and 6'8 250 pound freshman Charles Mitchell is another bruising presence down low.

#5 Duke.

Mason Plumlee (11.1 ppg & 9.2 rpg) emerged as a double double machine (12 last year) in 2011-12. The 6'10 235 pound senior may not have a polished offensive game, but he uses brute force and athleticism to produce big numbers. This season he won't have the presence of older brother Miles who graduated, but will have younger brother Marshall on the floor with him. Redshirt freshman Marshall does not have the aptitude for dirty work of Mason, but can score from 12-15 feet out. Joining the Plumlee brothers up front will be 6'11 senior Ryan Kelly. Kelly (11.8 ppg, 5.4 rpg, 41% 3P%) is at his best when he floats around the perimeter and can score in bunches. Josh Hairston is 6'7 junior who adds depth.

#6 Georgia Tech.

6'11 Daniel Miller (8.1 ppg, 6.5 rpg, 2.2 blocks) is an underrated post player with a nice finesse game, who should get more touches this season for the Yellow Jackets. Kammeon Holsley (9.4 ppg and 4.9 rpg, 59% from the floor) is a high percentage shooter, who at 6'8 forms a nice compliment to Miller. Incoming freshman Robert Carter is a 6'9 245 athlete who has nice power game and good shooting range. Julian Royal is a 6'7 role player who adds depth. Carter's presence and the continued development of Miller and Holsley might make GT's inside players the most improved in the ACC this season.

#7 Florida State

Replacing Bernard James will be no easy task for the Seminoles. James' leadership skills, defensive presence, and experience will be sorely missed. FSU is hoping that 6'8 Terrence Shannon (8.3 ppg in 7 games) can return from injury and provide the same toughness he was known for before dislocating his left shoulder. Joining Shannon will be a slew of newcomers, headlined by JUCO transfer Robert Gilchrist. Gilchrist is a 6'9 shot blocking force, who is originally from London. Nigerian born 7'1 Michael Ojo and 7'2 230 pound Boris Bojanovsky of the Slovak Republic appear to be long term projects. Coach Leonard Hamilton's ability to get the most out of any squad can never be underestimated, but he will have his work cut out for him with this inexperienced group. Good thing for Florida State they have a deep and talented back court.

#8 Virginia.

Perhaps no player is more irreplaceable in the ACC than Mike Scott is to the Hoos. Scott was my pick for ACC player of the year last season, and UVA will have a hard time replacing his production. Akil Mitchell (4.1 ppg & 4.4 rpg) and Darion Atkins (2.3 ppg & 2.3 rpg) can defend, but aren't particularly skilled with the ball. The most likely option to pick up some of the slack down low will be 6'10 freshman center Mike Tobey. Tobey is a well developed big with good hands who can score in traffic. Still, it may take him time to adjust to the rigors of ACC play.

#9 Clemson.

Devin Booker (10.5 ppg and 7.0 rpg) has the ability to hang with any player in the conference down low. Too often though Booker had off nights shooting, and seemed to get discouraged. The Tigers have very little other experience up front, so amongst the freshman group of Josh Smith, Jaron Blossomgame, and Larry Nnoko, someone will need to emerge. A more consistent and motivated Booker would be a huge help as well.

#10 Wake Forest.

7'0 250 Pound junior Carson Desrosiers (4.8 ppg & 4.4 rpg) had yet to establish himself as a presence down low, before transferring. His loss will open up minutes for 6'10 Sophomore Daniel Green, who also did not light it up last year. Fortunately for the Demon Deacs, an abundance of freshman big men arrive this year. Devin Thomas and/or Tyler Cavanaugh could man the four spot early on. 6'10 Andre Washington is freshman with good back to the basket skills who could play immediately as well.

#11 Boston College.

Dennis Clifford (8.9 ppg & 4.7 rpg) proved to be a skilled but athletically challenged 7 footer as freshman. BC would benefit from getting him more touches as he looks like he can be effective, even if awkward. 6'10 275 pound KC Caudill is similar to Clifford albeit less talented. Together Clifford and Caudill give the Eagles above average size. They will need to become better players however, for Boston College to become a better team.

#12 Virginia Tech.

No team has more question marks down low than the Virginia Tech Hokies. 6'9 Cadarian Raines (5.9 ppg and 3.9 rpg) & 6'8 C.J. Barksdale (2.7 ppg and 2.7 rpg) return. 6'8 Freshman Marshall Wood should also see time. Erick Green will likely not receive much help from this group.

Projected ALL ACC C/PFs:

1st Team: Reggie Johnson Miami & Calvin Leslie NC State.
2nd Team: Kenny Kadji Miami & James Michael McAdoo UNC.
3rd Team: Mason Plumlee Duke & Richard Howell NC State.
Best of the Rest:
Best Scorer: Calvin Leslie, NC State.
Best Rebounder: Mason Plumlee, Duke or Reggie Johnson, Miami.
Best Shooter: Kenny Kadji, Miami or Ryan Kelly, Duke.
Best Defender: Daniel Miller, GT.
Best Freshman: Shaquille Cleare, Maryland.

This wraps up our 2012 ACC positional breakdown. Please be sure to leave lots of feedback. I will do an overview of the series as a whole, including responses I receive, in the coming days.

Countdown: ACC Small Forward Rankings

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 26, 2012

With more and more teams going to three guard line-ups, the small forward position has become something of a commodity in College Basketball. Nonetheless some outstanding players remain at the three spot. Miami has a plethora of players who can man the wing.

Both Rion Brown and Trey McKinney Jones will be asked to play some at the two, but both are long and talented enough to guard SFs as well. Around the conference, despite the loss of UNC's premier SF Harrison Barnes, the ACC will have plenty of skilled and athletic wings.

With out further delay here are my ACC team small forward rankings for 2012-13:

(Author's note: Because of the abundance of three guard line-ups in the conference, some team rankings may seem slightly redundant to our shooting guard rankings.)

#1 NC State.

The Wolfpack return perhaps the premier shooter in the conference in Scott Wood. Wood averaged 12.9 ppg, shot 41% from deep and 90% from the charity stripe last year. Despite having talent all over the floor, NC State's success mirrored Wood's play on the floor (The Pack were just 4-7 in games where Wood failed to reach double figures). If Wood tires, NC State has the luxury of calling on 6'8 freshman T.J. Warren (ranked as high as the #4 SF in the country coming out of high school). Warren is a pure shooter who won't wow you with athleticism, but does have a very nice medium game. Overall, like nearly every other position on the floor, NC State has an abundance of talent at the three. Here's a closer look of what Warren can do:

#2 Wake Forest.

No team in the conference has a more traditional small forward than Wake Forest in Travis McKie. The 6'7 junior averaged 16.1 ppg, 7.1 rpg, and knocked down 48% of his shots from the floor last season. McKie is not only an excellent shooter and finisher, but a force on the boards on both ends of the court. 6'6 bruiser Arnaud Adala Moto should contribute as both SG & SF immediately. Aaron Rountree is a 6'7 freshman the Demon Deacons will develop behind McKie as well.

3 Miami.

The 'Canes have the luxury of two players in Rion Brown and Trey McKinney Jones who can score, shoot, pass, dribble, and most importantly defend. On any given night, either can score in double digits. And while both may be better suited to play SG, they have the size (both 6'6) and versatility to man the 3. Brown's explosive finishes may have become a signature, but his defensive prowess (perhaps the best perimeter defender this side of Michael Snaer) is highly underrated. McKinney Jones was at times, Miami's most consistent performer last season. UM also returns Garrius Adams from a knee injury. Adams has the skill set to play either guard spot as well as small forward. Erik Swoope is an undersized yet tenacious competitor who adds depth.

#4 North Carolina.

6'7 Reggie Bullock has the size and versatility to hang with any SF in the conference. Expect Bullock to improve on 8.8 ppg and score in double digits on a regular basis. P.J. Hairston can also man both the 2/3 positions with aplomb, but is it Bullock who has the highest upside as a natural 3. Incoming freshman JP Tokoto has the look of a future slam dunk contest winner. While the rest of his game rounds into shape, the Tar Heels will still have the luxury of plenty of production on the wing in Hairston and Bullock. If Leslie McDonald and Dexter Strickland are healthy and productive at the 2 spot, and freshman PG Marcus Paige develops quickly, UNC's 3's have a chance to put up some big numbers.

5 Duke.

While Duke may be short on experience at the three, they are long on talent. 6'8 Alex Murphy is a redshirt freshman who's game is remarkable similar to former Blue Devil stand out Kyle Singler. If Murphy can produce the way Singler did, Coach K will be one happy man. Duke fans will also get their first look at 6'8 Amile Jefferson. Jefferson's future would appear to be at PF, but while he grows more into his frame expect Jefferson to provide major contributions on the wing. His game should develop and mirror that of former UK standout Terrence Jones. Here are some highlights of Jefferson in action:

6 Florida State.

FSU is still waiting for 6'8 junior Okaro White (7.7 ppg and 4.4 rpg last season) to fulfill his lofty potential. White can give the Seminoles anywhere from next to nothing to dropping 20 on a given night. If White's inconsistency remains an issue, look for Coach Leonard Hamilton to turn to 6'6 incoming freshman Montay Brandon. Brandon is an extremely versatile player who is equally adept at passing, handling, and scoring. Brandon's immediate future may be on the wing, but long term he could star at any one of three positions for Florida State.

#7 Virginia.

Like Miami, the Hoos SG and SF positions are mostly interchangeable. Both 6'6 Joe Harris and 6'5 Malcolm Brogdon can man either spot adroitly. The X factor for this team however, could come in the form of a more classic small forward. Enter freshman Evan Nolte, a 6'8 shooter/scorer who has range out to 25 feet and a very polished game overall. If Nolte assimilates to the ACC quickly, this unit could be even higher on the list by season's end.

#8 Maryland.

Freshman Jake Layman can play either forward spot, but will likely start at the 3. His prowess from three point range (at one point during his senior season in H.S. he went 8-8 in a game) makes him dangerous on the perimeter, and his 7 foot wingspan makes him effective inside. Like UVA's Nolte, and NC State's Warren, Layman has a chance to be very good immediately. Sophomore SG Nick Faust can also slide over to SF as well and provide punch when needed.

#9 Virginia Tech.

Junior Jarrell Eddie is an underrated 6'7 player, who has a chance to distinguish himself as the Hokies second best player this season behind Erick Green. Last year he tallied 9.1 ppg and more impressively knocked

down 44% of his three pointers. Look for a more explosive version of Eddie this season. The transfer of 6'7 225 prospect Montrezl Harrell to will hurt depth.

#10 Boston College.

Ryan Anderson led BC in scoring last season at 11.2 ppg, but shot just 27% from distance. Anderson's potential, especially as a scorer and rebounder, is impressive. BC will need his all around game to improve this season. Sophomore Eddie Odio would appear to be the next option at the 3, but looks to be a role player at best.

#11 Clemson.

The strength of the rebuilding Tigers this season could be on the wing. 6'9 senior Milton Jennings (9.7 ppg, 5.6 rpg and 1.1 apg) shows flashes of star ability but needs to be more consistent. Sophomore K.J. McDaniels will also be counted on for more production this season. Both are exceptional athletes who should provide Clemson with a lot of highlights, even if the team struggles for wins.

#12 Georgia Tech.

6'5 Junior Jason Morris will be counted on to improve on 7.8 ppg and 35% from the floor this season. Like Morris, 6'4 Stacy Poole Jr. is a scoring threat at both the 2/3 positions. This group will get a definite boost if 4 star recruit Marcus Hunt can contribute immediately. All in all, the Yellow Jackets have a chance to climb up the rankings at wing, especially if Morris' game improves.

Projected ALL ACC SFs:

1st Team: Travis McKie, Wake.

2nd Team: Scott Wood, NC State.

3rd Team: Reggie Bullock, UNC.

Best of the Rest:

Best Shooter: Scott Wood, NC State.

Best Pure Scorer: Travis McKie, Wake.

Best Rebounder: Ryan Anderson, BC.

Best Freshman: T.J. Warren, NC State.

Best Defender: Rion Brown, Miami.

Underrated: Jarrell Eddie, Va Tech & Trey McKinney Jones, Miami.

And with that, we conclude our look at the position of small forward in the ACC this season. Keep a look out for our next installment in the series, when we break down big men in the ACC in the upcoming days.

Rothstein Files: Larranaga, Miami Should Be In ACC Mix

CBS New York
John Rothstein
Sept. 26, 2012

NC State has been anointed as the team to beat in the ACC.

The Wolfpack bring back four starters from last year's team that advanced to the Sweet 16 and add three talented freshmen in Rodney Purvis, T.J. Warren, and Tyler Lewis.

Florida State is coming off a season in which they won the ACC Tournament and beat North Carolina and Duke twice along the way. The Seminoles have made themselves a perennial contender in the conference and regardless of the defections in Durham and Chapel Hill, the Blue Devils and Tarheels will always represent the gold standard in one of college basketball's most storied leagues.

But what about Miami?

The Hurricanes had the same regular season conference record as NC State last year (9-7) and return everyone on their roster of significance except for shooting guard Malcolm Grant and burly forward DeQuan Jones. After a season in which Miami coach Jim Larranaga had to deal with nagging injuries on what seemed to be a daily basis, the Hurricanes finally appear to be healthy — and that could be bad news for the rest of the ACC.

"We'll be healthier going into this season than we were at any point a year ago," said Larranaga, whose team finished 20-13 last year and lost to Minnesota in the NIT. "We were under one impression as a team last year and then things would change regularly. We'd lose somebody or then someone else would come back. Our chemistry should be much better than it was last season."

A big reason for that is Reggie Johnson.

The 6-10 big man missed the start of last year with a knee injury but appeared in 23 games and averaged 10 points and 7.2 rebounds per game. Johnson also was unstoppable (27 points, 12 rebounds) in a win at Duke on February 5th.

"He's so much better than he was at any point last year," Larranaga said of the 6-10 Johnson. "Reggie is 50% better a player than he was at any point last season. He's more agile. He's quicker. He has a chance to have a special season."

If he does, expect the same from Kenny Kadji. The lanky forward excelled as a high post threat when Johnson returned to Miami's lineup last season, averaging 13.4 points per game when paired with the broad shouldered center.

"He looks like a right handed Chris Bosh," Larranaga said of Kadji. "He's running the floor incredibly well and he's dropped weight. He's down to 242 from 262."

Forward Julian Gamble is fully healed from a knee injury and should be ready to have a major role. Freshman shot blocker Tonye Jekiri may be a year away from contributing but has good size at 6-11.

Larranaga seems committed to a combination of veterans at small forward in Rion Brown and Trey McKinney-Jones. 6-6 senior Garrius Adams could also be in the mix but is coming off a knee injury.

"We expect Rion and Trey to share the 3 spot," Larranaga said. "They're both excellent three-point shooters and excellent defenders. Rion really closed out last season strong offensively and we hope he picks up where he left off."

Miami should have one of the better back courts in the ACC with Durand Scott and Shane Larkin. Scott, a senior should be

primed for a big time year without Grant being a focal point in the Hurricanes offense and Larkin was mightily impressive last season as a freshman (7.4 PPG, 2.5 RPG, 2.5 APG).

"I think Durand will have his best season ever," Larranaga said of Scott, who averaged 12.9 points and 5.4 rebounds per game last year as a junior. "Shane Larkin is someone we're counting on. We need his assists totals to go up. Bishop Daniels is another guy who's a sleeper. He's a great athlete and without question the fastest guy on our team."

With better health and more capable bodies, Larranaga should be able to augment the pace and take advantage of his team's depth and athleticism.

"We should be able to pressure the ball more," Larranaga said. "We're hoping to have the opportunity to play more how we'd like to play. We know we haven't done what the traditional powers have done. Last year was the first time ever Miami had a winning record in ACC play. We had the same regular season record last year as both Virginia and NC State. If we improve and stay healthy, we have a chance to have a very good year."

Countdown: ACC Shooting Guard Rankings

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 24, 2012

In just 5 weeks College Basketball season will be underway and the long road to the Final Four will commence. In the historically powerful ACC, there are more than a few teams with ambitions of March glory. One of the most integral parts to any deep run, is having a shooting guard who can make a big bucket when needed. The Miami Hurricanes have a wealth of options at the 2 spot. Durand Scott can play both guard positions, and is at his best when he slashes to the hoop. Rion Brown is a knock down shooter, who last year was a revelation as a world class finisher at the rim. Trey McKinney Jones is a clutch performer, who gives the team a little bit of everything. And finally, redshirt freshman Bishop Daniels, is a tremendous athlete who is the wildcard of the group. But where do these 'Canes guards stack up against the rest of the league?? Let's take a look.

With out further delay here are my ACC team shooting guard rankings for 2012-13:

#1 Duke.

Like his father Del, and his brother Stephen, Seth Curry is a pure shooter. Last season, despite having to defer to Austin Rivers as the #1 option, Curry averaged 13.2 points per game and shot 38% from downtown. When Curry wasn't knocking down jumpers, Andre Dawkins (8.4 ppg & 39% on 3P%) was. Dawkins unfortunately will be red-shirting this year for personal reasons. Still, do not feel sorry for Duke. Curry will still be joined by 6'3 freshman Rasheed Sulaimon (ranked as high as the #6 SG in the country coming out of high school). Sulaimon is not quite the pure shooter of Curry or Dawkins, but has a smooth handle and is exceptional pulling up on the break, and should team up nicely with Curry. If there's one weakness or question mark for this group, it is defensively. If Duke's shooting guards improve in that area, watch out!

#2 Florida State.

There may not be a better all-around SG in the nation than Michael Snaer. Snaer is not just a big-time scorer, he is also one of the best perimeter defenders in the country. Last season the 6'5 senior averaged 14 points, 3.8 rebounds, 1.9 assists and knocked down 40% of his trifectas. Snaer is the unquestioned leader of the Seminoles and a potential All-American. FSU is also excited about 6'5 freshman Aaron Thomas. Thomas is a slashing athletic type who could make an immediate impact for the Seminoles off the bench.

#3 Miami.

Durand Scott enters his senior season as the 'Canes leading returning scorer at 12.9 a clip, but Scott can also pass (3.1 assists per game) and rebound (5.4 rpg). With Shane Larkin expected to man the point, Scott will be afforded more opportunities off the ball. Scott's bread and butter is taking the ball strong to the hole. Miami is likely to employ a three guard rotation, and the third

starter is a toss up between Rion Brown (39% 3P%) and Trey McKinney Jones (37% 3P%) Coach Jim Larranaga can't go wrong with either guy. Brown averaged 14.7 ppg over the last 4 games of the season, when things seemed to click for him. McKinney Jones, who is a versatile performer, will look to slash more this season. 2012-13 will also mark the debut of redshirt freshman Bishop Daniels. For a preview at what kind of a player Daniels is, see below:

#4 Wake Forest.

6'3 senior C.J. Harris is one of the better overall returning players in the ACC. Last season Harris averaged 16.7 points, 3.1 rebounds, 2.5 assists per game, and shot 42% on 3P%. Harris was also typically the premier performer in Deamon Deacon victories (WF was 8-3 in games where Harris scored 20 or more). For Wake to make a run at the upper half of the ACC, Harris will need to continue his superb play. This season he could get some help at the 2 from 6'6 205 freshman Arnaud Adala Moto, who is a very physical player.

#5 NC State.

The graduation of CJ Williams would be seen as a big loss, had NC State not gone out a signed 6'4 freshman sensation Rodney Purvis. Purvis, who's style is reminiscent of a young Dwayne Wade, has a sick cross and already has NBA talent as a finisher. If Purvis acclimates to the college game quickly, the Wolfpack may easily have the best SG in the conference by season's end. Good thing for NC State the young man is special, as there are no veteran options behind him at SG. Here's a little taste of what he can do:

#6 Virginia.

Joe Harris played nearly half the season with a broken left hand, and still averaged 11.3 ppg and shot 38 percent from downtown. The 6'6 junior should be healthy, and team up nicely with 6'5 sophomore Malcolm Brogdon (6.7 points, 2.8 rebounds, and 1.4 assists). With the graduation of Mike Scott, Harris and Brogdon will need to step up their scoring. Fortunately for the Hoos, both seem more than capable. Freshman Taylor Barnette could also get a look a SG.

#7 North Carolina.

It seems almost sacrilegious to rate the Tar Heels this low at any position. But with Leslie McDonald (missed all of 2011) and Dexter Strickland (7.5 ppg in 19 contests) coming off injuries, SG is a question mark by UNC standards. There is, however, depth. 6'7 Junior Reggie Bullock stepped into the void last season and averaged 8.8 points and shot 38% from deep. PJ Hairston is another big guard (6'6) who while not a great shooter or scorer, can provide quality minutes. With so much talent surrounding them, UNC SGs won't be asked to continue in the traditions of Michael Jordan and Jerry Stackhouse in 2012-13.

#8 Maryland.

Nick Faust was a bit of an enigma for the Terps last season. The ultra talented sophomore averaged only 8.9 points a game in his freshman campaign. He also only managed to shoot 37% from

the floor and 32% from downtown. He appeared to catch on late in the season, scoring in double figures in his last five games. Maryland will need more of that kind of production from Faust. The team caught a bad break when Sam Cassell Jr. was ruled ineligible by the NCAA. Two big question marks in freshman Seth Allen and transfer Logan Aronhalt (if healthy) will be counted on for depth.

#9 Georgia Tech.

Veteran Brandon Reed (7.5 ppg last season) returns, and should get the nod to start initially. But if 6'4 Kentucky transfer Stacy Poole Jr. provides the explosiveness the Yellow Jackets have been missing in recent years, he may end up being the guy. Poole Jr. plays with a high motor, and maybe a needed spark for GT, who come off an awful 2012. Freshmen Marcus Hunt and Chris Bolden (a one time UM commitment) could also contribute immediately.

#10 Boston College.

Both 6'3 Lonnie Jackson (8.3 ppg 39% 3P%) and 6'5 Patrick Heckmann (8.3 ppg 35% 3P%) showed the ability to score. Neither really stood out enough to climb higher on this list. BC does have some good, developing front court players, and perhaps Jackson or Heckmann will get enough open looks in 2012-13 to establish themselves. Incoming freshman Joe Rahon may get a chance to play both guard spots, and provides depth.

#11 Virginia Tech.

Erick Green is the kind of point guard, who almost makes having a big time shooting guard unnecessary. Nonetheless the Hokies hope that 6'5 Robert Brown (6.8 ppg last year) takes some of the pressure off Green. Green and Brown will have to carry the load, as depth is a serious concern for VT at the guard spots.

#12 Clemson.

A huge improvement from 6'2 sophomore T.J. Sapp (3.6 ppg last season) would be monumental for the Tigers. Next in line would be another sophomore in Devin Coleman, who also had a very nondescript freshman season. It could be a long season in Death Valley.

Projected ALL ACC SGs:

1st Team: Michael Snaer, FSU.
2nd Team: C.J. Harris, Wake.
3rd Team: Durand Scott, Miami.

Best of the Rest:

Best Shooter: Seth Curry, Duke.
Best Pure Scorer: Rodney Purvis, NC State.
Best Freshman: Rodney Purvis, NC State.
Best Defender: Michael Snaer, FSU.

And with that, we conclude our look at the position of shooting guard in the ACC this season. Keep a look out for our next installment in the series, when we break down small forwards/wing players in the ACC in the upcoming days.

Countdown: ACC Point Guard Rankings

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 24, 2012

Basketball season is still 6 weeks away, but for Miami hoops fans the anticipation is beginning to boil over. Today we begin the countdown to basketball season with an analysis of the point guard position in the ACC for 2012-13. The 'Canes return sophomore Shane Larkin, coming off of a very promising freshman year. And while senior Durand Scott will play more off the ball as a result of Larkin's emergence, Scott is an experienced play-maker who can take reigns when needed. Around the league there will be plenty of challenges for Larkin and Scott. While the premier abilities of Kendall Marshall were lost to the NBA, the league boasts 4 of the top 20 incoming freshman point guards in the nation. Also returning is NC State do it all point guard Lorenzo Brown.

With out further delay here are my ACC team point guard rankings for 2012-13:

#1 NC State.

If Kendall Marshall was the consensus top PG in the league last season, then Lorenzo Brown was clearly 1A. Brown averaged 12.7 points, 4.5 rebounds, 6.3 assists and 1.8 steals last season. Brown has the explosiveness that reminds some of Oklahoma City Thunder guard Russell Westbrook, along with the floor game that reminds others of Boston Celtics star Rajon Rondo. The 6'5 junior will surely have NBA suitors whenever he decides to declare, but for now his mission will be running the show in Raleigh for one of the best teams in the nation. When Brown needs a breather the Wolfpack will count on true freshman Tyler Lewis. Lewis is a heady pass first PG (ranked as high as the # 6 PG nationally coming out of high school), who will need time to develop physically in order to endure the rigors of ACC play. But for 2012-13 he will simply need to use his time on the floor find NC State's many talented finishers.

#2 Miami.

If all goes according to plan, Larkin will break out and establish himself as one of the best players in the conference this year. The son of baseball hall of fame shortstop Barry Larkin averaged 7.4 points, 2.5 rebounds, 2.5 assists, and 1.6 steals last season. In addition to playing some of his best basketball at the end of the season, Larkin also proved to be a clutch performer. Larkin topped Miami, shooting 86% from the line in his first season in Coral Gables. Perhaps most impressive is Larkin's tenacious style on defense. You would be hard pressed to find a faster PG anywhere in the country. Miami also has the luxury of sliding Durand Scott to the point when Larkin needs a breather. Scott has been one of the best penetrating guards in the conference for 3 years now, and is coming off of a season in which he averaged a 12.9 points, 5.4 rebounds, and 3.1 assists. In addition the 'Canes can also count on 6'6 senior Garrius Adams to handle the point on occasion. Overall, Coach Jim Larranaga has tremendous depth at the point, but Larkin will be the key.

#3 North Carolina.

While it will be near impossible to replace Kendall Marshall's 9.8 assists per game, no one should feel sorry for UNC. Enter true freshman Marcus Paige (ranked as high as the # 4 PG nationally coming out of high school), a 6'0 Damon Stoudamire look-alike who brings supreme confidence and a sweet left-handed stroke to Chapel Hill. Here's a glimpse of what the young man can do:

#4 Wake Forest.

Like North Carolina, the Deamon Deacs will be counting on a first year player in Codi Miller-McIntyre to run the show in 2012-13. Miller-McIntyre (rated as high as the #9 PG nationally coming out of high school), is a wiry strong 6'2 point, who is an excellent finisher at the rim. While he may need some time to develop before bringing back memories of former Wake great Chris Paul, the 6'2 Miller-McIntyre should be one of the better true point guards in the conference this season. Backing him up will be 6'3 sophomore Chase Fischer. Fischer lacks the ideal floor game of a premier point, but is an improving shooter who can knock down shots from long range.

#5 FSU.

The defending ACC Tournament Champs will count on Ian Miller (10.3 points, 1.3 assists last season) to run the show this season. Miller's raw athleticism and superior range has caught the eye of NBA scouts. With the graduation of Luke Loucks, the 6'3 Miller will need step up his floor game for the Seminoles to repeat last season's success. Word around Tallahassee is that freshman Devon Bookert from Alaska, has impressed Coach Leonard Hamilton and could handle some of the point responsibilities immediately. Sophomore Terry Whisnaut II adds depth.

#6 Duke.

It will be interesting to see who emerges between Quinn Cook and Tyler Thornton as the starting PG for the Dukies. Cook's freshman year was a wash, after arriving in Durham as a highly touted recruit. Expect a significant improvement this year (4.4 points 1.9 assists last season). Thornton is more of a defensive specialist, but can give Coach K solid minutes should Cook struggle. If both fail, the Blue Devils can hand the ball to explosive scoring guard Seth Curry. For Duke to achieve their lofty goals, however, they will need Cook to emerge and Curry to continue doing what he does best: catch and shoot.

#7 Virginia.

Jontel Evans is one of the more underrated players in the conference. And while not having Mike Scott around will make it harder to duplicate the 3.9 assists he averaged last year, Evans should improve on the 7.3 points per game he averaged. Under Coach Tony Bennett the 'Hoos focal point is always defense first, and Evans is no exception. There may not be a tougher point guard in the conference. Evans can be counted on for 30+ minutes every night, but should he need a rest look for 6'5 sophomore shooting guard Malcolm Brogdon to run the point. Brogdon appears more

then capable of playing either back court spot with skill.

8 Virginia Tech.

VT will need a little bit of everything from senior Erick Green in order to be successful this season. Fortunately for the Hokies, Green is a clutch performer who can both score and distribute. Last season Green averaged 15.6 points, 3.3 rebounds, and 2.8 assists. Marquis Rankin and Robert Brown add depth, but Va Tech will go only as far as Green can take them.

#9 Georgia Tech.

Mfon Udofia was a solid performer last season for the Yellow Jackets. A bit of a streak shooter, Udofia averaged 9.9 points, 3.4 rebounds, and 2.8 assists last year. Udofia will need to shoot less and look to get others involved more often in his senior season. GT should have more talent around Udofia this season, which could help his assist totals. Sophomore Brandon Reed and Corey Heyward would appear to be the frontrunners to back Udofia up.

#10 Maryland.

It is hard to evaluate the performance of the Terrapins point guards last season considering Terrell Stoglin was such a dominant figure with the ball. Junior Pe'Shon Howard missed time with an injury, but was solid averaging 6.5 points, 3.7 rebounds, and 3.7 assists in 14 games. Shooting guard Nick Faust may get some time at the point when Howard needs a rest. Senior Logan Aronhalt and freshman Seth Allen will also vie for time.

#11 Boston College.

Jordan Daniels had an up and down freshman year (6.4 points 2.6 assists) at the point for the Eagles. BC is a very young team, and Daniels' development will be a key in their growth. Two three-star freshman in Joe Rahon and Oliver Hanlan could push Daniels, should he struggle.

#12 Clemson.

The departures of Andre Young and Tanner Smith leaves a big void in the back court for the Tigers. Rod Hall will get the first crack at running the team, but freshman Adonis Filer and Jordan Roper could push for immediate PT. This looks to be a rebuilding year in Death Valley.

Projected ALL ACC PGs:

1st team: Lorenzo Brown NC State,
2nd team: Ian Miller FSU,
3rd team: Shane Larkin UM.

Best of the Rest:

Best Scorer: Erick Green Virginia Tech.
Best Defender: Shane Larkin UM or Jontel Evans Virginia.
Best Freshman: Marcus Paige UNC.
Best Passer: Lorenzo Brown NC State.

And with that we conclude our look at the position of point guard in the ACC this season. Keep a look out for our next installment in the series, when we break down shooting/scoring guards in the ACC in the upcoming days.

Celtics make Jay Larranaga hire official

Boston.com

Gary Dzen

Sept. 19, 2012

The Celtics announced today that they have officially added Jay Larranaga to their coaching staff as an assistant coach. Larranaga comes from the Erie BayHawks of the NBA Development League. The 37-year-old Larranaga is the son of Jim Larranaga, head men's basketball coach at the University of Miami.

Top 10 Reasons Miami can win the ACC this season!

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 11, 2012

Yes we know, despite the awful loss this past weekend there's no need to panic, and football is still king. But just in case you wanted to take a break from the gridiron, we are here to tell you Miami's basketball team has a chance to be special this year. With out further delay, here are our top 10 reasons the 'Canes can win the ACC this season:

1) Reggie Johnson is healthy. With the exception of monster performances against FAU (15 points, 9 rebounds, 5 assists, and 5 blocks) and his super duper Super Bowl Sunday destruction of Duke (27 & 12), Reggie was not himself last season. Word around the program is, "heeeeeee's back!!!!" If the 6'10 300 pound Johnson is at 100% he is a match-up nightmare for every big man in the country.

2) The Progression of Shane Larkin. The son of hall-of-fame baseball player Barry Larkin, averaged 7.4 ppg 2.5 rpg 2.5 apg and 1.6 stls last season.. Larkin may already be one of the quickest players in the country and played exceptionally well at the end of the season. If his floor game improves he could become a superstar.

3) Kenny Kadji is the most versatile big man in the ACC. Over a 5 game stretch last season, Kenny Kadji averaged 17.5 ppg 8.1 rpg 2.0 blcks and knocked down 8-16 from long-range. If Kadji can bring that kind of effort consistently and improve his rebounding, Miami will be very difficult to beat.

4) Julian Gamble is back. The 6th year senior was granted medical hardship by the NCAA, and while his numbers will never wow you, his grit and leadership is invaluable. Gamble gives Coach Larranaga much needed depth at the 4 and 5 spots as well.

5) Rion Brown is ready to break out. While he averaged only 6.9 ppg last season, expect more from Brown this year. Brown averaged 14.7 ppg over the last 4 games of the season, when things seemed to click for him. Along with the prettiest stroke on the team, Brown showed off explosive athleticism in 11-12. Expect his star to rise with the graduation of Malcolm Grant opening up minutes next season.

6) Trey McKinney Jones is underrated. McKinney Jones averaged 7 ppg 3.5 rpg and shot 37.5 % from downtown last season. TMJ hit several clutch shots through out the year and at times was Miami's most consistent player.

7) Miami is due for some breaks. Untimely injuries, back breaking suspensions, and poorly officiated games all hurt the 'Canes last season, and they still finished 9-7 in the ACC. Minus all the distractions and bad luck, the sky is the limit for this squad.

8) Alex Oriakhi transfers to Missouri. When Oriakhi announced he was transferring from UConn, the ACC big boys (NC State, UNC, and Duke) were all salivating at the possibility of landing the big man on campus. Old friend Frank Haith, however, does UM a solid and gives Kadji/Johnson one less big body to contend with.

9) Duke, FSU, and North Carolina all lost key performers. Say goodbye to Austin Rivers, Bernard James, and Kendall Marshall. Yes we know Seth Curry, Michael Snaer, and James Michael McAdoo return But Miami hung in tough with these teams last year, and the 'Canes return nearly everyone.

10) Pack the BUC!!!! Historically attendance at the Bank United Center has been anything but impressive. But expect that to change. First, the team is going to be VERY good. Second, coming off the championship that Lebron James and the Heat delivered, South Floridians will catch basketball fever. Finally Charlie,

Josh, and I will not rest until it becomes so!!

And with that, we return you to your regularly scheduled programming.

Let's go 'Canes!!!

Rothstein Files: ACC Offseason Notebook

CBS New York
By Jon Rothstein
Sept. 4, 2012

FIVE QUESTIONS ENTERING THE ACC

1. WILL NC STATE LIVE UP TO THE HYPE?

2. WHY DOESN'T MIAMI GET MORE RESPECT?

I really have no idea. The Hurricanes return the majority of pieces from last year's team that was terrific at times during the second half of the season when they were finally healthy. Burly big man Reggie Johnson is finally close to 100% and should form potentially the best power forward-center combo in the ACC with Kenny Kadji. Sophomore floor general Shane Larkin looks primed for a breakout season and Durand Scott is one of the better off guards in the conference. If Jim Larranaga catches a break and avoids any major injuries, Miami is more than capable of challenging for the ACC title. Seriously.

3. WHAT WILL DUKE LOOK LIKE WITHOUT AUSTIN RIVERS?

4. CAN MARCUS PAIGE RUN THE SHOW FOR NORTH CAROLINA?

5. WHO IS THE SLEEPER?

Dare we say Florida State

ACC PRESEASON POWER RANKINGS

1. NC STATE

THE SKINNY: Mark Gottfried returns four starters from last year's squad that reached the Sweet 16.

2. NORTH CAROLINA

THE SKINNY: Freshman point guard Marcus Paige could be another Damon Stoudamire.

3. MIAMI

THE SKINNY: The Hurricanes could win the conference if they stay healthy.

4. DUKE

THE SKINNY: Blue Devils will be more balanced post Austin Rivers.

5. FLORIDA STATE

THE SKINNY: Leonard Hamilton absolutely loves his freshman class.

6. MARYLAND

THE SKINNY: Mark Turgeon should have better chemistry during his second season in College Park.

7. VIRGINIA

THE SKINNY: The Mike Scott era is officially over in Charlottesville.

8. GEORGIA TECH

THE SKINNY: The Yellow Jackets bring back five starters and add a stud in freshman power forward Robert Carter.

9. CLEMSON

THE SKINNY: Backcourt inexperience is a major concern for the Tigers.

10. VIRGINIA TECH

THE SKINNY: James Johnson will have to do more with less.

11. WAKE FOREST

THE SKINNY: Jeff Bzdelik needs instant contributions from first-year PG Codi Miller-McIntyre.

12. BOSTON COLLEGE

THE SKINNY: The rebuilding process continues for Steve Donahue.

ACC PRESEASON FIRST TEAM

Lorenzo Brown, NC State

Seth Curry, Duke

C.J. Leslie, NC State

James Michael McAdoo, UNC

Reggie Johnson, Miami

ACC PRESEASON PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Michael Snaer, Florida State

TEN THAT HAVE WAITED AND WILL MAKE A MAJOR IMPACT

1. Kiel Turpin, Florida State (red shirt)

2. Terrance Shannon, Florida State (injury)

3. Robert Gilchrist, Florida State (JUCO)

4. Aaron Thomas, Florida State (prep school)

5. Alex Murphy, Duke (red shirt)

6. Marshall Plumlee, Duke (red shirt)

7. Jordan Vandenberg, NC State (red shirt)

8. Julian Gamble, Miami (injury)

9. Bishop Daniels, Miami (red shirt)

10. Pe'Shon Howard, Maryland (injury)

TEN BREAKOUT PLAYERS

1. James Michael McAdoo, UNC

2. P.J. Hairston, UNC

3. Okaro White, Florida State

4. Shane Larkin, Miami

5. Rion Brown, Miami

6. Nick Faust, Maryland

7. Alex Len, Maryland

8. Akil Mitchell, Virginia

9. Jarell Eddie, Virginia Tech

10. Milton Jennings, Clemson

TEN IMPACT FRESHMEN

1. Rasheed Sulaimon, Duke

2. Amile Jefferson, Duke

3. Marcus Paige, UNC

4. Rodney Purvis, NC State

5. T.J. Warren, NC State

6. Tyler Lewis, NC State

7. Shaquille Cleare, Maryland

8. Robert Carter, Georgia Tech

9. Montay Brandon, Florida State

10. Aaron Thomas, Florida State

FIVE UNDER-THE-RADAR FRESHMEN

1. Mike Tobey, Virginia

2. Jake Layman, Maryland

3. Charles Mitchell, Maryland

4. Jaron Blossomgame, Clemson

5. Tonye Jekiri, Miami

Bracket reveal: Diamond Head Classic

ESPN.com
Eamonn Brennan
July 26, 2012

Tournament bracket for the Diamond Head Classic

When and where: Dec. 22-23, 25 at the Stan Sheriff Center in Honolulu, Hawaii

Initial thoughts: San Diego State and Arizona are the main attractions, and rightfully so -- UA is a potential top-10 team, while SDSU has blossomed into a perennial NCAA tournament program in Steve Fisher's recent rebuild. That said, don't sleep on Miami. If they stay healthy, the Hurricanes have bodies big enough to trouble anyone. San Francisco lost nine -- yes, nine -- players this offseason, six of whom transferred out of the program in rather unexpected fashion. In other words, at least the Dons get to go to Hawaii this year. Silver linings and all that.

Matchup I can't wait to see: To be perfectly frank, I'm not sure I can get too worked up about any of those first-round matchups, although the hometown Warriors hosting an ACC school should make for a fun atmosphere. If the Hurricanes survive that, their matchup with Arizona would be a quality marker for both teams as they prepare for conference play.

Potential matchup I'd like to see: San Diego State vs. Arizona. Two top programs in the West slugging it out on Christmas night? Yes please. The way-too-early edge probably goes to the Wildcats, given all the talent in Sean Miller's 2012 recruiting class, but an experienced, physical Aztecs team should be up to the challenge.

Five players to watch

Jamaal Franklin, San Diego State: A multitalented swingman, Franklin had a very good sophomore season, but he still has plenty to

improve, particularly his outside shooting. If he branches his game out further away from the rim, he could be a nigh-unstoppable force in the Mountain West this season.

Grant Jerrett, Arizona: How good is Miller's 2012 class? Top-five prospect Kaleb Tarczewski is only barely its highest-ranked member. Jerrett comes in at No. 9 in the ESPN 100 (and fellow power forward Brandon Ashley ranks No. 16), and his scouting report says he's improving at "an alarming rate." By the time December rolls around, Arizona's young frontcourt might just be the best in the country.

Durand Scott, Miami: Scott will be the lead guard for a Miami team with a very clear goal -- a trip to the NCAA tournament -- in Jim Larranaga's second season. With Malcolm Grant departed, Scott will need to do even more to lead a brutish frontcourt duo of Kenny Kadji and Reggie Johnson.

Chase Tapley, San Diego State: The SDSU senior is one of the few remnants from 2011's dream 34-3 season, and he had a chance to step into a starring role last year. In addition to shooting 43 percent from 3, Tapley was also his team's best perimeter defender.

Kaleb Tarczewski, Arizona: The No. 4-ranked player in the class of 2012 is the centerpiece -- literally and figuratively -- of Miller's very impressive recruiting work since his arrival in Tucson. Tarczewski could be this season's Cody Zeller, an intuitively talented big man who is far from the complete package, but is good enough to lead his vaunted program back to national relevance once again.

Title-game prediction

Arizona over San Diego State: If this game were earlier in the season, when Arizona's coterie of freshman were still finding their sea legs, I'd probably give the edge to SDSU. But come Christmastime Arizona will have had nearly two months to build around that

star-studded freshman class, and their sheer talent wins out.

Who others are picking:

Andy Katz: Arizona over San Diego State

Jason King: Arizona over San Diego State

Myron Medcalf: Arizona over San Diego State

Dana O'Neil: Arizona over San Diego State

Larranga's preparedness, motivation could lift Canes

The Miami Hurricane

Patrick Riley

July 17, 2012

He quotes Albert Schweitzer, reads books about everything from management to self-help and was drafted by the Detroit Pistons in the sixth round of the 1971 NBA draft.

But Jim Larranaga, head coach of the men's basketball team at the University of Miami, is best known for something completely different.

"Well, first thing I thought about was the Final Four run," said shooting guard Rion Brown of his first thought of Larranaga.

However, while his famous run with George Mason in 2006 certainly catapulted "Coach L" into the national spotlight, it was 20 years earlier that his success story started as head coach at Bowling Green.

"They had had four straight losing seasons," the Bronx native said. "My first year they were picked to finish last in the league and we were able to go from being picked last to finishing tied for second."

After 11 seasons with Bowling Green, which included three NIT appearances, opportunity came knocking again when Richmond, James Madison and George Mason were all looking for new head coaches.

"I inquired with all three schools and only George Mason returned my call," Larranaga said. "When I got the job they had had seven straight losing seasons from 1991 to 1997. I think four of those seasons they finished last, so they happened to be looking for someone who had already built a program."

It soon became clear that Larranaga was just the man for the job.

During his 14-year tenure with George Mason, he transformed the Patriots into the winningest program in Colonial Athletic Association history and became the most successful coach in the history

of the conference. His unprecedented accomplishments culminated in the much-talked about Final Four run.

To get there, he had to first employ a quote from one of his favorite books: "Get the right people on the bus and then decide where you're going."

"When we first arrived ... we told everybody we were going to recruit locally and they said, 'Well, you'll never win, because Georgetown, Maryland and George Washington will get all the best players and you'll stink.' But on our Final Four team ... the five starters were all from within an hour and a half from campus," Larranaga said.

It was also during his time with the Patriots that Larranaga introduced the country to his motivational skills and powerful pregame speeches, like when he told his team before facing UConn in the Regional Finals in 2006 that the CAA stood for Connecticut Assassins Association.

The famous pregame talk was developed the morning of the game, when Larranaga read an article that made it very clear that the Connecticut players knew little about his team.

"They didn't know anything about George Mason," the triumphant coach said. "They were asked who the coach was, they said, 'I have no idea.' They asked what league we were in, one of them said, 'They're in the Missouri Valley.' And the other guy said, 'No, they're in the Patriot League.' So in formulating my thoughts going into the pregame I structured it so that our players understood that they don't know anything about us, we know everything about them. We're better prepared to win this game."

Larranaga's pregame speeches are often not quite so spontaneous, but rather meticulously conceived much earlier.

"I normally start writing my pregame talks in July ... I have thoughts about what a game might be like so I might use a quote, I might use one word, I might use a story to share with the team to put them in the ... best mental frame of mind to play."

His love for reading and broad arsenal of motivational quotes often aid Larranaga in instilling such

a frame of mind in his players.

"One of my favorite books is called 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.' So there are stories there that I always share with the team," he said. "They always have a moral; there is always a point. Some nights it'll be a quote. It might be by Albert Schweitzer, who once wrote, 'Success is not the key to happiness, happiness is the key to success.'"

But even though success has been following him wherever he goes, Larranaga has never lost sight of his main motivation.

"Everything he does, he does for the players," said Miami assistant coach Chris Caputo, entering his 10th season at Larranaga's side. "He always has their best interests at heart."

Larranaga did exactly that with Jai Lewis, a talented player who came to George Mason with one problem: He was 300 pounds.

"A lot of coaches would have just said: 'Hey, you need to go run on the treadmill, you need to go run on the track, we're going to make you lose 50 pounds.'"

Not Larranaga.

He saw Lewis' potential and knew he had to be much more subtle in his approach. So Larranaga told Lewis, who planned on playing football after college, that he would send out letters to every NFL team and tell them about him, but that he had to be in good shape.

Instead of demeaning him for what he wasn't, he tried to enhance what he was. Lewis grew into George Mason's leading scorer and rebounder when the team made its improbable run to the Final Four.

At Miami, Larranaga is looking to do many of the same things that have brought him so much success in the past, and his goals are as ambitious as ever: to be mentioned in the same vein as Duke and UNC.

If history has taught us anything, that goal is not out of Larranaga's reach.

Kadji proves his worth after long journey

The Miami Hurricane
July 17, 2012
David Furones

With his first season wrapped up, Kenny Kadji had consistently proven to coach Jim Larranaga that he can be one of Miami's most productive and dependable weapons.

Kadji, the 6-foot-11-inch forward/center who sat out his first season at Miami after transferring from Florida, finished second on the team with 11.7 points per game and led the team with 170 total rebounds and 51 blocks.

Kadji believes Larranaga has put him in the best position to display his skill set.

"I can go inside and play, I can come out, catch and shoot, and I'm okay putting the ball on the ground," Kadji said. "I think I'm a pretty all-around player."

Since frontcourt mate Reggie Johnson returned to the lineup after surgery on his right knee, Kadji has improved his play dramatically. He's scored in double figures in eight of his nine games playing alongside Johnson.

"We believe Kenny's benefited the most from Reggie being back," Larranaga said. "Now he gets to play on the perimeter where he feels most comfortable, but he also can go inside and not get double-teamed. He's also being guarded by the second biggest guy and not the biggest guy."

Kadji had a unique journey to get to Coral Gables.

Born in Douala, Cameroon, he moved to France at age 14 and then to the United States at 16. He played high school basketball at IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla., before enrolling at the University of Florida.

Kadji first started playing basketball when he was 10 years old in Cameroon with his cousin, Whale.

While soccer is the sport of choice in Cameroon, Kadji said all of his relatives play basketball because of the height that runs in their family.

"It was great growing up in Cameroon. You could just go out, spend time at your neighbor's house," he said. "Miami is probably three times bigger than the city I was living in."

Kadji had no idea he had any potential in basketball until his days in France playing at the same boarding school as the NBA's Mickael Pietrus and Boris Diaw.

Coming out of high school, he was heavily recruited and chose Florida after Billy Donovan had just won back-to-back national championships, but after a freshman season that was cut short due to a herniated disc, Kadji looked to transfer.

He decided to take his talents to Coral Gables.

"I just wanted a new start," he said. "Miami was recruiting me out of high school. It was in-state and my parents didn't want me to go out of state. I thought we could have a great team."

Having now played under Larranaga, Donovan and Frank Haith in his college career, Kadji insists Larranaga is the best coach of the three.

"He's the best because he takes every player differently," Kadji said. "Coach L will look at your character, how you respond to things, and adjust. I think that's the best way you can do it."

Kadji is currently listed as a sophomore and may apply for a sixth year of eligibility during his senior year in similar fashion to Adrian Thomas two years ago.

ACC's most important players

ESPN.com
Robbi Pickeral
July 16, 2012

Boston College: Ryan Anderson

The forward was a unanimous All-ACC rookie selection last season after leading his team with 11.2 points and 7.4 rebounds. But the freshmen-laden Eagles averaged only 59.1 points and 40.8 percent shooting. So as Anderson's numbers build, so perhaps will BC's.

Clemson: Milton Jennings

Remember when the senior forward was touted as the first McDonald's All-American signed by the Tigers since 1991? With Andre Young and Tanner Smith having graduated, Clemson needs Jennings to finally live up to that potential. Last season, he served two suspensions and averaged 9.7 points and 5.6 rebounds.

Duke: Seth Curry

Austin Rivers was Duke's go-to guy last season, but his early departure makes Curry, a senior, Duke's leading returning scorer (13.2 ppg). Coach Mike Krzyzewski has said he wants Curry to be able to concentrate more on scoring this season, and it helps that he won't be asked to play point guard, like last season.

Florida State: Michael Snaer

The 6-foot-5 senior isn't just key because he's the team's leading scorer (14 ppg), but because he's the Seminoles' leader, period. His two ACC game winners gave the Seminoles a fearless attitude last season that should carry over to this season, too, even with so many of last season's players gone.

Georgia Tech: Mfon Udofia

No returning Yellow Jackets averaged double figures last season, but the closest is Udofia (9.9 ppg at point guard). His senior leadership will be as important as his stats, as Tech will continue to try to rebuild after an 11-win season. Perhaps making things a bit easier for

the young team: Udofia and the Jackets will open at their new arena, McCamish Pavilion, in November.

Maryland: Nick Faust

With last season's ACC leading scorer, Terrell Stoglin, gone, Maryland needs some offense, and this sophomore looks like a good candidate. Although the guard averaged 8.9 points last season (third on the team), that jumped to 13.4 over his last nine games. And the Terps would like to see it jump even more.

Miami: Reggie Johnson

At 6-10 and 284 pounds, this senior is an exhausting load for most big men to contend with. With veterans Kenny Kadji and Durand Scott also back, expect second-year coach Jim Larranaga to try to get more of everything out of Johnson (10 points, 7.2 rebounds), who got a late start last season after knee surgery.

North Carolina: James Michael McAdoo

Questions linger about who's going to get the sophomore forward the ball (Will Dexter Strickland be healthy? Will Marcus Paige be ready?), but with little experience in the frontcourt, McAdoo is going to be counted on to be UNC's go-to big guy. He came on strong at the end of the last season, averaging 10.6 points and 4.8 rebounds over his last seven games.

NC State: C.J. Leslie

The 6-8 forward averaged a team-best 14.7 points, plus 7.3 rebounds last season and helped the Wolfpack to a late surge that pushed them to their first NCAA berth since 2006. State isn't very deep in the frontcourt, so his decision to return bolstered the Wolfpack as a top-10 favorite.

Virginia: Jontel Evans

It's going to be difficult for the Cavs to replace forward Mike Scott's offense, but Evans, a senior guard, returns with defensive intensity and consistency. Last season, Evans became

the first Cavalier since 2001 to be named to the ACC's All-Defensive team, and coach Tony Bennett will expect him to set the stick-to-itive tone, again.

Virginia Tech: Erick Green

New head coach James Johnson is expecting the senior to lead the Hokies on and off the court, and to that end, Green attended Chris Paul's CP3 Elite Guard Camp and the Deron Williams Skills Academy this summer. The second-team All-ACC selection averaged 15.6 points last season, and his consistency will be key to a team that features a single-digit number of scholarship players.

Wake Forest: Codi Miller-McIntyre

After the transfer of Tony Chennault, the freshman point guard will likely have to play 30-plus minutes from the get-go. How well, often and consistently he can get the ball to veterans C.J. Harris and Travis McKie will impact how much the Deacons improve on last season's 13-18 finish.

Johnson: ACC Title or Bust

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
June 30, 2012

Miami Hurricanes senior center Reggie Johnson has high hopes for the 2012-13 season.

After a 20-13 finish last season and failing to make the NCAA tournament for the fourth straight year, Johnson is excited about this year's team under second-year head coach Jim Larranaga.

"It's ACC championship or nothing for us," Johnson said. "If we don't win it, I'll be disappointed. I don't what people say or if it's a long shot, I know what kind of guys we have. Hopefully we can win the ACC championship and make a good run in the NCAA tournament and win that too."

Last year, Johnson entered his name into the NBA Draft before returning for his junior campaign. After this season he didn't contemplate leaving early.

"Because I knew what type of team we could have," he said. "I think we have a top three team in the ACC and a top 25 team to begin the season. We still have to go on the court and prove it, but everyone is working hard."

In addition to Johnson, who has averaged 9.5 points and 7.3 rebounds in 91 games at UM, the Hurricanes return their top two scorers in Durand Scot and Kenny Kadji as well as Shane Larkin, Rion Brown, Trey McKinney-Jones, Garrius Adams, and Julian Gamble.

Johnson averaged 10.0 points, a team-high 7.2 rebounds, and shot 49.2 percent in 23 games, making 22 starts as he dealt with recovering from offseason knee surgery, which he had one year ago to the day.

"Looking back I wasn't healthy, but right now I feel like I'm back to myself," Johnson said.

"I'm able to do the things I'm used to doing and I'm playing above the rim right now. They said it would take six months to get back on the court, but it really takes about a year to be all the way back."

Johnson recently participated in the Amar'e Stoudemire Skills Academy at the Attack Athletics facility in Chicago, Ill. June 21-23. He checked in at 6-foot-9 and 329 pounds with a 7-1.5-inch wingspan.

"Everything went good," Johnson said. "I learned a lot from Amar'e and I got good feedback from the coaches. They told me to keep doing what I was doing. They loved everything about my hands and feet, and hopefully I'll get an invite to the LeBron James Skills Academy."

He was one of 14 big men who participated in the event. Other ACC participants included Duke's Ryan Kelly and Mason Plumlee, and N.C. State's CJ Leslie. North Texas' Tony Mitchell, Kansas' Jeff Withey, Colorado's Andre Roberson, and Ohio State's Deshaun Thomas also participated.

Since returning from Chicago, Johnson has resumed his offseason workouts with the team.

"Workouts are going good," Johnson said. "Everyone is putting in work together in hot Miami."

While he's excited about a number of his teammates, he believes Brown will be one that will step up this season.

"Anytime I kick it out to him I know it's a guaranteed bucket," Johnson said. "I think me and Rion's camaraderie has grown. I know what he likes to do."

Having shooters around Johnson is something he enjoys as a good passer out of the post.

"I've got a lot of weapons," he said. "That's what's excited about this season. I know teams are going to focus on me, but it's going to be hard for teams to double-down and if they don't I'll take my chances with anyone in the country one-on-one."

Incoming freshman Tonye Jekiri, a 6-foot-11 center, has been working out with the team and has been impressive.

"He's a deer," Johnson said. "He runs the court like a deer and finishes well. He's a freshman so he makes mistakes, but he rebounds and plays defense. I'm looking forward to playing with him."

The 2012-13 schedule has not been announced yet, but Miami will host Michigan State on Nov. 28 as part of the annual ACC-Big Ten Challenge.

"It's going to be a big-time game here in Miami," Johnson said. "Hopefully we get off to a winning start to the season. It's going to be exciting. I want the ACC to get back to winning the challenge. Hopefully we can do our part. It's going to be a big game and that's what college basketball is all about."

The Makings of an Inspirational Coach

The Tablet
By Jim Mancari
May 24, 2012

After a stellar 40-year basketball coaching career for the current University of Miami, Coral Gables, Fla., head basketball coach, Jim Larranaga, it's all coming back to where it started.

The Archbishop Molloy, Briarwood, graduate was inducted May 17 into the CHSAA Hall of Fame at the 27th annual CHSAA Golf Outing and Hall of Fame Dinner at the Brynwood Golf & Country Club in Armonk, N.Y.

Larranaga actually couldn't attend the ceremony, since the 62-year-old coach is recovering from hip replacement surgery that occurred three days before his induction. The other four inductees include Jack Bruen from Power Memorial Academy, Manhattan; Robert Caputo from Iona Prep, New Rochelle; CHSAA official John Hughes; and Bill Stetter from Cardinal Hayes H.S., the Bronx, and Holy Cross H.S., Flushing.

Larranaga prepared an acceptance statement that his high school teammate John Carey and coach Jack Curran read at the dinner. He credits Curran as his inspiration to want to pursue a career in coaching.

"To play for Jack Curran was an honor and a privilege," Larranaga said. "It meant so much to me and had such an impact on my entire life...not just my basketball life, but my entire family and professional life."

From a young age, Larranaga developed a passion for basketball by watching his older brothers, Bob and Greg, play at St. Helena H.S., the Bronx, where the family resided. Jim went to St. Helena Elementary School right in the Bronx, but he received a call one day in the eighth grade from Curran, inviting him to try out for a basketball scholarship with the Stanners.

Curran signed Larranaga, even though the it would mean an hour and a half commute to and from school each day. At first, Larranaga's father was against this decision, but Bob and Greg convinced him that Jim would be playing for the best coach in the city – Curran – and getting a top-notch education at Molloy.

"It was the best decision I could have made," Larranaga said.

Larranaga fondly recalls his memories of Coach Curran and the CHSAA. His freshman and junior varsity teams won the city championship in 1964 and 1965, respectively, but his varsity teams were ousted in the city semifinals the next two years by Rice H.S., Manhattan.

"I think the CHSAA is the best high school basketball league in the country," Larranaga said. "Competing in it as a high school player was a real thrill. We played against great players every day."

Larranaga credits Curran for teaching him "everything" about basketball and life including discipline and an emphasis on the little things, which he now translates to his own players. Curran lives in Rye, N.Y., so he often drove Larranaga home to the Bronx and shared stories that each had a moral.

"I thought he was a great role model, a great teacher and a great mentor to all of his players," Larranaga said. "I knew when I was in high school that I wanted to follow in his footsteps to become the kind of coach he was and to become the kind of leader that he is."

His dream coming out of high school was to play basketball at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass., for Naismith Hall of Fame legend Bob Cousy. Cousy recruited Larranaga but decided the young man was more suited to be a Division II player.

Larranaga instead accepted a scholarship offer to Providence College, Providence, R.I. One of his fondest college basketball memories was when he scored 39 pts. against Cousy's Boston College Eagles. Cousy said to Larranaga after the game that he had made a mistake.

In the sixth round of the 1971 NBA Draft, the Detroit Pistons selected Larranaga, a combo guard/forward. However, Curran had recommended Larranaga for an opening at Davidson College, Davidson, N.C., as an assistant basketball coach. Davidson allowed him to try out for the Pistons, but he did not make the team so instead took the coaching job.

After coaching jobs around country and even the globe, Larranaga settled in as the head coach at George Mason University, Fair-

fax, Va., in 1997. While there, he transformed the program into a perennial Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) contender and had a winning record for 13 consecutive seasons.

His crowning achievement at George Mason came in 2006, when he guided the mid-major program to the Final Four of the NCAA men's basketball "March Madness" tournament. Though the team did not win its own conference title that year, it received an at-large bid to the tournament as a No. 11 seed. Naturally, fans and analysts alike predicted an early exit for the Patriots.

However, the team had returned all five starters from the previous season and bought into Larranaga's philosophy of "attitude, commitment and class."

"Our players, rather than believing the experts, believed in themselves," Larranaga said. "They had a tremendous amount of confidence in their ability."

The team rattled off wins against Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich., Wichita State University, Wichita, Kan., and the basketball powerhouse University of Connecticut, Storrs, Conn., before losing in its Final Four game to the eventual tournament champion University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. At the time, George Mason was the first mid-major team to reach the Final Four in over a quarter century.

Though he was George Mason's and the CAA's career wins leader (271), Larranaga accepted the head-coaching job at Miami on April 22, 2011. It was a tough decision, but he said one of his lifelong goals was to coach in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC).

"When the opportunity arose, it seemed like the perfect time," he said.

The Hurricanes finished 9-7 in conference play in Larranaga's first year – marking the first time the team has finished with a winning record since joining the ACC.

Looking back at his career, Larranaga will never forget the words instilled in him by Coach Curran: "Practice does not make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect."

Hoops Weight Room Results Are In

CaneSport.com (Rivals)

Matt Shodell

May 16, 2012

The hardest work for the Hurricane men's basketball team began after the season ended March 19.

That's when strength and conditioning coach Jim Krumpo, better known to players as "Killer K," started molding them. Players worked hard over the last two months to get stronger and faster in the weight room located in the depths of the BankUnited Center. And Krumpo came up with an innovative way to get their competitive spirit going around the barbells and sand bags. He drafted two teams that competed against each other in categories ranging from leg press and bench to box jumps and sand bag squats. They competed once a week over a full month, with winning players receiving a T-shirt.

"The winning team is getting a Dri-FIT shirt with an Ibis holding some dumbbells," Krumpo said. "And we're having dinner at coach's house - the winning team gets steaks and the losing team gets hot dogs."

Any other punishment for the losing team?

"No, they just have to hear about it from their teammates," said Krumpo, who was hired last year after Jim Larranaga took over the program.

In the end it was Group B that came out victorious, with team members Durand Scott, Justin Heller, Erik Swoope, Reggie Johnson, Raphael Akpejori and Bishop Daniels. Overall they had a 1,423-1,397 rep advantage and won three out of the four competitions ([FOR FULL INDIVIDUAL RESULTS CLICK HERE](#)).

Results varied from week to week for players, and some numbers were impacted by changing up when events were done - for instance one week the leg press might be the first thing players did when they were fresh, another week it could be the last event after they are exhausted. Some exercises also had more weight added each week.

Asked why he decided to turn workouts into a competition, Krumpo said, "We just wanted

to kind of harness their competitive spirit a little bit more, to work on that. Most of these guys, if you give them a competition it doesn't seem so much like work. They want to get into it."

Krumpo drafted the teams himself.

"You have a point guard on each team, shooting guard on each team, a small forward, power forward, center," Krumpo said.

- The leg press reps were performed at 360 pounds, with Swoope doing the most reps on the team (34). The bench reps were done at 155 pounds for post players and 135 for guards (after the first week, when it was a percentage of each player's body weight); Trey McKinney-Jones and Durand Scott tied for the most reps at 28. Tying for the lead in chin-ups was Shane Larkin and Erik Swoope at 28. The leg curl champion was Julian Gamble at 34 reps (it started at 90 pounds and went up 10 pounds each week). The barbell curl started at 75 pounds and ended at 95 pounds the final week - the champ was Shane Larkin and Reggie Johnson at 36 reps. The incline leader was Scott at 34. The lat pull started at 135 pounds (going up five pounds each week), and the champ was Johnson with 36 reps. The box jump leader was Rion Brown with 42 reps. The seated press started at 65 pounds and went up five pounds per week, and McKinney-Jones did the most reps with 39. The sand bag squat (starting with a 50 pound sandbag in each hand, then one over their shoulders later) winner was Larkin with 49 reps.

"It was about effort every week," Krumpo said. "We've just really tried to work hard, get better in here and work on effort. I have a year under my belt with these guys now, have been able to correct a lot of the imbalances and get a base level of strength. So now we can really start pushing them to another level. They have a good foundation, a good base."

* Due to recovery from injury Bishop Daniels and Garrius Adams did not compete in lower body workouts.

"Bishop had a strained hamstring and Garrius had his knee cleaned up a little bit," Krumpo said.

Krumpo also said that Reggie Johnson is back at 100 percent after knee surgery cost him the start of last season.

Johnson's weight is currently 310 pounds.

"He's lost eight pounds since the season," Krumpo said. "We're looking at (reducing) his body fat. Reggie's leg strength is back; we're continuing to work on his body composition."

"This is the first time he's really been able to do everything since I've been here. (Last year) he was just getting into our stuff and then he got hurt."

Julian Gamble continues to work his way back after missing last year with a knee injury. He is not back at 100 percent yet.

"He's had so many different injuries to the knee - he's still getting back to strength," Krumpo said.

* A focus for Kenny Kadji is "getting him more muscular," Krumpo said. "A goal for us as a team is getting all of our posts up and down the floor better. You look at ACC teams that are good, they have post players that can really get up and down the floor well. Kenny needs that bulking aspect of it, but he also needs his body fat to go down."

* Who made the biggest strides in the weight room since the season ended?

"Shane Larkin, he's just genetically very gifted, is a freak," Krumpo said. "He's made great strides. Raphael has made some great, great improvements. And Kenny Kadji - he's done a great job with his diet, his work ethic."

* Krumpo said nine of the team's 12 players will remain on campus in the first summer session with everyone participating in the second summer session. Krumpo declined to say which players will not be on hand for the first session.

Krumpo said during the second summer session there will be more competition among the team.

"We'll do obstacle course relays, tire flips, all sorts of stuff once a week and continue to develop that competition and the guys grinding with a purpose and a goal," he said.

5 Teams That Will Rise Next Season In College Basketball

CBS Sports.com
By Jon Rothstein

1. IOWA

The Hawkeyes will lose veteran guards Matt Gatens and Bryce Cartwright but Fran McCaffery has this team on the cusp of finishing in the top half of the Big Ten and challenging for a bid to the NCAA Tournament. Iowa will add two quality freshmen that figure to contribute immediately in 6-foot-11 big man Adam Woodbury and crafty floor general Mike Gesell. Ultra skilled combo guard Devyn Marble and bruising forward Aaron White figure to be borderline All-Conference players as juniors while Zach McCabe also adds insurance up front. The X-Factor for McCaffery will be versatile wing Melsahn Basabe, who had a tremendous freshman season but hit a little bit of a wall as a sophomore. Also keep an eye on 6-foot-5 sharpshooter Josh Oglesby, who should get better with experience and added strength.

2. ARKANSAS

Don't be surprised if the Razorbacks finish among the SEC's top four teams. Mike Anderson will welcome back maybe his best all-around player in forward Marshawn Powell, who missed nearly all of last season with an injury. The fastest 40 minutes in basketball should be back in full effect in Anderson's second season in Fayetteville thanks a terrific back court headlined by star guard BJ Young, who should be one of the conference's better players as a sophomore. Joining Young on the perimeter will be guards Mardracus Wade, Rickey Scott, and the always instinctive Rashad "Ky" Madden. Devonta Abron is a quality role player up front and Hunter Mickelson should be one of the more improved players in the SEC.

3. USC

The Trojans may not qualify for the field of 68 but they'll be vastly improved under Kevin O'Neill. Decimated by injuries last season, USC was never a team with a chance — and that will change in 2012-13. High-octane scoring guard Jio Fontan returns from an ACL injury to form a potentially explosive perimeter with Maurice Jones and Wake Forest transfer Ari Stewart, who should add some much needed versatility at 6-foot-7. UC Irvine import Eric Wise is a bruiser at 240 pounds and will have an impact up front along with Aaron Fuller and 7-footer Dewayne Dedmon, two players who both fought injuries at one point or another last season. The top of the PAC-12 looks set with UCLA, Arizona, Washington, and Stanford, but don't be surprised if O'Neill has this group challenging for a spot in the league's top third.

4. ST. JOSEPH'S

Phil Martelli returns every single piece from a group that won 20 games and reached the NIT. With both Temple and Xavier suffering major defections, the Hawks should be in the mix with both Saint Louis and UMass as teams that have the potential to win the Atlantic-10. The triumvirate of Halil Kanacevic, C.J. Aiken, and Ronald Roberts figures to be capable of matching up with any baseline in America and Chris Wilson seems primed to take a major step forward at point guard as a sophomore. Look for Martelli to use a three guard alignment frequently with Wilson running the show and Tay Jones and Langston Galloway on the wings. Hawk Hill got a taste of what this group could do last year in wins over Creighton and Temple and next season they should have a legitimate chance to taste what everyone is really craving — a trip to the NCAA Tournament.

5. MIAMI

Once this team gets healthy, the rest of the ACC should be put on notice. Jim Larranaga's first season with the Hurricanes was spent rarely at full strength — but if that changes in year two, Miami should be a regular installment in the Top 25. Shane Larkin and Durand Scott are two quality breakdown guards and Trey McKinney-Jones is a "swiss army knife" type that can do a little bit of everything. Up front, Kenny Kadji and Reggie Johnson should be one of the better power forward-center combos in the country and Rion Brown is a veteran wing with accurate range from deep. Keep an eye on freshman combo guard Melvin Johnson, an efficient scorer when given extended minutes.

Miami Signee an Impressive Player

InsideTheU
Alex Schwartz
February 2012

WESTON, Fla. – There might not be a high-level player in the class of 2012 who is more under the radar than Tonye Jekiri of Champagnat Catholic (FL).

A 6-foot-11, 220-pound center who has signed with the University of Miami, Jekiri has only been in the United States for two years and has not had the exposure that many other top seniors have had.

However, after watching Jekiri play on Friday night it is clear that he deserves to be considered amongst the nation's elite post players.

Although his squad lost 67-59 to the Sage-mont School (FL), Jekiri was by far the best player on the floor.

Jekiri posted an unofficial line of 23 points and 18 rebounds, 10 of which came on the offensive end. In addition, he had 2 blocks, 2 assists, 1 steal, and 5 turnovers. He shot 11/15 (73.3%) from the field and 1/4 at the free throw line.

All five of Jekiri's fouls came in the second half and two of them were on the offensive end, including the final one with 13 seconds left. Those last few ticks joined the final 2.1 seconds of the first half as the only time Jekiri spent on the bench, as he also showed impressive stamina.

"I thought we came to win," Jekiri said after the game of how it went. "We had a lot of things to bring and we brought them all. We had some mistakes and turnovers, we played—I don't think I brought my best game. If I did, I think we go home celebrating. Me and my teammates don't think we played well."

Jekiri and the Lions are in the midst of a superb season, though. Champagnat Catholic head coach Daniel Serrano said that the team is 19-4 and that his star big man is posting 18 points, 12 rebounds and 5 blocks per game.

As aforementioned, Jekiri is only in his second year in the United States. The big man, who is originally from Nigeria, has also only been playing basketball for two years.

"I actually starting play with a coach who saw me and tried working me out," Jekiri said of his introduction to the game. "I was playing a little bit of soccer, then I started playing basketball."

As is the case with many kids who are new to the game, Jekiri can really see himself coming along as a player.

"I see myself developing," Jekiri said. "I see a lot of change every game, need to keep working [and] playing some of the best players in the state like tonight; I had a good matchup, think I learned a lot. My coach, he makes changes to my free throws, my movement in the post."

Asked what he feels the strongest part of his game is, Jekiri actually listed quite a few attributes.

"Right now, defense, rebounding and blocking shots," Jekiri said, adding, "and scoring."

Jekiri is looking forward to quite a few different things about being at the University of Miami next school year.

"My excitement is that I will be working with a great team and I would say a great coach," Jekiri said. "I am excited for the next level, competing against the best in the ACC. I just love Miami because it's a great school in terms of academics and basketball-wise. It's gonna be fun."

If Tonye Jekiri continues to perform at this high of a level, Miami fans may well have just as much watching him play as he will at the school.

Crunch time

ESPN The Magazine

Peter Keating

August 13, 2012

Terms you'll need to know for this story

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY

For a team: Points allowed per 100 possessions.

For a player: Points his team allows per 100 possessions while he is on the floor.

EFFECTIVE HEIGHT

The combined height of a team's centers and power forwards. Measured in inches above or below the national average baseline.

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY

For a team: Points scored per 100 possessions.

For a player: Points produced per 100 possessions.

PACE

Possessions per 40 minutes. Faster pace means more possessions in a game.

PLUS/MINUS

A team's point differential when a particular player is on the floor.

TEMPO-FREE STATS

Statistics adjusted for possessions to allow for accurate comparisons across teams.

ONCE IN HIS LIFE, in third grade, Jim Larranaga asked his father for help with his math homework. The elder Larranaga, a very private man who never talked at home about his work as an insurance adjuster, looked at the assignment and handed it back to the youngster. "You're going to have to learn that on your own," he said. Larranaga, now 62, has been learning on his own ever since.

You probably know him as the gregarious hoops lifer who shot to national prominence during March Madness in 2006, when his George Mason Patriots made the Final Four as an 11 seed. A Bronx, N.Y., native with a receding hairline, lively eyes and a restless mind, Larranaga has fully earned the kind of old-school plaudits that come a man's way over 29 years of successful head coaching: motivator, philosopher, occasional cutup. But there's something more to Larranaga's approach, and it's nearly unique. The timeless lessons of basketball fundamentals aren't enough of a foundation for him; he has always wanted to ground his teachings in empirical data. "The better you can assess a situation and figure out how to improve it, the better you'll be against teams that don't have that ammunition," he says.

So Larranaga, who majored in economics at Providence College and graduated in '71, started tracking what we would now call advanced metrics 30 years ago. And as new hoops stats have spread around the Internet, he has embraced, absorbed and applied them with the kind of zeal you'd expect from an enthusiast one-third his age. Larranaga logs on to KenPom.com and RealTimeRPI.com and WarrenNolan.com. His assistants crunch updated numbers in real time during games. He quotes stats he cares about to report-

ers. He posts them for his players to see and to focus their goals. "What your mind dwells upon, your body acts upon," he likes to say.

In short, no other college basketball coach uses statistical analysis more thoroughly to connect strategy to tactics. And this season, his first at the University of Miami, he is delivering what may be his greatest performance yet. With players he didn't recruit, facing a schedule he didn't set, Larranaga has led a team plagued by injuries, scandal and death to a 15-9 record (through Feb. 17). Indeed, with their Feb. 5 win over Duke, the Hurricanes, who haven't been to the Big Dance since 2008, put themselves right on the NCAA bubble. "You can see the team morphing, kind of like watching Optimus Prime change in slow motion from a junky truck into his magnificent robotic form," says Josh Kaufman, a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Miami who co-runs Category 6, a blog covering all things Hurricanes. "And Coach Larranaga is how this team plays."

IT WASN'T EASY for Larranaga to leave George Mason, where he amassed 273 wins, three CAA championships and five NCAA tournament berths in his 14 years on the bench. GMU had grown to love him not just as a coach but as the kind of teacher you always remember. He's constantly reading and watching movies, quoting everything from Aristotle to Abraham Lincoln to the movie *Drumline* to Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*. He routinely posts a Thought of the Day for his team; this season's first: "Begin with the end in mind."

In 2008, Larranaga turned down the chance to coach at Providence, his alma mater. But last year, George Mason president Alan Merten (and Larranaga's best friend at the university) retired and Miami came at him offering \$1.3 million a year. Larranaga, who always wanted to coach in the ACC, realized that the Canes had a solid core of talent in a great location with access to huge resources in a conference with just two dominant teams, and that Miami was just waiting to be resuscitated. In a word, the program was undervalued, just as so many of Larranaga's George Mason recruits had been before they shocked the country with their stunning tournament run.

As soon as Larranaga arrived at the U, his new team faced a wave of problems. Center Reggie Johnson hurt his knee and missed a month of the season. Big man Julian Gamble tore an ACL -- out for the year. Guard DeQuan Jones got caught up in Miami's booster scandal -- his family was accused of taking \$10,000 to commit to the U in 2008 -- and sat out the first 10 games. And in a different category entirely, guard Malcolm Grant's 36-year-old brother, Yatti, died of a heart attack in December. (Larranaga missed his first practice in several years to go to the funeral.)

"It's all about the percentages. Ten turnovers in a 50-possession game is just as bad as 20 turnovers in a 100-possession game."

-- Miami head coach Jim Larranaga

Still, Larranaga pressed on; he would install his hybrid system -- coaching integrated with metric analysis -- with whoever was able to play.

Larranaga's approach starts with basketball box scores. Points, rebounds and assists are hoops' version of batting average, home runs and RBI -- numbers that most of us reflexively value because news accounts have tracked them for so long. But simple counting statistics are hugely influenced by the pace at which a game is played, and to truly measure these stats' value at either end of the floor, you need to adjust for possessions. For example, this season, Wisconsin is giving up 50.3 points per game, the fewest of any team in the country. But the Badgers play at a crawl, averaging just 58.6 possessions per game. Ohio State is actually more efficient on defense, surrendering just 81.2 points per 100 possessions, versus 82.2 for Wisconsin. "It's all about the percentages," Larranaga says. "Ten turnovers in a 50-possession game is just as bad as 20 turnovers in a 100-possession game."

Former UNC coach Dean Smith invented per-possession, or "tempo-free," stats, and stathead Ken Pomeroy popularized them on his website (KenPom.com). Once you learn about adjusting for pace, the concept seems obvious. But most college coaches aren't keeping up. In October, for example, the CAA Hoops blog surveyed conference coaches, who had to compete against Larranaga for years, and was shocked to find most coaches pay very little attention to tempo-free stats. "I care about rebounds, turnovers, free throw percentage," Drexel's Bruiser Flint said. "All that other stuff is a little too much. My favorite is what a kid does over 40 minutes. Well, he doesn't play 40 minutes for a reason!" Flint's assertion makes as much sense as disliking on-base percentage because a player gets more than one plate appearance a year. But even that sentiment was light-years ahead of Georgia State's Ron Hunter, who said: "I don't look at stats. I don't read newspapers. People keep trying to tell me and I don't want to know." So the stats revolution hasn't quite arrived everywhere just yet.

Larranaga, of course, applied it immediately to the Hurricanes. While Miami's slow pace last season obscured some of the team's issues, when the new coach looked at pace-adjusted stats, turnovers jumped off the page: Miami gave the ball away on nearly 21 percent of possessions in 2010-11, ranking 218th among 345 DI teams. Play had gotten so bad that the Canes had to run trick plays to inbound the ball. So at one of his very first practices, Larranaga put the team through a drill called TOBE: turnover basketball elimination. It starts with Larranaga putting 12 balls on a rack and letting his players scrimmage. Whenever anyone commits a turnover, he eliminates one ball. After the 12th ball is gone, the players run for the rest of practice, whether for half an hour or two and a half hours.

The Hurricanes started those earliest practices the way they played a year ago: sloppy. But as balls vanished from the rack, play got crisper, and hazardous passes disappeared. As the season neared, the Canes rarely had to run at all. "If you give players a reason, they'll change their own

behavior and make better decisions," Larranaga says. "I call it incentive thinking."

Now inbound passes are accurate, and players have vanquished another Miami bugaboo: dribbling into a corner and hanging around until a double-team converges. This season, Miami has soared to 53rd in pace-adjusted turnover rankings, losing the ball on just 18.4 percent of possessions. Of course, that's good coaching and good execution, both driven by data that interpreted turnovers as a priority. "You start to learn any new language through vocabulary, word by word, and eventually the words flow together," Larranaga says.

Larranaga's next change was to go beyond adjusting box score stats to charting what's not in box scores at all. He's been working on this for three decades, since he was an assistant to Terry Holland at Virginia. "We had a guy named Kenton Edelin, who was not a good shooter, who was a terrible free throw shooter, who statistically didn't appear to be very good at all," Larranaga says. "But when he was in the game, we did better. He was so tenacious defensively, rebounding and shot-blocking, and on offense he never took a shot. So defensively, we were better, and offensively, he was screening to our best shooters and getting them open so they could take the shots."

Eventually, Larranaga started taking notes on how well his teams did when different players and combinations of players were on the floor. Which is to say, he embraced what statheads now call lineup plus/minus -- a stat that captures the cumulative impact of harassing opponents, inspiring teammates and other seemingly unquantifiable skills to the extent that they actually change the course of a game. It's helped clue Larranaga in to the contributions of low-scoring but high-intensity defenders like Shane Larkin at Miami and Andre Cornelius at George Mason. "Everybody wants to look at his own stats, but while you were scoring 20, your team might have been outscored," Larranaga explains. "And when you look at lineups, another player may have scored only four points, but the team was plus-12 when he was in the game."

Coaches use plus/minus and tempo-free stats to tailor their goals to their program. Tom Izzo at Michigan State and Blaine Taylor at Old Dominion believe in maximizing the number of their teams' possessions, and you'll see those schools post huge offensive rebounding percentages season after season. Larranaga has studied the statistical profiles of teams that make the NCAA tournament and found that their field goal percentage allowed is typically first, second or third in their conference and that they're usually particularly efficient at stopping threes. So everything Larranaga's players do at both ends of the floor is keyed to holding opponents to under 40 percent shooting and under 30 percent on three-point attempts.

On offense, Larranaga instructs his players to rotate the ball until they create a high-percentage shot; he'll often say things like, "What good is it if you're open if you miss eight of 10 from that

spot?" He wants them to attempt no more than 17 to 18 three-pointers per game, or about one-third of their total shots, in part to limit long rebounds and fast breaks for opponents. And you won't find the Canes crashing the boards en masse. Larranaga would rather have them get back after missed shots, again to clamp down on easy breaks for the other side.

Defensively, Larranaga is known for a disruptive scheme he calls the Scramble -- a man-to-man scheme with trapping options designed to force opponents to consume time and make suboptimal decisions. If defenders anticipate and rotate well enough, they avoid getting caught in the kind of three-on-four and two-on-three breakaways that commonly puncture higher-risk defenses. And because it slows games down, you don't need great athletes to run it. Instead, it requires players with a keen sense of where the ball is headed.

Larranaga is just starting to implement it at Miami, but already the scheme is giving the Hurricanes a hustling vibe very different from last year's zone defense. And the team is starting to meet Larranaga's goal of compelling bad shots without gambling. In five consecutive ACC wins from late January through mid-February, Miami held opponents to just 37.8 percent shooting. Again, that's good coaching in a classical sense and good execution, but all focused on goals set by Larranaga's statistical research. "Our players know our goals," he says. "If the other team shoots 42 percent, even if we win, we didn't meet our goals."

HE'S NOT DONE innovating. Larranaga uses Synergy Sports' video-retrieval and indexing software to scan games to find opponents' strengths, weaknesses and tendencies. "[Assistant coach] Chris Caputo gets all the stats, on our opponents and ourselves, to see how we need to match up and at what tempo," Larranaga says. "For example, a player may be dynamite going to his right, but influence him to go to his left and he might be 20 percent less effective." Another assistant, Michael Huger, fits together the best groups of players to exploit potential matchup advantages and helps monitor efficiency during games. "At halftime, he's able to tell me, 'These five guys were plus-6, and they were the only group that was effective,'" Larranaga says. "We then ask whether that was because of their size, or who they were guarding, or how they were beating the other team's zones, or whatever. We try to figure that out and apply it."

Add it all up and you get a team with a distinctive statistical profile that's suddenly become hugely dangerous for this spring. With their trapping defense slowing the pace, the Canes average just 64.6 possessions a game, ranking 261st in the nation. But because the team protects the ball so well and takes good shots, it scores 110 points per 100 possessions, the 45th-highest efficiency in the NCAA. And despite playing makeshift lineups, Miami has improved its three-point defense from 224th in the country last year to 112th while remaining stout inside. Overall, opponents score

just 95 points per 100 possessions against the Hurricanes, ranking them 74th in defensive efficiency.

This is a team with numbers reminiscent of Larranaga's George Mason squads. In fact, take Larranaga's last 10 teams and shuffle their stat lines, and you won't be able to pick out which one was put up by this year's Hurricanes. In less than one season, he's imprinted on Miami the statistical templates that made George Mason a winner.

And there's more to come in the off-season. For one thing, Larranaga has barely begun recruiting athletes to Coral Gables. At George Mason, he found players undervalued by other programs, and year after year, his teams won despite a lack of height. "His recruiting approach was Moneyball?" says Peter Boettke, a professor of economics and philosophy at George Mason and a former AAU coach. "He got exceptionally talented players who were overlooked not for skill or accomplishment but because they were slightly off the expected body type for major-conference players. And most of them stayed all four years and bought completely into Coach L's system."

In contrast, Larranaga is stepping into a program that has underachieved in recent years but never lacked for big men. This year, the Canes' effective height is 2.8 inches above average, giving them the 23rd-tallest inside presence in the country. Now he gets to see who else he can bring aboard, and letting Larranaga pitch Miami is like giving Billy Beane the keys to the Yankees' vault.

Moreover, next season will be the first time Larranaga helps choose Miami's nonconference opponents. Last May, at the first ACC meetings Larranaga attended, Virginia Tech coach Seth Greenberg asked him how George Mason, coming out of the CAA, managed to gain so many at-large bids to the NCAA tournament. Larranaga claims he hadn't planned on saying much, but he launched into an explanation of how he and his staff, led by assistant coach Eric Konkol, had conducted a mathematical study of NCAA invitations and RPI. "We found that bids are determined not just by who you beat but who you schedule," he explained. "As much as possible, we avoided scheduling the teams likely to end up in the lowest category of RPI." Further, he noted, his staff looked to face opponents who had the potential to be surprisingly good: "If we beat them and they ended up in the top 50 in the country, that would be a great win on our resume." So George Mason routinely played opponents from outside power conferences that nonetheless went on to post impressive seasons, like Harvard and Duquesne last year and Dayton and Creighton in 2009-10.

As Larranaga spoke, his fellow ACC coaches listened intently. Their conference ranked 16th in nonconference strength of schedule in 2010-11 and sent four teams to the NCAA tournament. The Big East, which ranked first, sent 11. Mike Krzyzewski, who happens to be two years older than Larranaga, said it best: "We need to be listening to the old man."

It's either that or learn it on your own.