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University of Miami
Men's Basketball Clips
2011-12

Larranaga, Miami Hurricanes seem like perfect fit

Miami Herald

Nov. 11, 2011

By Israel Gutierrez

Just a few minutes after his first win as the University of Miami basketball coach — his first “first” win with a school in 14 years — Jim Larranaga walked into the interview room a bit early.

In his white shirt and orange tie, perhaps a show of solidarity with another first-year UM coach who sports that particular look, Coach L sat down with the media members and decided he’d listen to his players’ interviews before it was his turn to speak.

It could’ve been awkward for his guys, Malcolm Grant and Raphael Akpejiori, as they answered questions with their coach just a few feet away. But there wasn’t any of that.

“Coach L, he’s our guy,” Grant said after helping get his coach an 11-point win over Tennessee Tech.

Frankly, he might just be the right guy, period.

Not because his team rallied to outscore the Golden Eagles by 20 points in the last 10 minutes to rally from a nine-point deficit. Not because his vibe with his players is a lot like a cool professor and his students. Not because of anything that happened Friday night at BankUnited Center.

It’s just because at this school, with this basketball program, Larranaga is exactly what you need: an established coach with a history of consistent success. UM, where basketball has basically been an afterthought — as evidenced by the half-empty arena in Larranaga’s regular-season debut — is not the place for a head coach to get his feet wet.

It’s not a place where big-name recruits are going to help build a coach. It’s a place where

a coach has to build up the program, then attract recruits.

And in Larranaga, the Hurricanes have a coach who knows his style works, knows his system works, knows his assistants work and knows his overall approach to the game works.

It’s not often you see a 62-year-old coach decide to take on an endeavor like this. These jobs are usually reserved for the up-and-comer hoping his approach can translate.

The fact that Larranaga decided that this was the job that would pull him away from mid-major monster George Mason after 14 years is a major score for this program, and Friday was just the start of what should turn out to be a brilliant marriage.

It wasn’t brilliant from the beginning, of course. After the Canes opened the game on a 10-0 run, they looked very much like a team confused a bit by a new system, and like a team that was missing some key components.

But from the start you could tell there was a difference in this team than there was in the Frank Haith era. There was a randomness to the Canes teams under Haith. There was never a true identity to the team, and the results showed an inconsistency.

Larranaga visualizing success for Hurricanes

FOX Sports Florida

Nov. 11, 2011

By Chris Tomasson

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Malcolm Grant has a message for his coach.

The University of Miami guard is envisioning a national championship.

It all started in the fall of 2005 when Jim Larranaga, then coach at George Mason and now in his first season with the Hurricanes, brought in sports psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella to speak to the team. Rotella told the players to close their eyes and have the biggest dream possible about what they thought the season would be like.

Rotella then asked one player to share his thoughts. Lamar Butler raised his hand and said, “I dreamed we went to the Final Four.”

Of course, that is what would happen the following spring, when the Patriots stunned the college basketball world by advancing to the Final Four in Indianapolis. After George Mason lost to eventual champion Florida in a national semifinal, Larranaga came up to Butler.

“I gave him a hug and said, ‘I am still mad at you,’” Larranaga said. “He said, ‘Why are you mad at me?’ I said, ‘You dreamed we went to the Final Four. You should have dreamed we won the national championship.’”

Larranaga recently told that story to the Miami players. So Grant, a senior, wants to make sure he’s not selling his team short.

“Yeah, I’m going to envision a national championship,” Grant said. “Coach can be happy with what I wish... I think we’re going to be one of the best teams in the country... We’re all going to get in the same boat and ride it out and get to the tournament and we can see who has the last laugh.”

Larranaga is also talking about hoisting a trophy on a first Monday in April, although he won’t be specific about a year.

“I want to accomplish the one thing we didn’t at George Mason, which is winning a national championship,” said Larranaga, 62, about leaving the Patriots five years after one of the most memorable NCAA tournament runs ever.

For that to happen this season really takes a lot of visualization. While the Hurricanes were picked a respectable fifth in the ACC preseason media poll, they could have as few as eight scholarship players available for Friday’s opener against Tennessee Tech.

Miami opted Thursday to sit out forward DeQuan Jones for the season while possible NCAA rules violations regarding the forward are being investigated. Steady forward/center Julian Gamble is done for the year with a torn ACL, and Larranaga said freshman guard

Bishop Daniels might also not play this season due to a foot injury.

Highly regarded starting center Reggie Johnson is out until January with a knee injury. And top-rated freshman guard Shane Larkin, son of former baseball star Barry Larkin, has yet to be cleared to play this season after transferring from DePaul, although Larranaga is hopeful that will happen soon.

“We’re certainly shorthanded,” Larranaga said.

Adding to the angst in South Florida is the ongoing NCAA investigation regarding former booster Nevin Shapiro. He alleged to Yahoo! Sports in a story last August he gave former Miami assistant coach Jake Morton \$10,000 to assure Jones’ commitment to the school.

All of this came out after Larranaga had agreed last April to join the Hurricanes.

“We’ve told the players we have no control over that and not to worry about that,” Larranaga said about the presence of an NCAA investigation. “We don’t address that.”

For now, Larranaga is too busy on the court getting his players ready and off the court drumming up support on a campus that long has been apathetic about basketball. The Hurricanes, who went 21-15 last season and 6-10 in the ACC while advancing to the quarterfinals of the NIT, averaged a meager 4,763 fans.

Recently, Larranaga took the entire team to two freshman dormitories to talk to students about their importance in supporting the program. Larranaga also has gone with Grant, the team’s leading scorer last season with a 14.8 average, to visit fraternities and spread that message.

“We want to make the BankUnited Center a very tough venue for anybody to come to play,” said Larranaga, who got the Miami Heat’s Chris Bosh to attend a recent exhibition game and who is now trying to get fellow Heat stars LeBron James and Dwayne Wade to also stop by and sit courtside. “If the students come in large numbers, then the fans will start coming in large numbers.”

Larranaga knows a bit about having a strong homecourt edge in the ACC. He was an assistant coach at Virginia under Terry Holland from 1979-86, when the Cavaliers went to two Final Fours, one with Ralph Sampson.

Larranaga never will forget those ACC days. That’s one reason why Miami was able to pry him away from George Mason after he looked content to finish out his career at the mid-major school.

“I’m very goal-oriented and one of my goals was to be coach of an ACC school,” Larranaga said. “I loved my seven years at Virginia. I did love my 14 years at George Mason... But this is a challenge I’m really looking forward to.”

Larranaga compiled a 273-164 record at

the Fairfax, Va., school from 1997-2011. Obviously, the highlight was the 2006 tournament run.

George Mason surprised Michigan State, North Carolina, Wichita State and second-ranked Connecticut en route to becoming the first mid-major school to advance to the Final Four in more than 25 years. The Patriots might have been manhandled 73-58 by Florida in a semifinal but they captured the fancy of a nation.

During that time, Arizona State and Seton Hall called to see if Larranaga might have interest in moving to a bigger school. But he was having too much fun.

“I was enjoying the run to the Final Four so much and the spinoffs from the Final Four,” he said. “We got nominated for two ESPYs. I got invited to work the Michael Jordan fantasy camp in Las Vegas. We were able to recruit some very, very good players. Everything seemed to be going so good... I wasn’t ready to give that up.”

Larranaga still wasn’t when his alma mater Providence offered him the head coaching position in 2008. But Miami ended up giving Larranaga an offer he couldn’t turn down.

He likes the area, having bought a home seven years ago on Florida’s West Coast and having visited the state each summer as a child. Larranaga tells the story of his grandfather coming to Key West from Cuba and meeting his grandmother. Larranaga’s father eventually settled in New York, with Larranaga being born in the Bronx.

Larranaga believes he can win at Miami even if the team has made just one NCAA appearance the past nine years. He cites the ability to recruit in the ACC, a wealth of talent available in Florida and Miami’s academic reputation.

Defections aside, there still is talent left on the Hurricanes. Grant is a preseason All-ACC pick. Backcourt mate Durand Scott averaged 13.6 points last season. And Johnson, who averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds, should provide a presence inside when he gets healthy.

And the coach is a guy who last season led George Mason to a 27-7 mark with an NCAA tournament victory over Villanova.

“He brings instant credibility,” Grant said. “When we found out that he was going to be our coach, we all looked at his resume, that he took a team to the Final Four and to numerous (five) NCAA tournaments. We were just so excited to get a guy like that who could do that for our program.”

Grant is trying to do his part. He’s visualizing the ultimate for the Hurricanes.

Hurricanes senior Jones out for basketball season

Miami Herald

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By Michelle Kaufman

The University of Miami men's basketball team opens its regular season Friday night on a troubling note, as the school announced on Thursday that senior forward DeQuan Jones will miss the entire season while the NCAA and UM continue their investigation of the Nevin Shapiro scandal.

Shapiro claims that he gave former UM assistant coach Jake Morton \$10,000 to secure Jones' commitment to the school, an allegation Jones and his mother have vehemently denied. UM officials decided they could not risk further sanctions by playing Jones in case it comes out later that there were violations.

Jones was unavailable for comment Monday, his mother declined comment, and new UM coach Jim Larranaga will not speak until after Friday's game.

Even before the announcement, Larranaga was expressing concern that his team is shorthanded, has not yet mastered his system, and he is, therefore, downplaying expectations heading into the 7 p.m. home game against Tennessee Tech.

Larranaga and his staff have been trying to cram everything in with extra meetings, hand-outs and videos, but "Coach L" said: "The clear message will be we're not where we want to be, but we've got to be ready to be as good as we can be at this point in time. We're a long ways from where we want to be. We're an inexperienced group right now. Not just the players; me, too. I have 40 years experience, but not with this team. We need to learn each other."

UM centers Reggie Johnson and Julian Gamble are both out with serious injuries — Johnson is due back in January, Gamble will

miss the entire season — so the burden inside will fall on 6-11 University of Florida transfer Kenny Kadji, who is more of a forward than a true center. Freshman guard Shane Larkin, a DePaul transfer, is awaiting NCAA clearance.

Tennessee Tech features a 7-footer and two 6-8 players, plus the senior backcourt duo of Kevin Murphy and Zac Swansey, whom Larranaga called "two of the best guards in the country." The Hurricanes will surely be tested, he said.

"We wouldn't mind if Chris Bosh and James Posey, who have been working out here, wanted to suit up," the coach said of the locked out NBA stars. "They probably have eligibility left, don't they?"

The mood is much happier and more optimistic in the women's basketball office.

Katie Meier, last year's co-AP National Coach of the Year, could not be giddier about putting her seventh-ranked Hurricanes on the court against Texas-Pan American in Friday's 1 p.m. matinee. Her biggest concern is how she will manage her 13-deep roster, which includes two Wade Trophy national player of the year candidates — Shenise Johnson and Riquana Williams.

The Hurricanes beat Barry 96-44 in an exhibition on Monday, and all 13 players scored.

"We're really excited, itching to play," Meier said. "We're going to have fun with the high expectations. We need that absolutely freeness, lightness and energy to play the way we play. I have to make sure I don't overcoach, so I can keep them in that zone, feeling excited."

The women head up to Knoxville on Tuesday to face No. 3 Tennessee in the State Farm Women's Tip-Off Classic. The game is at 6 p.m. and will be televised on ESPN2.

Larranaga's preparedness, motivation could lift Canes

The Miami Hurricane

Nov. 9, 2011

Zach Beeker

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 when asked what initially crossed his mind upon hearing 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 when he began his head coaching career at Bowling Green University.

"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 we had eight local players; 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 George Mason players knew everything about their opponent, while the opposite was true for UConn's 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 than they are."

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 to them; there is always a point ... Some nights it'll be a quote. It might be a quote 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 for coaching.

"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 weighed 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.

In a sense Larranaga tricked Lewis into thinking that it was his own idea to lose weight. Instead of demeaning him for what he wasn't, he tried to enhance what he was.

Four years later Lewis would go on to be the leading scorer and rebounder for George Mason 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.

Easy shots felt difficult to come by, and frankly, if it wasn't for the difficult shot-making of Jack McClinton, never would've made the one NCAA Tournament he made in his seven years at UM.

This version of the Hurricanes might not be the most talented group, but under Larranaga they already look like a team that has a clue how the game is played.

Larranaga is the reason. He brought his entire coaching staff from George Mason with him, helping him with the transition. It makes teaching his proven system easier.

And there's plenty to teach.

Larranaga breaks down his assistants like a football team does, splitting up their duties between offense, defense and special teams. If you're wondering what special teams translates to in basketball, it's basically the scout team, which is run by Chris Caputo, who dissects the opposition before each game.

You can tell when a coach has been around when he answers simple questions like "why did your team have such balanced scoring?" by offering a philosophical gem like, "Life is all about balance."

And that's just what this program needs. In Larranaga, there's a sense that there is already something established here.

It might just be coaching staff that's established, but that's a great place to start.

Larranaga's first win as a Hurricane came against a team that might just make the NCAA Tournament, and it turned out to be a bit more difficult than he would've liked.

But it's a feeling he is quite familiar with. And it's one this program will eventually start becoming familiar with as well.

Miami basketball preview

Sun Sentinel
Nov. 8, 2011
By Steve Gorten

while playing the third-most minutes in school history. Grant, who grew up idolizing Kenny Anderson, has said he wants to develop his point-guard skills and become the primary ball-handler the 'Canes lack.

How they'll score

Once Johnson returns, the 'Canes will look to run their offense through the big man inside. Until then, Grant and Scott are expected to be the primary scorers. The 'Canes don't have much of a scoring presence in the post aside from Johnson, but have plenty of firepower on the perimeter. Brown came on at the end of last season and Adams also can pour in points. You can expect the 'Canes, who averaged 21 3-pointers per game last season, to hoist up plenty of shots from beyond the arc.

How they'll stop the other team

Larranaga is renowned for his vaunted scramble defense, on which he has written books and produced instructional videos. The defense, which gave opposing teams fits when Larranaga used it at George Mason, involves various full-court traps and constant pressure. The Hurricanes, who handled opponents' full-court press poorly last season, hope to create easy offense from their defense. It will take some time for players to fully master Larranaga's scramble defense, though. The coach said late during the preseason that it was still a work in progress.

Writer's take

Outside expectations are high for the Hurricanes, who return four starters and nine of their top 10 scorers from a team that finished 21-15 and reached the NIT quarterfinals last season. They're predicted to finish fifth in the ACC, a reasonable goal as long as Johnson returns by the start of conference play and is in good physical condition. The 'Canes possess plenty of talent, but don't have many front-court options, which will put pressure on the perimeter-oriented team to hit outside shots. An NCAA Tournament appearance is possible in Larranaga's first season.

Three keys to success:

1. The 'Canes have to win some close games. Last season, they lost four consecutive ACC contests by four points or less. Establishing a go-to player will be essential.

2. Reggie Johnson will need to be in midseason form when he returns from knee surgery, expected to be near the start of ACC play. The 6-foot-11, 300-pound center led UM in rebounding and was third in scoring in 2010-11.

3. Starting guards Malcolm Grant and Durand Scott, who combined for 227 assists and 192 turnovers last season, have to take better care of the ball.

You didn't know:

The 'Canes roster is loaded with combo guards, but has very few frontcourt players. That's why coach Jim Larranaga will go with three guards on the floor, and sometimes four. In addition to Grant and Scott, Rion Brown and Garrius Adams, as well as transfer Trey McKinney Jones and incoming freshman Bishop Daniels, give UM plenty of ball-handlers and outside shooters. Big men Kenny Kadji (6-11) and Raphael Akpejiori (6-10) hail from Africa — Kadji was born in Douala, Cameroon; Akpejiori was born in Lagos, Nigeria.

Player to watch

Guard Malcolm Grant, a preseason All-ACC selection, led the Hurricanes in scoring (14.8 points per game) and assists (3.2) last season. The 6-1 senior from Brooklyn led the league in 3-point percentage (42.3) — he has made a 3-pointer in 23 consecutive games — and free-throw percentage (85.3) last season

Miami has high expectations in Larranaga's first season

Sun Sentinel
Nov. 8, 2011
By Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES — When Jim Larranaga was introduced as Miami's new men's basketball coach this spring, he noted that he was leaving behind a team at George Mason that had a chance to be Top 25 in the polls this season.

"I would not have left that caliber of a team if we did not feel that we have that caliber of talent already here at the U, that we had the capability of challenging the very best teams, not only in the ACC, but the entire country."

The 'Canes return four starters — forward Adrian Thomas was their only senior last season — and nine of their top 10 scorers from a team that finished 21-15, 6-10 in the ACC last season and reached the NIT quarterfinals.

Expectations are high despite the fact the 'Canes haven't made the NCAA Tournament since 2007-08 and earned just one berth in former coach Frank Haith's seven seasons. Last month, they were picked to finish fifth in the ACC by the media after ending the regular season last year ninth.

"I try not to look at the rankings because like Coach L said to us the first day we came back from media day, you can't predict who's going to finish where or who's going to do this," said senior guard Malcolm Grant, a preseason All-ACC pick after leading UM with 14.8 points and 3.2 assists last season.

At the same time, Grant says the 'Canes have the talent to make the NCAA Tournament.

"Yeah, definitely. I've said that every year, but this year with Coach L as our leader, it's just a big difference," he said. "You guys can see it at practice. The whole team can see it. With him, it just makes a big difference for us."

The 'Canes have some issues to overcome, most notably the absence of center Reggie Johnson until likely the start of ACC play — UM opens at Virginia on Jan. 7.

The 6-foot-10, 300-pound Johnson, who was the team's leading rebounder (9.6 per game) and third-leading scorer (11.9 points) as a sophomore last season, tore his ACL during an offseason workout and underwent surgery. The 'Canes' other experienced big man, Julian Gamble (6-10, 265), also suffered a knee injury that will force him to miss this entire season. The senior plans to apply for a sixth year from the NCAA.

Without them, UM starts the season with no depth in the frontcourt — 6-10 Raphael Akpejiori, 6-11 Kenny Kadji, a transfer from Florida who's more of a face-up player, and 6-6 Erik Swoope are the only options inside.

Larranaga plans to go with a three-guard lineup, possibly four at times.

There's also the issue of adapting to Larranaga's systems, including his famous scramble defense.

"We have 10 percent in. 90 percent still has to be learned," said Larranaga, who has devoted much of practice to teaching. "And we may not get to 100 percent this year. In fact, in all likelihood, we won't because there's too much for the players to digest.

"Would I like to be farther along? Sure. But it is what it is. We know it's going to take us some time and we have to be patient."

Said Grant, "The first couple of games, there will still be some kinks, we're still going to mess up trying to get adjusted to it, but I think by midseason, maybe ACC play, we should be fine."

With numerous combo guards on the team but no true point guard, the Hurricanes still don't

know who'll be their primary ball-handler. Grant and junior Durand Scott shared duties last season.

"I definitely want to improve on my decision-making," Scott said. "I've been working on that and I've been doing well with it."

Miami Hurricanes' Jim Larranaga a master motivator

Miami Herald

Nov. 7, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

Jim Larranaga is a Bronx guy who loves to talk, and the new University of Miami men's basketball coach has a treasure trove of stories after 40 years in the business.

There's the one about coaching his Archbishop Molloy freshman team to the city championship when he was 14. There's the one about giving each George Mason player a butterfly in a box and releasing them together as a symbol of their common journey. And, there's the legendary tale about helping former assistant Stan Heath get a job at Michigan State.

"Tom Izzo told me he had two candidates in mind and Stan was not one of them," Larranaga recalled. "I told Stan he had to capture Tom's attention. I told him to get a mannequin and break off the right arm. Then get a long stem red rose box. Put the right arm in the box and Fed Ex it to him with a note — "Coach Izzo I'd give my right arm to be on your staff and if you hire me I will help you win a national championship. It worked."

Coach L, as Larranaga likes to be called, is a quirky guy constantly seeking new ways to motivate his teams. He begins every practice with a Thought of the Day, and quotes everyone from John Wooden to the Dalai Lama to Ralph Waldo Emerson.

He recently preached "One band, one sound," to his UM players, a concept from the movie, Drumline. And he loves to impart pearls of wisdom from Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

Number cruncher

But his favorite thing to talk about is the subtle complexity of the game of basketball. He has dissected it like a Wall Street analyst does the stock market, and compiled hundreds of pages of notes and formulas along the way.

He majored in math and economics at Providence, and remains a number cruncher. His staff keeps detailed stats at every practice, and posts them for players to examine.

He insists players focus on points per possession, not just points. If you scored 20, but took 25 shots, that's not a good game. He wants them to "select" shots instead of "take" shots, based on their tendencies and those of their teammates. He recently chided a player in practice who was taking a lot of 3-point shots despite not being a particularly good long-range shooter. Asked why he was taking them, the player replied: "Because I was open," to which Coach L answered: "What good is it if you're open if you miss 8-of-10 from that spot?"

When a player turns the ball over during a scrimmage, his team loses a point. Every rebound in practice is tallied. The top rebounder at each position is excused from running or weight training that day, so the battles have become fierce.

"Those numbers are a reflection of something and I want them to be aware how they impact performance," said Larranaga, 62, who led George Mason to the Final Four in 2006. "It's very different from what they're used to, but they seem intrigued by it. During practices now, they are constantly calling over the statistician. What your mind dwells upon, your body acts upon. We need their minds focused on the right things.

"Most kids, they're focused on "How many shots am I getting? How many points am I scoring?" If you ask them the most important thing, they'll say winning, but they're not focusing on the things it takes to win."

He is particularly concerned with UM's alarming turnover rate. The Hurricanes, who won 21 games but finished ninth in the ACC last season, ranked 205th out of 336 Division I teams in turnovers. His George Mason team ranked

No. 22. UM ranked 271st in assists per game, so the assist/turnover ratio ranked 248th.

Game technician

Larranaga said UM players were in too much of a hurry to make fancy passes and shots rather than slowing down, thinking, and making smarter, more high-percentage plays. He blames the AAU culture, where young players are thinking of "entertainment value" and "dunking on SportsCenter rather than fundamental basketball. He is trying to bring back the basics.

"I've had three coaching staffs, and this is definitely the most challenging," said UM center Kenny Kadji, who transferred from the University of Florida. "He's a master of the game and wants you to think about every part, every position. He slows it down for you so you can understand it. I've learned more in a few months with him than my first three years in college."

Added guard Malcolm Grant: "He definitely makes us look at the game in a different way, and he took a mid-major to the Final Four, so we'd be fools not to listen to him. His resume speaks for itself."

Summer in Las Vegas Good for Scott

Inside the U

Nov. 7, 2011

Chris Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Shortly after he finished his last final exam in May, Durand Scott packed his bags and headed to Las Vegas.

Scott, a junior guard at Miami, elected to workout with Impact Basketball, one of the premier basketball training sites in the world.

Impact Basketball has developed relationships with a number of NBA players, including Kevin Garnett, Dwight Howard, Paul Pierce, Chauncey Billups, Vince Carter, Chris Bosh, and Baron Davis over the years.

The Las Vegas facility is a hot spot for the pre-draft process in which a number of aspiring draftees train. This past summer, NBA draft hopefuls Alec Burks, Kawhi Leonard, Jordan Williams, Josh Selby, Darius Morris, Malcolm Lee, Jon Diebler, Isaiah Thomas, Greg Smith, Xavier Silas, and Jacob Pullen were among the 25 players working out at their facility.

Only Villanova's Maalik Wayns, Temple's Ramone Moore, and Scott were among the players that worked out in Las Vegas that returned to college basketball this season.

"It was a great experience," Scott said. "I was out there just working out, working on things I need to improve on. Everything needs improvement so I was out there getting my game together working on jump shots, dribbling, decision-making, just little things. It was a nice little experience, it was great, and I think it has prepared me for this season."

Scott spent 2 ½ months in Las Vegas and worked out six times a week at the facility. Each player had a designed workout in the weight room as well as on the court.

"I'm definitely more confident in my jump shot, ball-handling skills, and just more confident overall," Scott said. "I think it prepared me for the season and it gave me a good mindset of just being ready. I just want to get out there and get after it."

Scott is coming off a sophomore season in which he averaged 13.6 points, 4.2 rebounds, 3.1 assists, and 1.2 steals a game.

"I want to be a better decision maker, that is definitely something I want to be better at and make sure that it is so much better," Scott said. "Less turnovers, which I think decision making takes care of and it takes care of my shot selection and my defense of when to go for as steal and when not to. Just mentally that is what I wanted to work on because physically I think everything will take care of itself."

Scott scored 23 points and grabbed a team-high seven rebounds in Miami's exhibition win over Florida Southern last week.

UM kicks off their season Friday with a home against Tennessee Tech.

Playing with a number of guys in the summer that have moved on with their basketball careers into the NBA only inspires Scott.

"Everybody looks at them and say they want to be exactly where they are going," Scott said. "I look at it as a congratulations that this was their turn. Everybody goes separate routes and at different times if they're lucky. This was their year and I wish them luck. Now I just have to work on myself and hopefully I take the right path, which is different than theirs, and hopefully I get to where they are at."

NBADraft.net projects Scott as a second-round draft pick in 2013.

Top 50 shooters: The best from downtown

CBSSports.com College Basketball Insider
Nov. 5, 2011
By Jeff Goodman

Jon Diebler is gone. So are guys like Jared Stohl and Andrew Goudelock. Rotnei Clarke has been left off the list because he's sitting out following his transfer to Butler.

But there are still plenty of knock-down shooters around the country. We take a stab at the elite marksmen with the CBSSports.com Top 50 shooters in America.

Top Shooters

1. John Jenkins, 6-4, 220, SG, Jr., Vanderbilt: His percentage dropped last year, but it's because everyone knew where he was at all times. Jenkins shot 48 percent from beyond the arc as a freshman and was 100 of 245 for 41 percent last season. He also made 89 percent of his free throws. If you want one guy shooting it from deep with the game on the line, it's Jenkins.

2. Brad Redford, 6-0, 182, SG, Jr., Xavier: Missed all of last season due to an ACL injury, but his stroke is still as smooth as ever. Over his first two seasons, he made 101 of 227, good for nearly 45 percent of his attempts.

3. Ashton Gibbs, 6-2, 190, G, Sr., Pittsburgh: Has raised his shooting percentage from beyond the arc in each of his three seasons. Shot 39 percent as a freshman, 43.9 as a sophomore and a sizzling 49 percent a year ago. You won't find many shooters in the nation better than Gibbs.

4. Robert Nyakundi, 6-8, 220, F, Sr., Southern Methodist: The Texas native was second in the nation a year ago in three-point field-goal percentage behind Ohio State's Jon Diebler. The skilled forward shot 39 percent as a freshman, 40 percent as a sophomore and made 97 of 195 a year ago for 49.7 percent.

5. Doron Lamb, 6-4, 210, SG, Soph., Kentucky: Shot a sizzling 49 percent last season for the Wildcats, converting on 68 of 140 attempts from beyond the arc.

6. Andre Dawkins, 6-4, 200, SG, Jr., Duke: He's a pure shooter who made 38 percent as a freshman and then canned 43 percent of his attempts as a sophomore. Once he gets going, there aren't many better.

7. Gabe Rogers, 6-2, 175, G, Jr., Northern Arizona: The Houston native made 47 percent of his attempts from long distance a year ago -- fifth in the nation. He had seven games where he connected on at least five 3-pointers. Also shot 37 percent from beyond the arc as a freshman.

8. **Malcolm Grant, 6-1, 188, G, Sr., Miami (Fla.):** There haven't been too many guys more consistent and reliable from long range over the last three years. Grant made 47 percent as a freshman at Villanova, 41 percent in his first season at Miami and 42 percent a year ago.

9. Tim Abromaitis, 6-8, 235, F, Sr., Notre Dame: Has shot 43 percent each of the past two seasons from long distance and is a 41.6 percent shooter in his college career. Also has made 88 percent of his free throws in his three seasons in South Bend.

10. Brady Heslip, 6-2, 190, G, Soph., Baylor: The Canadian enrolled at BC midway through the 2010 campaign, but transferred after the coaching change and sat out last season at Baylor. He will instantly prove himself as one of the nation's elite from long distance.

UA Micro G Juke – N.Y. Gauchos Player Exclusive

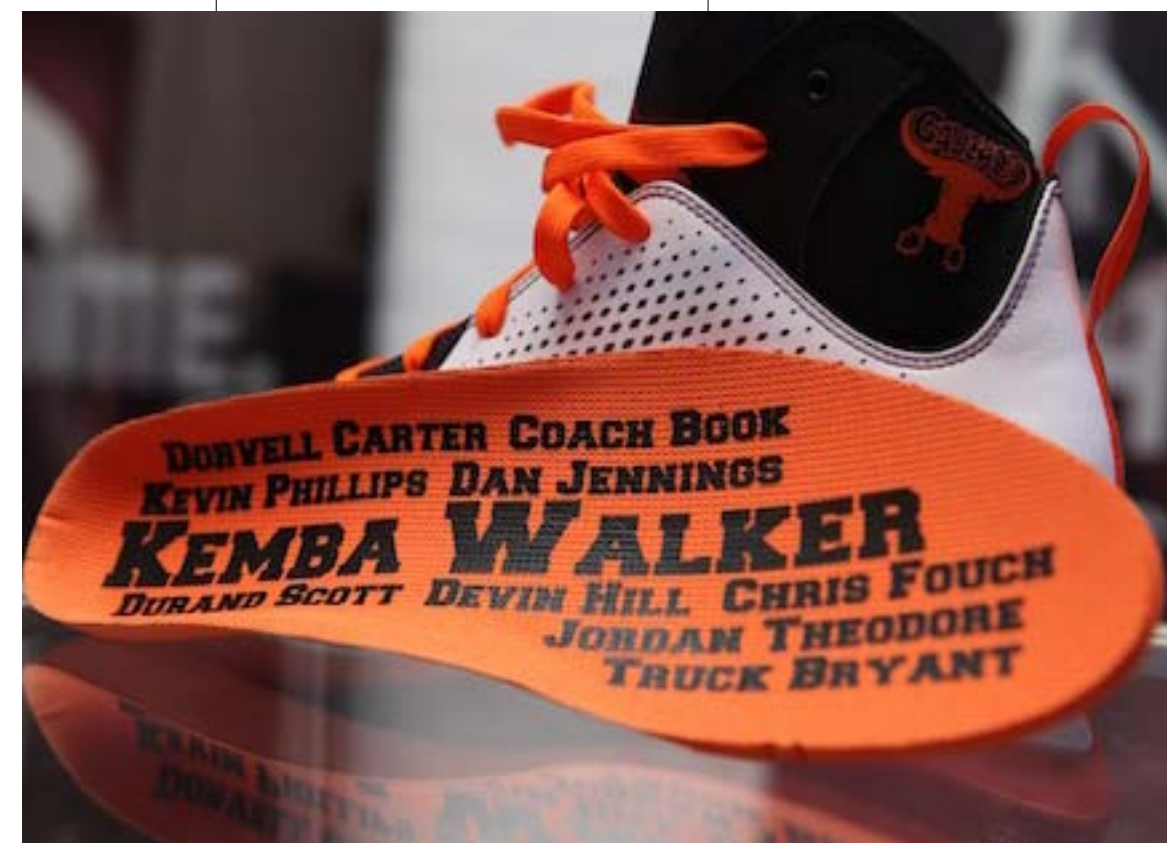
ZKSports.com

For those of you that have been following Kemba Walker's career since high school, you know his story runs deep. Well before he won a national championship at UConn or got drafted to the NBA, Walker was an absolute monster on the AAU circuit. During the summer of 2007, he and the New York Gauchos won just about every tourney they played. Led by three point guards – Walker, Darryl "Truck" Bryant (West Virginia) and Jordan Theodore (Seton Hall) – the Gauchos were more than a team, they were family.

In fact, everyone from that team that grew up playing together – including **Durand Scott (Miami)**, Chris Fouch (Drexel), Dorvell Carter (Marist), Devin Hill (Loyola), Dan Jennings (Long Beach State), and Kevin Phillips – has inked "Family 4 Life" or "F4L" in some way to their body. Now, they can add a shoe to that collection.

This special makeup of the Under Armour Micro G Juke – the shoe Walker will wear this season – is not slated to hit retail, but is an amazing tribute by UA to their new athlete and one of the greatest AAU teams of all time.

<http://dime.com/2011/11/under-armour-micro-g-juke-new-york-gauchos-player-exclusive/>



Larranaga Making Mark as Teacher of the Game

CaneSport.com
Nov. 4, 2011
by Jim Martz

There is a lot of teaching going on these days at the practice facility and the adjacent BankUnited Center.

New men's basketball coach Jim Larranaga is like the tenured professor who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom.

When he speaks in his booming voice, the Hurricanes listen because they know he's been to where they want to go - not only to the NCAA's Big Dance, but to the Final Four.

Larranaga is the first head coach in UM history who has been the head coach of a Final Four team. That was unheralded George Mason University in 2006. It marked the first time in 27 years that a mid-major program reached the Final Four. In his 14 years at Mason, Larranaga reached the NCAA Tournament five times and the NIT three times.

"Coach L is definitely a teacher of the game," said senior guard Malcolm Grant, a pre-season All-ACC first-team selection. "A guy his age (61), he has a whole bunch of experience. We're going to listen to all his teaching points and we're going to get it right."

The first "test" for professor Larranaga's students will be Nov. 11 against Tennessee Tech at the BankUnited Center. On Thursday night they had a "pop quiz" so to speak, an exhibition game against Florida Southern ...

UM won, 88-78, coming back after falling behind by nine points in the first half and trailing for most of the second half before ending on an 18-8 run.

Grant led the team with 26 points, and Durand Scott had 23 points and seven rebounds. Rion Brown added 13 points (seven of 12 free throws, four steals) and Trey McKinney Jones had 11 points and seven rebounds. UM shot 53 percent in the game but the team was out-rebounded, 34-31.

Asked if his team is where he wants it to be, Larranaga replied, "I'd say we've made some progress but, no, we're not where we want to be. There are a lot of things to still improve upon before we're able to execute. Whenever you're developing a new system or new style of play it takes a while for the players to adjust and figure out what the coach want.

"The players all want to please the coach, they want to do what he wants. But they all have developed their own style themselves. And, as we've explained to them, a coach can't adjust to 13 different styles, but 13 people can adjust to one new style. And that's what we're trying to do now."

That's where the teaching comes in. And there's plenty to learn because Larranaga's upbeat tempo on offense and his "scramble" defense are markedly different from the system used by Frank Haith, who coached the Hurricanes the last seven seasons and left for the head job at Missouri.

Larranaga is so comfortable with his coaching, or so eager to get media coverage - or both

- that his practices are open to the media. Practices were closed under Haith, as they are at UM football. In fact, it's a rarity for a major college basketball or football program to allow the media to attend workouts.

The Canes not only are learning new X's and O's but they've quickly discovered the new coach is a strict disciplinarian. Come back on the court after water break too slowly and you'll run "suicides" up and down the court. Lag a little in picking up a new drill and there will be a lecture.

"Just harping on everything" Grant said about Larranaga's style. "Coach L is big on discipline. He's real strict, he's from the old school. Coming from George Mason, they've had so much success so we're going to buy into that plan and that system."

Asked if he likes it, Grant's eyes lit up and he said, "Oh, without a doubt. He's been to the Final Four, we haven't been out of the ACC tournament yet. We're going to listen to him and we're going to get on that ship."

There will be a learning curve, and that can lead to frustration.

"I'd say coaching, very much like teaching, you're trying to teach your players what you should and shouldn't do," Larranaga said. "And you want them to learn very, very fast and that's probably unrealistic. We're pushing them hard to learn at least as much as they can as fast as they can, knowing quite frankly there are going to be times that they certainly are not going to do it the way we want.

"So there are a lot of corrections. We're not angry with them as much as we are trying to be demanding with them. With that in mind we had a situation with one of our players, Kenny Kadji, who didn't fulfill one of his responsibilities so he (did not play) Thursday. Basically coach's decision, a violation of team rules, or maybe team expectations is more accurate."

Kadji is a talented, 6-11, redshirt sophomore forward/center from the Cameroon who transferred from Florida. He's expected to contribute significantly, especially in the absence of injured junior 6-10 center Reggie Johnson, who is sidelined by an injury that may keep him out until ACC games begin.

"I learned so much just in the very first workout," said Grant. "He's taught me how to value the ball more, not turn the ball over, be patient with my passes. I've learned so much in just a little amount of time."

How long might it take before the Hurricanes have the new system down?

"I say probably mid-season," Grand replied. "First couple of games there are still going to be some kinks in there, we're still going to be messing up trying to get adjusted to it. I think mid-season, maybe ACC play, we should be fine.

"We've just got to get used to coach L, him harping on every little thing and understand it's every little thing that makes the big things much more valuable. Once we get that we should be fine

...It's a new system and isn't going to come right away. Every day of just keep doing it. Repetition counts, doing something every day you can do nothing but get better at it."

Larranaga not only brings his own experience to UM but he is joined by the most veteran staff the program has had since Leonard Hamilton's assistants 11 years ago consisted of Scott Howard (seven seasons at the program), Dwight Freeman (five) and Stan Jones (five). Coach L brought along assistants Chris Caputo (10th season), Eric Konkol (eighth) and Michael Huger (fifth).

The staff's main emphasis:

"I'd like first of all for us to be able to defend better," said Larranaga, "where our defense is paying very close attention to pressuring the ball but also taking away dribble penetration and rebounding the basketball. If we could do basically those three things I'd be happy with the defense.

"On offense, if we can share the ball without turning it over; we turn the ball over way too much. Most of it is not caused by the defense, most of it is caused because the players are in too much of a hurry and we need to develop a little more patience and understanding."

A week ago in a scrimmage in Tampa with South Florida the Hurricanes reportedly dominated but didn't necessarily impress the head coach.

"It showed a lot of the elements that we anticipated seeing," Larranaga said. "We turned the ball over a lot. We're not a great rebounding team, but we can shoot the ball and when we throw the passes we can make open shots. From a defensive standpoint we need to rebound better. From an offensive standpoint we need to learn to not turn it over so much.

"For example, if you take 50 shots and make 50 percent of them, let's say you make 25 out of 50. If you turn the ball over 25 times that's 25 shots you didn't get. We'd much rather be a team that turns it over 10 and gets 60 shots or 65 shots. But we have to reduce our turnovers to accomplish that."

Larranaga said earlier this week that senior forward DeQuan Jones will be on the bench indefinitely until he receives clearance from the NCAA. Jones, who continues to practice with the team, has denied allegations against him in the Nevin Shapiro booster scandal.

The Hurricanes have been picked by the media to finish fifth in the always-rugged ACC.

"I try not to look at the rankings," Grant said. "Like coach L said the very first day we came back from media day, you can't predict who's going to finish where, so you just have to play basketball. You're going to have ups and downs during the season but at the end of the day we want to be in the NCAA tournament."

Can the Canes make it to the Big Dance?
"Definitely," Grant replied. "I say that every year, but this year with coach L as our leader it's just a big difference. You guys can see it in practice, the whole team can see it. With him I think it makes a big difference for us."

Larranaga works on implementing new style

The Miami Hurricane
Nov. 4, 2011
by David Furones

The wait is over for Miami hoops enthusiasts: The men's basketball team is set to launch its season Thursday at 7 p.m. in an exhibition game against Florida Southern.

While the game's result won't officially be reflected in the Canes' record, it will be the team's first contest since it was eliminated by Alabama in a 79-64 loss in the quarterfinals of last season's NIT.

New head coach Jim Larranaga has had his players preparing for the start of the season for the past three weeks with practices and intra-squad scrimmages.

"The guys are tired of playing against each other," he said. "You want to try and beat on somebody else."

Miami comes into the season projected to finish fifth in the very competitive ACC, as it returns 11 players from last season's 12-man roster that finished with a 21-15 record and a ninth-place finish in the conference.

Senior guard Malcolm Grant leads a talented and deep backcourt for the Canes, and was voted to the Preseason All-ACC team. Last season, Grant led the conference in three different statistical categories: three-point percentage, three-pointers made per game and free throw percentage.

With a talented and athletic group of players, Larranaga is faced with the challenge of adjusting his team to a new style of play.

"Whenever you're developing a new system, it takes the players a while to adjust," he said. "A coach can't adjust to 13 different styles, but 13 people can adjust to one new style."

Larranaga feels that, defensively, the team needs to improve on pressuring the ball, preventing dribble penetration and ultimately rebounding better to finish off opponents' possessions.

Offensively, he'd like to see his guards distribute without turning the ball over. Larranaga said he sees too many turnovers in practice because players are in a hurry.

The Canes are hindered by injuries in the frontcourt. Julian Gamble is out for the season with an ACL tear, and Reggie Johnson isn't expected back until January.

Larranaga will mostly play a four-guard lineup this season, with either Kenny Kadji or Raphael Akpejiori playing center. Against bigger teams, expect Kadji and Akpejiori to split playing time and create better matchups.

Kadji will not play in Thursday's exhibition at the BankUnited Center because of a "violation of team expectations."

Hurricanes adjust to new coaching style

DailyTarheel.com
Nov. 3, 2011
Henry Gargan

North Carolina hasn't forgotten its last encounter with Miami.

A buzzer-beating Tyler Zeller layup was all that prevented an early UNC exit from the ACC tournament at the hands of a team that has perennially occupied the conference's bottom tier.

This season, though, Miami returns with a new coach, last season's leading scorers and a fresh attitude.

Yet the Miami basketball program still remains under the radar.

The fans that flock to see the Hurricanes compete on the gridiron have always been largely absent from the school's basketball arena. Last season, the average home game attracted slightly more than half the bodies required to fill the school's 8,000 arena.

To make matters worse, allegations have surfaced that former coach Frank Haith knew about a \$10,000 donation from a booster to help recruit DeQuan Jones.

Haith left the Hurricanes last spring after the team's NIT quarterfinal loss to Alabama to coach at the University of Missouri. His seven seasons at Miami included just one trip to the NCAA tournament and a middling 43-69 record in the ACC.

Now, former George Mason coach Jim Larranaga leads Miami, having proven himself capable of leading a small-time program to big-time success. Under Larranaga, George Mason earned five NCAA berths and one trip to the Final Four in 2006.

"Coach Larranaga is the leader," junior guard Durand Scott said. "If you follow the leader,

how can you go wrong if he's been where you want to go?"

Following the leader, especially for Scott, will mean a greater focus on discipline. Larranaga described an interaction in which he demanded that Scott ride the exercise bike to remind him to come prepared for practice. Scott was incredulous.

"It's not about the big things, it's about doing all the little things well," Larranaga said. "If we pay special attention to all the little details, we'll be successful. If we ignore all the little things, we'll never get to the big things."

Top rebounder Reggie Johnson's recovering meniscus has sidelined him until mid-season, but Malcolm Grant, Miami's top returning scorer, said he believes that his team's back-court will make a definite impact despite his absence.

"At times, you're probably going to see four guards out there until Reggie Johnson comes back," Grant said. "But we're going to be a team that's hard nosed on defense, put a lot of pressure on the opposing team and trying to cause a lot of turnovers."

UNC found itself at the other end of this tactic last season, as Miami forced 20 UNC turnovers in the ACC Tournament matchup.

As team leaders, Grant and Scott will attempt to continue to find ways to do the little things right as Miami enters the Larranaga era.

"This is my last year," Grant said. "I told the guys, 'Look. I'm getting on you hard because I get on myself hard. I'm my hardest critic, and I dedicate myself to this game of basketball. So if I'm getting on you, it's not personal. I just want to win.'"

Larranaga serious about Miami Hurricanes' basketball

AP
Nov. 3, 2011
by Steven Wine

CORAL GABLES - Preseason basketball practice had hardly begun when Miami Hurricanes guard Durand Scott first felt the wrath of the team's new coach, Jim Larranaga.

Scott made the mistake of taking the court without tying his shoes.

"You might not think that's important, but it's as important as making a bucket," Scott said. "Coach yelled at me. At first I didn't think he was serious. I didn't think you could get in trouble for not having your shoelaces tied. I went back to him, 'Are you serious?'" Larranaga was serious. Scott did a stint on a stationary bike as punishment, and has made sure to tie his shoes ever since.

"Double knots," he said.

So the Hurricanes are following their new coach's rules. Less clear is how closely rules were followed before Larranaga arrived.

Frank Haith left Miami in April to become the coach at Missouri and was replaced by Larranaga. Shortly before the coaching change, the NCAA began looking into allegations by a former Hurricanes booster, but the investigation didn't become public until August.

Most of the allegations involved football, but one basketball player was implicated — DeQuan Jones. Yahoo Sports reported that the ex-booster said he provided \$10,000 cash to Miami coaches to help recruit Jones, and Haith was aware of the matter.

With the season about to begin for two teams with new coaches, the case is the elephant in the gym in Coral Gables and Columbia.

"We don't know what's going to happen," Larranaga said.

Haith has said the allegations "are not an accurate portrayal of my character," and said the way he deals with the situation can be a teachable moment.

"It's a life skill we all can learn, because I think in life we're all going to be faced with adversity," Haith said. "No one has a perfect life. When someone attacks your character and who you are, the thing I want our guys to see is how I handle myself and how I stand. I stand firm, and being able to handle this thing face-on, hopefully that's a learning experience for our players."

Larranaga said he was unaware of the NCAA investigation when he took the job. Following a spirited recent practice, he denied a cloud of uncertainty hangs over the program.

"The general public has their own opinions and points of view," he said. "But we also have a very specific job to do, and we're not going to allow anything to distract us from doing that job. You can only control the things you can control. We share that thought with the players and coaching staff.

"If you watched practice, you could see there was no cloud in this gym today."

Jones took part in that practice but won't play until the NCAA rules on his case. Miami officials say they don't know when that will happen.

Jones was a part-time starter last season and could play a significant role for the Hurricanes, who are coming off a disappointing 21-15 season. In seven years under Haith they went only 43-69 in the Atlantic Coast Conference, including 6-10 in 2010-11.

So there's plenty of room for improvement under Larranaga, who transformed George Mason into an overachieving success. He wants to recruit heavily in Florida, where basketball has become more popular with prep athletes.

"One reason our staff is confident we can build a championship-caliber program here is because of the great high school basketball talent developed over the past 25 years," Larranaga said. "When the Miami Heat and Orlando Magic started their franchises, that opened the doors for a lot of high school players to have role models and encourage them to play more basketball."

The scandal and possible sanctions, however, have made it even tougher for Larranaga to compete with the ACC's heavyweight programs for recruits.

Haith faces a similar challenge competing in the Big 12, along with a recent standard of success at Missouri that will be tough to maintain. Predecessor Mike Anderson left for Arkansas after leading Mizzou to a school-best 77 wins over the past three seasons, and an NCAA tournament appearance each year.

Haith was not the Tigers' first choice for the job, and some fans were less than thrilled with his hiring. Whether he succeeds in Columbia will depend in part on what happens in Coral Gables.

"I can't worry about things I can't control," he said. "All I'm focusing on is doing what I'm paid to do, and that's coach basketball."

Larranaga regales Hurricanes with tales of success

The Washington Times
Nov. 2, 2011
Patrick Stevens

It didn't take long for Miami guard Malcolm Grant to learn something significant about his new coach.

Jim Larranaga can spin a yarn like few others.

"One thing I've learned is that with all his stories, there's always a message to it," Grant said. "He's not just talking to hear himself talk. He's giving us a message for us to be successful in life."

That's Larranaga, an accomplished college basketball coach and a professional raconteur whose meandering tales and winning ways made him a beloved figure at George Mason. An unexpected trip to the Final Four in 2006 cemented his legacy at Mason, and his decision in 2008 to spurn Providence (his alma mater) to remain with the Patriots seemed to ensure he'd finish his career in Fairfax.

Well, until April when Larranaga departed to start over at Miami. His first head coaching gig in a power conference begins Nov. 11 when the Hurricanes play host to Tennessee Tech.

In this photo taken Oct. 16, 2011, Miami head coach Jim Larranaga, center, watches his players during NCAA college basketball practice in Coral Gables, Fla. (AP Photo/Lynne Sladky)

The 62-year-old had job security, an avid fan base and many of the pieces returning from a 27-7 team that reached the NCAA tournament's round of 32. Now, he has the chance to coach in a conference he was plenty familiar with three decades ago as an assistant at Virginia.

"Would my life have been any less significant to my wife or my children or my grandchild-

ren? No," Larranaga said. "But is it cool to be in the ACC? I can you tell this, when I'm talking to my sons during the interview process, both of my sons said 'How cool would it be to be in the ACC? How cool would it be to take your team to Cameron Indoor Stadium and to the Dean Dome?' And my answer was 'It would be really, really cool if we're good.'"

The Hurricanes could thrive this season. Grant and Durand Scott provide the foundation of a deep backcourt that also features Garrius Adams and Rion Brown. Assuming they embrace Larranaga's emphasis on defense, Miami's perimeter seems set.

One big caveat — one listed at 6-foot-10 and 284 pounds — exists. Center Reggie Johnson underwent knee surgery over the summer and isn't expected back until January. Larranaga knows the junior won't be at full strength immediately upon return, so the Hurricanes can expect a transition period as their rotation adjusts during conference play.

At full strength, Larranaga said he believes Miami could "be a top-25 team and earn an at-large bid." That would be major progress for a program with one NCAA berth and no winning conference records in the past decade. Last year, Miami was 21-15 and reached the NIT quarterfinals.

"I think we're going to be a scary team," Grant said. "A lot of people know that we're a good team and we're talented, but we haven't been able to get over the hump. I think Coach L is the key for us to get over the hump."

That would be the latest chapter in Larranaga's own saga, a twist anything but telegraphed after a 14-year run at Mason that included five NCAA tournament appearances and a 273-164 record.

He regaled reporters at the ACC's media day last month with tales of his high school career, how he broke into coaching and even

what prompted his penchant for storytelling (it was a parenting technique). But he wouldn't say his move has reinvigorated him — if only because he believes he was plenty engaged already.

"I'm always enthusiastic," Larranaga said. "I love doing what I do. I love working with the players. I'm very, very happy I have my staff with me. Starting over at a new program, if I had to bring a new staff and try to teach them while I was teaching players, that wouldn't have worked."

Still, it's a different place with a separate set of challenges. His new school, despite its gaudy conference affiliation, drew more than 1,000 fans fewer per game than Mason last season. Turnovers and defensive 3-point field goal percentage are areas of concern.

But if he can make the Hurricanes a mainstay in the top third of the ACC? That would really be a heck of a story.

"He has a plan, he has a goal," Scott said. "I think everybody's just focused and tuned in to listening to him and doing exactly what he wants to do. If all that comes with listening to his stories, then I'm going to listen to stories all day."

Hoops Buzz: 11/2

Inside the U
Nov. 2, 2011
Chris Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- The Miami Hurricanes basketball team held a closed scrimmage against USF over the weekend and will play Florida Southern tomorrow in their lone exhibition game.

On Tuesday, they held their 15th practice of the fall in both the practice facility and the BankUnited Center.

"I'm sure the guys are tired of playing against each other," coach Jim Larranaga said. "They are so familiar with each other. It's not the kind of competition at this stage that you want. You want to try to beat on somebody else. Hopefully Thursday will give us an opportunity to do that."

UM beat USF in the scrimmage as they overmatched USF at times as the Bulls were without some of their top guards and their young players struggled.

UM opens their regular season on Nov. 11 against Tennessee Tech.

"We've made some progress, but we're not where we want to be," Larranaga said. "We have a lot of things still to improve upon before we're going to be able to execute. Whenever you're developing a new system or new style of play, it takes a while for the players to adjust and figure out what the coach wants. The players all want to please the coach, but they've also developed their own style themselves. A coach can't adjust to 13 different styles, but 13 people can adjust to one style. That's what we're trying to do now."

News & Notes

- The first team in white jerseys saw a new lineup from last week as post players Kenny

Kadji and Raphael Akpejiori played alongside each other instead of against one another. Also in white were guards Malcolm Grant, Durand Scott, and Garrius Adams. Having the team's two post players on the court at the same time will depend on matchups. "It really depends on the opponent," Larranaga said. "In basketball matchups are so important on the defensive end, who can guard who. If it's a very big team we might need to use Kenny and Ralph together because our size might be a disadvantage."

- In green was: Shane Larkin, Trey McKinney-Jones, Rion Brown, Erik Swope, and DeQuan Jones.

- G Trey McKinney-Jones came off the bench and scored 19 points in the scrimmage against USF. It was a good showing for McKinney-Jones, a transfer from UMKC, as he's battling for playing time in a crowded backcourt. He's 6-5, but has shown he's capable of being able to play point guard on both ends.

- C Kenny Kadji was been suspended for Thursday's exhibition game for a violation of team expectations. "He did not fulfill one his responsibilities so he will not be playing on Thursday," Larranaga said. Larranaga expects the suspension just to be for one game.

- Kadji is not the only player that will miss Thursday's game as Larranaga expects to only play seven scholarship players. DeQuan Jones (potential NCAA violations), Shane Larkin (waiting on NCAA decision on hardship), Bishop Daniels (left toe), Reggie Johnson (knee), and Julian Gamble (knee, out for season) will be out.

- Larranaga stopped a drill in which players were throwing backdoor lobs for alley-oops. Larranaga expressed his displeasure when one player tried reaching for a one-handed dunk, but the ball slipped out of his hand. Then shortly after another player slammed down a reverse dunk. Larranaga stopped the drill and

told the team they should be concentrating on the results of the play, not whether or not it would show up on a highlight reel.

- G Malcolm Grant was very impressive in a shooting drill in which he had a defender on him and he ran off two low-post screens to get open. McKinney-Jones defended him about as well as he could, but Grant continued to make shots and got open. It is a very tiring drill as the offensive player continues until he gets off five shots. This was a great sign to see as Grant has been limited at times during the fall with a sore knee.

- SG Bishop Daniels (right toe) did not practice as he was in a walking boot, but was in his practice gear and did stretch and shoot with the team in various drills. Daniels was rocking the Kobe V shoes honoring Rice High School, Durand Scott's alma mater in Harlem, N.Y. and basketball powerhouse that was closed this year.

- Freshman PG Shane Larkin still has not received word from the NCAA whether or not he'll receive a hardship that will allow him to play this year. Larkin was expected to receive a decision last week, but the NCAA requested more paperwork before making a decision.

- PF Julian Gamble (torn ACL) has already begun the process of applying for a sixth year of eligibility for next season, but there is no timetable for his decision.

- G Durand Scott has been a key host for the basketball team and recently hosted 2012 C Tonye Jekiri over the weekend. On Monday, Jekiri committed to UM over Clemson, Virginia Tech, and others.

Jones to remain on bench until cleared by NCAA

Miami Herald

Nov. 2, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

University of Miami senior forward DeQuan Jones, who has denied allegations against him in the Nevin Shapiro booster scandal, will remain on the bench indefinitely until he gets clearance from the NCAA, Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga said Tuesday.

“DeQuan will not participate until we are 100 percent notified by the NCAA that he’s eligible,” Larranaga said. “There is no timetable. The NCAA can do what it does. They make decisions on their own time.”

The Hurricanes play their first exhibition Thursday night against Florida Southern and open the regular season Nov. 11 against Tennessee Tech. Jones has been practicing, but Larranaga said they cannot risk putting him in a game until the NCAA clears him because if he is later declared ineligible, the team would have to forfeit games and perhaps face further penalties.

Shapiro claims he gave former UM assistant coach Jake Morris \$10,000 to secure Jones’ commitment, an allegation Jones and his mother vehemently denied.

Jones is one of six players on the roster who will not play Thursday. Starting center Reggie Johnson is injured and not expected back until January. His backup, Julian Gamble, will miss the season after knee surgery. Shane Larkin, a freshman transfer from DePaul, is still awaiting clearance from the NCAA. Freshman guard Bishop Daniels is injured.

And 6-11 center Kenny Kadji, who was expected to start in place of Johnson and Gamble, was suspended for Thursday’s game.

“We had a situation with Kenny Kadji, who didn’t fulfill one of his responsibilities,” Larranaga said. “I’ll use the expression, ‘A violation of team rules’ or, maybe, ‘team expectations’ is more accurate.”

Larranaga replaced Frank Haith in April, and conceded the transition has been harder than he expected. The injuries and uncertain status of Jones and Larkin have added to the challenge.

“Hopefully, people will be patient,” he said. “This is a very young team. The way I see it, these guys are all rookies, learning for the first time a new system. It’s going to take a while. We are not where we need to be.”

PG Larkin Awaits NCAA Decision

Inside the U

Nov. 1, 2011

Chris Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Freshman point guard Shane Larkin is still waiting to hear from the NCAA allowing him to be eligible this season.

Larkin attended DePaul during the summer, but sought a transfer after learning of a medical issue with hopes of returning closer to his Orlando home.

He has applied for a hardship and expected to hear a decision last week from the NCAA, but they requested more paperwork.

“It’s always on your mind, but no matter what you do you have to play hard so I’m out here every day playing hard trying to earn a spot so that if the appeal does go through I might earn playing time,” Larkin said.

Larkin has practiced with the team this fall and has impressed coach Jim Larranaga.

“He’s practicing and practicing very well,” Larranaga said. “We’re very happy to have him.”

Having Larkin (5-11, 160) eligible to play this season is a huge boost to the team as he’s the team’s only true point guard.

“I’m just trying to add something new to the team,” Larkin said.

As a senior at Dr. Phillips he led the Panthers to the Class 6A state title game before falling to Winter Park. He averaged 18.8 points, 6.4 rebounds, 6.3 assists, and 3.6 steals a game as a senior. He was a two-time all-state performer and the 6A player of the year runner up twice. Larkin is the son of former Cincinnati Reds 12-time All-Star Barry Larkin.

Larkin missed two days of practice last week with a cold and is still battling through it, but has practiced this week.

“Things have been good,” Larkin said. “At the beginning it was a little shaky trying to get familiar with everybody, but as the weeks have progressed I’ve gotten familiar with the players.”

His freshman counterpart, Bishop Daniels, has been in and out of practice dealing with a toe injury. The two have developed a strong bond, which goes back to their summer high school days at the CP3 camps.

“Everywhere you go on campus you’ll see me and Bishop walking together,” Larkin said. “Definitely down the road I can see us being a very good backcourt so we’re just developing that chemistry on and off the court.”

Larkin and Daniels are two key pieces to the puzzle as Larranaga aims to improve the Miami basketball program.

“Coach Larranaga is a great coach,” Larkin said. “He took a team from the CAA to the Final Four and beat North Carolina, UConn, all of them so he’s a great coach. Hopefully he can take us there too.”

Miami faces Florida Southern in their lone exhibition game Thursday. As of now, Larkin will not be playing.

Larranaga Assistant Talks Scheduling and More

CaneSport.com
Oct. 31, 2011
by Matt Shodell

Men's basketball coach Jim Larranaga may be in his first year coaching at UM.

But some things have stayed pretty much the same for the 62-year-old head coach - namely his assistants.

One long-time Larranaga veteran is Eric Konkol, who worked under the coach for seven years at George Mason. And he had some of the most rigorous work as soon as the new staff took over.

It's Konkol who is in charge of scheduling, and when he came on board he worked on adding non-conference opponents to this year's schedule, actually delaying the release of the schedule as he finalized games he felt could benefit the program.

"We've got a great conference schedule; we know who we play in the conference so we try to fit the best non-conference schedule we can, and that's to achieve our ultimate goal of getting into the NCAA Tournament and preparing ourselves to win a national championship," Konkol said.

The opponents Konkol added to this year's schedule: Charlotte (on the road Dec. 22), UMass (at home Dec. 3), Tennessee Tech (season-opener at home Nov. 11) and Appalachian State (home Dec. 30).

"Those were games we had to go out and get," Konkol said. "We felt those are all good opponents. Tennessee Tech we feel could be very close to winning their league; Appalachian State will be close to winning their league, will be a good team; UMass and Charlotte are going to be very strong contenders in the A-10. Those are games we want to play, teams that are good."

Moving forward Konkol said his objective every year is "find a good exempt tournament where we can play neutral games at a neutral site against some other good opponents. And then by doing that we have 11 other (non-conference) games to schedule."

It's a different philosophy than that of coach

Frank Haith and his staff. There would always be a few "cupcake" games, as Haith & Co. wanted scrimmage type opportunities to help hone the team.

Under Larranaga, there won't be any of those. The goal now is focused squarely on playing a worthy enough schedule to make into the NCAA Tournament even if the team winds up at .500 in the conference.

"We're always trying to play teams that won't hurt you in the RPI," Konkol said. "We'd rather not play any teams in the 200s in the RPI, certainly not in the 300s. We want to play good opponents. And then you try to balance how many home, how many away, and what type of teams."

Konkol says he's also on the lookout for teams that play similar styles to UM's ACC opponents.

"Style does play some of a factor," Konkol said. "We'd like to play some running teams like a Carolina, would like to play some teams that shoot a lot of threes like a Duke, where they have some flexibility at the 4. We look for some of that. But most of all we want to challenge ourselves on a neutral court because we're going to play in the ACC Tournament, we hope to play deep in March. And we also want to play (tough) games on the road, challenge ourselves in front of somebody's home crowd because we're going to do that plenty of times in the ACC."

An issue for Konkol's scheduling goals moving forward is games that are already under contract. It'll be a couple of years before he really can build the full non-conference schedule he'd like.

"There were games for this year that were already scheduled, games for next year that are already scheduled and a couple the following year that are already contracted that we can't do anything about," Konkol said. "There are games we have to work into our schedule and figure out."

"We want to play some games in the state, have some good national rivalry type games. We also want to play games in our recruiting areas, which is up and down the East Coast. We also consider travel - what's a direct

flight, easy to get to, all those things."

It's not always easy to schedule the teams you want. But helping UM is its location - who doesn't want to come to Miami in November and December?

"Everyone wants to play good games," Konkol said. "(And the location) doesn't hurt either."

Konkol said moving forward "we still have room to do a couple of series (starting next year), would like to do someone in the Big East, SEC, someone on the East Coast where we can be in one of those markets. We've put in a good number of calls, are close to finalizing some exempt event where we can take our team and play three games in four nights, mimic a little of the ACC Tournament. And we have a lot of games returning from this year, so next year there's really not a whole lot of spots to fill."

* What does it feel like being with Larranaga but at a different program?

"It feels kind of like someone who has a business and takes their whole business and moves it to another location," Konkol said. "There's a lot of similarities. We've all been together; as coaches we have 23 years of coaching years with Coach L. The familiarity is great, and it's very helpful in the transition because we didn't have to spend time getting to know each other. It was jumping right in with both feet."

* Konkol could be considered the team's offensive coordinator, working on that side of the ball in practices (Mike Huger, who has been with Larranaga four years, could be considered the defensive coordinator).

So how would Konkol compare UM's athletes to the ones he coached at George Mason?

"There's very strong similarities," Konkol said. "I would say the overall athletic ability is greater here, but George Mason has a very athletic team, too. But we feel this team right here has a chance to be very special."

Barry Jacobs On ACC Coaches

Duke Basketball Report
Oct. 31, 2011
By Barry Jacobs

The preponderance of ACC coaches are relatively new arrivals during these last years of the league's Dozen Decade - the period between the expansion to 12 members in 2004-05 and the impending growth to 14 no later than calendar year 2014.

Eight coaches took up their current posts in the past three seasons, coinciding with a drop from a striking seven African-Americans to one. The survivor is Florida State's Leonard Hamilton, 63, old enough to remember sports in the region in pre-integration days.

The coaching corps has gone from an eastern-oriented group to one dominated by Midwesterners. Where in 2009 Mike Krzyzewski was the only league coach from the Midwest, now seven of 12 come from the nation's mid-section. Three hail from Illinois, more than any other state, and one each from Indiana, Kansas, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Last year three alums coached at their alma maters. Now it's only Roy Williams at North Carolina. In fact, with Gary Williams retired at Maryland, Roy is the only Williams in the ACC, a first since his arrival from Kansas for the '04 season.

Hamilton and Williams are the only coaches who grew up within the league's traditional footprint. Both are North Carolinians.

Miami's hire of Jim Larranaga maintains a three-decade run of at least two coaches from the New York metropolitan area. He joins Virginia Tech's Seth Greenberg. Last season there were four coaches spawned in the New York area - Greenberg, Gary Williams (from New Jersey), Miami's Frank Haith, and Georgia Tech's Paul Hewitt. Haith, like Michael Jordan, was born in a New York borough but raised in North Carolina.

Tony Bennett, hired at UVa for the 2009-10 season, remains the youngest coach in the league at 42. Clemson's Brad Brownell is a close second. Krzyzewski, 65 before season's end, is the oldest.

In fact, while coaching turnover has been pronounced, the chronological profile of those on the sidelines remains remarkably stable. It is, however, trending modestly younger.

The average age of the 2012 contingent is 52.8. The average age in 2011 was 53.1. The average in 2010 was 53.7.

Half of the coaches celebrate birthdays during the 2012 season, but none play games on those dates. Last year both Brownell and Krzyzewski coached and won games on their respective birthdays.

ACC Coaching Roster For 2011-12 Men's Season

COACH	BIRTHDATE	AGE	HOME STATE	SEASONS AT CURRENT POST
Steve Donahue, BC	May 21, 1962	49	Pennsylvania	2
Brad Brownell, C	November 15, 1968	42	Indiana	2
Mike Krzyzewski, D	February 13, 1947	64	Illinois	32
Leonard Hamilton, FS	August 4, 1948	63	North Carolina	10
Brian Gregory, GT	December 15, 1966	44	Illinois	1
Mark Turgeon, M	February 5, 1965	46	Kansas	1
Jim Larranaga, Mi	October 2, 1949	62	New York	1
Roy Williams, NC	August 1, 1950	61	North Carolina	9
Mark Gottfried, NS	January 20, 1964	47	Ohio	1
Tony Bennett, V	June 1, 1969	42	Wisconsin	3
Seth Greenberg, VT	April 18, 1956	55	New York	8*
Jeff Bzdelik, WF	December 1, 1952	58	Illinois	2

* One previous season at school while member of Big East.

NOTE: Age entering 2011-12 season.

Hoops Recruiting: UM wants “State of Miami”

CaneSport.com
Oct. 30, 2011
by Matt Shodell

The men’s basketball program has taken to bringing official and unofficial visitors to UM football games.

And coaches say they’re trying to take a page from former football coach Howard Schnellenberger’s book: Creating a “State of Miami.”

Chris Caputo, whose primary responsibilities include recruiting and scouting the opposition, says UM plans to cast a recruiting net from Jacksonville down, searching for top talent that wants to come to Miami.

“Most people want to go four hours from where they live, for the most part,” Caputo said. “So the State of Florida has to be the first place we look. Just like years ago with Schnellenberger, it has to be the State of Miami, up to Jacksonville, through Tampa and Fort Myers over to Broward, Dade and Palm Beach. We have to be certain we’re recruiting all the best players in those areas.”

The team will also try and cherry pick top prospects from Atlanta (“Miami’s had success in Georgia, which is a neighboring state - there’s a lot of talent in the Atlanta area and similarities between the Atlanta metro area and Miami metro area,” Caputo said), North Carolina and South Carolina (“they’re good because of the ACC, the amount of times their kids get back to play in front of family”), Virginia and Maryland (“because of our relationships there because of the time we spent there”) and New York (“Miami’s had success there, always say ‘This is like the sixth borough.’ I’m from New York; coach Larranaga is from New York”).

“And we’re willing to go to other places to recruit guys as we did at George Mason - we had guys from Florida, Texas, Memphis, Charlotte. We’re not afraid to do that, but I think we also are going to make a commitment to recruit the State of Florida because we feel there are guys like Brandon Knight that are No. 1 rated, but also guys that have been under-recruited, hidden that are good.”

Caputo, in his 10th season on coach Jim Larranaga’s staff, says the overall recruiting philosophy won’t change much for these coaches despite moving from George Mason and the CAA to Miami and the ACC.

With one exception: Center.

“The only thing that’s different is the size in the front court (in the ACC) - there’s a little bit more of a need defensively to match up with some of the size,” Caputo said. “Like in the CAA, for many years centers in the league were 6-6, 6-7 - they could pass, shoot, score around the basket.”

Other than looking for bigger bodies down low, the team will continue to seek athletic ball handlers who can penetrate and shoot.

And Caputo sees players similar to the ones he’s seeking already on Miami’s roster. He praised coach Frank Haith’s staff for putting together a team that these new coaches feel can reach great heights.

“You look at our team, and I would say we have arguably top four, five or six talent in the league at this point,” Caputo said. “We were picked to finish fifth in the league (this preseason), and they don’t know anything about us as coaches. So those guys were good in identifying who was good and who they can get, and that’s important.”

UM landed its first commitment for the Class of 2012 earlier this month in shooting guard Melvin Johnson, who is from New York. Helping sell Johnson: attending UM’s football game that weekend.

“Things like that - you’re trying to put your best foot forward,” Caputo said.

Coaches can’t comment on specific recruits, but Caputo spoke about what the Canes sell prospects on.

“You sell playing time, the type of institution we are - the City of Miami, the weather,” Caputo said. “All those things separate us, make us different than the places we’re recruiting against.”

Caputo says he expects to have a better success at attracting so-called “national names” now that the new coaches can sell UM and the ACC.

“At the University of Miami you should be able to at least engage in some conversation with anyone in the country because you have a great institution, a great city, great league,” Caputo said. “Miami is a national name.”

* Caputo says he begins following potential prospects starting their freshman year of high school, continuing to keep tabs on them as their careers progress and getting in touch with them when allowed by NCAA rules.

And keeping in regular contact with high school coaches also plays a major role for the coaches. The UM sports information department says hoops coaches send out approximately 1,000 e-mails to high school coaches every day - typically a motivational quote, an offensive set or different ways to do things.

To help connect with area coaches, Caputo says a coaching clinic is in the works that high school coaches will be able to attend.

“It’s a key thing to build a groundswell amongst the people in the area, have them feeling good about our access as far as going to practice, feeling they can come over, have their guys come over,” Caputo said.

* The system in place for giving a scholarship offer?

A coach will watch a prospect live, and if he feels that player is worthy of a scholarship then Larranaga will also watch the recruit and meet with him before an offer goes out.

Caputo gave a prime example of how this staff works together: “We recruited Luke Hancock at George Mason,” Caputo said. “He was one of our best players. But he had no scholarship offers coming out of high school, was a Division III recruit. He goes to Hargrave Military Academy, pays his own way. Coach (Mike) Huger goes down there to see someone else, says ‘I like this Hancock guy, I’m going to bring coach (Larranaga) down next week.’ So him and coach went down and the kid doesn’t play quite good enough. Coach says ‘I like you, just didn’t see enough today - I can’t offer you.’ So then Eric (Konkol) and I go down the next week and we watch him for five minutes and it’s ‘Man, this guy is really good.’ We called back to coach, said ‘Hey, I think you should offer him.’ So we offered him. We had the No. 1 rated non-BCS recruiting class in the country, and he’s the sixth heralded guy in that six-man class and turns out to be the best in the group, was an all-conference player by his sophomore year (note that Hancock wound up transferring to Louisville after Larranaga and the staff left George Mason).”

* Of his role breaking down film and scouting opponents, Caputo said, “As the season starts I’m watching us less than the other (coaches) and watching the opponents much, much more than maybe they are.”

Hurricanes basketball coach wants better shot selection

Miami Herald
Oct. 28, 2011
By Michelle Kaufman

Jim Larranaga has six days to get his University of Miami men’s basketball team ready for its Nov. 3 exhibition and two weeks to prepare for the season opener against Tennessee Tech. In that time, the new coach is giving his players a crash course in shot selection and point guard play.

He is not satisfied with what he has seen so far.

“At this stage of their career, there’s a certain expectation of what they should know and be able to do,” Larranaga said. “But one of the most difficult things to teach is shot selection, so we’re trying to work on that area. We’re going through a transition period where it’s very difficult for players to understand what I’m asking them to do. It’s not their fault. It’s very different from what they’re used to. While they’re making the transition, it’s like we take one step forward and two steps back.”

He urges players not to shoot every time they’re open, as is their tendency, but rather when they can take a high-percentage shot. He also demands his point guards play more like quarterbacks. He described Malcolm Grant and Durand Scott as “high octane,” (Grant made 84 three-point shots in five minutes at a recent practice) but said they need to create more offense for teammates.

“Malcolm is a tremendous three-point shooter, don’t know if I’ve ever coached anybody who can shoot the ball better from that range,” he said. “Durand is a very crafty player, very good going to basket. He can hit threes, pull-up jumpers, layups. But I didn’t describe either one as point guards who create shots for other people. Offense, just like in football, there’s a play every time down the field. You huddle, call a play, and the quarterback orchestrates. Sometimes he hands off to

a running back, sometimes he runs it himself, sometimes he passes.”

Larranaga said UM shouldn’t be judged on its nonconference record. “I am taking over a program that won 21 games, so, there’s a certain amount of physical talent here. But we finished ninth in the [Atlantic Coast Conference]. I’m not measuring success on wins and losses. If we’re not learning how to play better and better, we’ll struggle to finish top 4-5-6 in the ACC. Our goal is to position ourselves for an at-large [NCAA Tournament] bid, and right now we’re not showing capability of doing that.”

Barry Jacobs On Jim Larranaga And Defending The Three

Duke Basketball Report
Oct. 28, 2011
Barry Jacobs

Jim Larranaga is a firm believer in statistical analysis as a tool to improve performance.

The new Miami men's coach used to devour a stat-oriented annual, The Fan's Guide to ACC Basketball, even when he was no longer coaching in the league. Each year, upon seeing the author at some basketball event the loquacious Larranaga would share a new stat, or inquire about a possible area of analysis.

That interest remains a key component of the 62-year-old's approach to understanding and coaching the game.

Not surprisingly, Larranaga had a quick answer when asked what an initial perusal of Miami's 2011 stats had revealed.

"We begin first with the areas that need the most attention, and there's two that were very, very glaring," he said. (We'll leave the second for another time.) "The first is our defensive field goal percentage from three. That needs to change.

"We were one of the bottom-third in the country in defending the 3-point shot. You can't win at this level – because the 3-pointer is such a weapon for everybody – if you can't hold an opponent to 30 percent or below. So our goal is to hold our opponents to 30 percent or below from 3-point range."

The Hurricanes were among five ACC squads that saw opponents hit better than a third of their 3-pointers in 2011, a conversion rate that made use of the shot a winning offensive strategy. The Canes allowed 35.4 percent shooting on threes, 226th in Division I.

Worst in the ACC was Georgia Tech, which ranked 320th among DI teams by allowing a 37.9 percent conversion rate. That was weak-

est by a league team in four years, since Miami opponents made 38.3 percent on threes in 2007, and the second-worst in the past decade.

As for Larranaga's goal of holding Miami opponents to 30 percent conversion, good luck.

In the quarter-century since the shot has been in effect throughout college basketball only 10 ACC squads managed to hold opponents under 30 percent from beyond the arc.

That's 10 out of 240 teams competing in the ACC from 1987 through 2011, 4.2 percent. Interestingly, four of the 10 best competed in 2010, led by Duke, which set the conference standard by holding opponents to 28.3 percent accuracy on threes.

Last year's ACC leader in 3-point field goal percentage defense was Florida State at 30.6 percent. Overall, FSU led the nation in suppressing opponents' shooting accuracy (.363).

Nothing like ambitious goals, Coach L.

What is Miami's Problem?

Rush the Court
Oct. 28, 2011

Jim Larranaga is facing a harsh reality check. At George Mason, the coach was adored. The school's students, band, and fans are a lively bunch who really love basketball, and a great deal of credit for that goes to Larranaga for building up the school's program. At the University of Miami, however, things are different. Well, in Miami, things are different.

As Larranaga has pointed out several times in the preseason, Miami was the focal point of one of the most publicized basketball seasons in recent history: The debut of LeBron James and Chris Bosh with Dwyane Wade's Miami Heat. With the NBA players currently locked out and the professional season in jeopardy of partial or even full cancellation, assuming that Miami's passion (?) for basketball would transfer to the Hurricanes seems like a fairly reasonable idea. In the right light, it seems reasonable when Larranaga says things like:

"I heard that Miami loves star power, that if stars come and sit courtside then fans will think it's a worthwhile event and show up, so we're reaching out to those guys, and we'll be inviting LeBron and Dwyane Wade to our games," said Larranaga.

Given James' recent deal to dress the university's team with his branded Nike products (along with Kentucky and Ohio State's teams), including some really cool-looking University of Miami customized LeBron 9Ds, this seems like something that is well within the realm of possibility. So when Larranaga hosted his first Miami Madness, he must have been pleased to see a number of NBA players in attendance. When he saw who specifically showed up, he must have been at least a little crestfallen. James Posey, Jarrett Jack, Janero Pargo, and Serge Ibaka are all fine players (just kidding about Pargo), but they aren't exactly the same caliber of basketball star as

James or Wade. In general, Larranaga must have been disappointed with the turnout as the assembled Miami fans struggled to even fill up the first several rows around the court.

If he was disappointed, however, he didn't show it. The video of the coach trying to pump up an enthusiastic, but ultra-small crowd is disheartening. He's trying so hard and getting so little in return. What's the deal, Miami? Your team is stocked with some of the best players in the ACC and you can't be bothered to even show up? I know that the NCAA investigation is hanging over Hurricane athletics like a dark, ominous, um, tropical storm. This problem isn't new though. The basketball program seems to have a mortal lock on the lowest attendance numbers in the ACC. While Larranaga seems to think that if he can build the program up like he built up George Mason, the people will come, I'm skeptical. Even after assembling its superstar triumvirate, the Miami Heat couldn't get fans to arrive to games on time if they even arrived at all. This is an organization that won a championship five years ago and played for a championship last season. Arguably the two best players on the NBA are on the same team, and the Heat has to teach the city how to "Fan Up." That's embarrassing

I feel bad for Larranaga. He is a fine coach leading a fine team. I guess it's not surprising that people who choose to live and go to school in Miami are fair-weather fans, but, seriously: The sun is shining on this basketball squad. This team deserves to be loved by the university's students and the wider south Florida community. So far, no one seems to be biting. That's a real shame, and you can't help but hope that things change in Coral Gables. Larranaga and his unflagging enthusiasm might make him just the man for the job.

Hoops Buzz: 10/27

Inside the U
Oct. 26, 2011
Chris Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- The Miami Hurricanes basketball team held a 30-minute scrimmage during Wednesday's practice.

Practice began shortly before 4:00 and ended at 6:15. The practice consisted of a number of drills before and after the scrimmage. At times the practice was a bit shaky, but coach Jim Larranaga thought it went better than Tuesday's practice.

"Well we didn't practice yesterday," Larranaga joked. "It was much better than yesterday. We're inconsistent. That's pretty typical right now. I'm not surprised by it, I'm not disappointed in it. Would I like to be further along? Sure. It is what it is. The coaches know, we've been here before. It's going to take some time and we have to be patient."

Larranaga says the team still is learning the new system, which features a higher intensity man-to-man defense and an offense that focuses on ball movement and screens as opposed to a wide-open system under former coach Frank Haith.

"They don't (know our system)," he said. "If you were measuring in a percentage, we have 10 percent in, 90 percent still has to be learned, that's a lot. ... We may not get to 100 percent this year. In fact in all likelihood we won't because there's too much for the players to digest."

He compared the beginning stages of the players learning the system to a youngster learning how to tie a shoe.

"Do you remember when you had to tie your shoe?" Larranaga asked. "When you go to tie your shoe now you don't have to think about it. You just tie it and it gets done really well. But when you first were starting to learn to tie your shoe your parents or teacher—one lace over another, then you go underneath, then you make a bow, then you wrap one lace around the bow and pull it tight. For a kid just learning that's very complicated and you have to think about it a lot and you can't do it very fast. After you've done it a thousand times you don't even think about it again. You don't do it for a week or a month if a shoelace

is in front of you can still tie it. We're still in the learning of how to tie our shoes. That's the stage we're in, there's a lot of thinking."

News & Notes

- The first unit in white jerseys were: Malcolm Grant, Durand Scott, Garrius Adams, Erik Swoope, and Raphael Akpejiori.

- The second unit in green jerseys were: Trey McKinney-Jones, Garrius Adams, Bishop Daniels, DeQuan Jones, Kenny Kadji, Ryan Quiglar, and Justin Heller.

- In the 30-minute scrimmage, there were three different segments of games to nine points with the winning team needing to make a free-throw to seal the victory. The white team won all three segments by a combined score of 32-22. Swoope led them in scoring with nine points. Kadji led the green team with 11.

- C Kenny Kadji showed good footwork in the low post as he has an up-and-under move he feels comfortable. He also likes to step out and shoot the 20-footer. "I'm learning more and more about Kenny as an offensive player," Larranaga said.. Kenny is very, very skilled. He's got some very good skills around the basket, but he's also a very good perimeter shooter. He may be a better facing player than a back to the basket. He may be better off with Reggie (Johnson) coming back or he may be better playing with Raphael (Akpejiori) than playing against him, that I don't know yet."

- PF Raphael Akpejiori had a rough practice, but has made strides with his development and is expected to be a key player this year. Following practice, Larranaga pulled Akpejiori aside for a talk. "I think he's improved tremendously from where he was a month ago to where he is today," Larranaga said. "What we talked about with him is trying to limit his scope of what he's looking for. Sometimes players try to do too much. I told him I don't want him being a playmaker, don't want him making difficult passes, or putting the ball on the ground and making plays for other guys. What we need him to do is defend, rebound, and score on the low block."

- Freshman PG Shane Larkin missed the last two days of practice due to an illness. Larkin expects to hear from the NCAA today whether or not he'll receive a hardship that would al-

low him to play this year as opposed to sitting out after transferring from DePaul.

- PG Trey McKinney-Jones is proving to be a solid player, he doesn't make many mistakes and is showing he's capable of handling the ball. Malcolm Grant and Durand Scott have shared the point guard responsibilities in practices thus far and McKinney-Jones is looking to be a capable back-up especially if Larkin does not receive the hardship. Larranaga on McKinney-Jones: "I think he's a terrific player in drills and I think he's getting more and more comfortable in full-court action. He's still having to think too much. Players don't become real comfortable especially on offense until they can quit thinking."

- Freshman SG Bishop Daniels re-aggravated his right toe early in practice and was relegated to riding the exercise bike the rest of practice. He originally sprained the toe in July and has a tough time of practicing more than a few days in a row on it before it flares up. "Right now he hasn't been healthy long enough to know how much he can help us, but when he has practiced he has practice well," Larranaga said.

- In regards to the team's man-to-man defense they will employ, Larranaga said there's seven different ways they will use it, which is still an adjustment although the guys did do well in a deny/help drill in which they really did a good job being aggressive and playing with energy throughout the drill—something not always seen in the past. "All of those things you think guys just know, they don't," Larranaga said in regards to the players' way of playing defense. "They have their own way of doing it so they think it's the right way, but that may not be our way of doing it."

- UM will be hosting 2012 C Tonye Jekiri on an official visit on Thursday. Currently, Larranaga has one recruit committed to the program—2012 SG Melvin Johnson. "When you take over a new program the entire staff is working very, very hard to beat the bushes and find the right prospects for us," Larranaga said. "There's enough good players out there for everybody to have a good team, you just have to find the players that fit your program."

- The team will have their lone exhibition game on Nov. 3 at 7:00 against Florida Southern.

Hoops Buzz: 10/26

Inside the U
Oct. 26, 2011
David Lake

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- The University of Miami men's basketball team is eight days away from their exhibition game against Florida Southern.

The Hurricanes have been practicing for 12 days now and coach Jim Larranaga is learning his new personnel at Miami while the players are adjusting to new schemes and philosophies.

News & Notes

- The first unit consisted of PG Malcolm Grant, SG Durand Scott, SF Garrius Adams, PF DeQuan Jones, and C Kenny Kadji. The second unit was PG Trey McKinney-Jones, SG Bishop Daniels, SF Rion Brown, PF Erik Swoope, and C Raphael Akpejiori.

- The two squads played two games to 21 with the teams getting two and three points for those shots, one point for rebounds, and negative one point for turnovers. The first unit won the first game, 24-18, with equal scoring from the entire team. The second unit was led by Rion Brown's steady scoring. The second game was won by the first unit as well, 22-20, with great play by Malcolm Grant. The second unit was led by Bishop Daniels in that second game.

- Following Tuesday's practice, coach Jim Larranaga expressed some frustrations with his team's shot selection. Last year's offense consisted of a high volume of three point shots and while Larranaga doesn't mind his team shooting threes, he wants the shots to be good shots. "Shot selection is very important and you have to know your own strengths and weaknesses, where you shoot well from and what shots you need to pass up," Larranaga said. "Even if you are open, that doesn't mean it is a good shot. Every player has shots that he makes at a higher rate than other shots. Some times you think you should shoot it because you are open, but in actuality you should be a little more patient and get the shot for someone else who can make the three or get yourself a shot that you can make at a higher rate."

- Speaking of improving shot selection, Larranaga got on Malcolm Grant early in the team's first scrimmage situation about taking a three-pointer early in the shot clock without working the possession with some passes. From that point on, Grant did a much better job of involving his teammates by making sharp passes and taking smarter shots.

- While the offense this year will be uptempo and feature a heavy dose of three point shooting under coach Larranaga, it appears the scheme will be much more structured than what Miami ran last year, which appeared at times to be a lot of freelancing. "There is way more ball movement and a lot of motion," Malcolm Grant said. "It is way more disciplined. Coach got on me today even though I was wide open, but he wants more ball movement and for everybody to touch the ball and get a good shot. Last year we were in the habit of if we were open we would shoot it right away, but now we are being more patient."

- Grant has impressed Larranaga with his three-point shooting ability. Last year Grant shot 43-percent from three and made nearly three threes a game. "I don't know if I have ever coached anybody who can shoot the ball better than him from three-point range," Larranaga said.

- While Grant is a great shooter, he has worked hard this offseason to improve other parts of his game. "I hate being referred to as just a shooter," Grant said. "I can drive the ball and dish and shoot those floaters. I have really concentrated on getting to the hole and shooting over 40-percent on field goals and improving my assist-to-turnover ratio."

- Larranaga has been impressed with Durand Scott's ability to get to the rim and shot creating ability. "Durand is a very crafty player that is good at getting to the basket and making shots," Larranaga said. "He can hit threes, pull up jumpers, get to the foul line, and make some lay-ups."

- In the past, Larranaga has had three of his guards handle point guard responsibilities. He would like to see Grant and Scott fill that role, but they will need to show more of an ability to initiate the offense. "Notice I didn't describe either [Grant or Scott] as point guards who can create shots for other people," Larranaga said. "They are good at scoring the ball, but like in football the quarterback calls the play and he orchestrates. He is delivering the ball to various people, including himself."

- C Kenny Kadji has a nice scoring touch around the basket, but it was clear at practice Larranaga is looking for him to have more of a physical presence on defense and with his rebounding. There were multiple times during Tuesday's practice when Larranaga worked with Kadji one-on-one. Kadji has good athleticism, but Miami will need him

to play with great energy this year.

- Backup C Raphael Akpejiori is extremely athletic and was the best rebounding during Tuesday's practice. Akpejiori is still refining his skills on offense and is learning his rotations on defense, but his athleticism and energy will make him a valuable rebounder and piece off the bench. "Raphael is someone that plays extremely hard. He is really in the beginning stages of learning how to score."

- With DeQuan Jones (6-8, 221) and Erik Swoope (6-6, 220) both playing as undersized power forwards right now, Kadji and Akpejiori must have a big presence on defense and rebounding situations. "We would like [the centers] to do three things. One: rebound the ball because they are the biggest guys on the team. Two: defend the other team's big men. Three: give us an inside presence so that if they do get the ball inside they can give us some points. I am not saying they have to average double figures, but they have to give us some kind of presence so teams can't just gang up on our guards."

- Jones has been a small forward throughout his UM career, but with the injuries to Reggie Johnson and Julian Gamble, he is learning to adjust to the power forward spot. "I think it is a work in progress," Larranaga said of Jones. "There are some days where he is very active and scoring a lot of buckets and getting rebounds, but for him and with everybody else there hasn't been a consistency there as to how they are going to score and produce points."

- One big difference between coach Larranaga's practices to coach Frank Haith's practices at UM is that Larranaga is much more hands on from drill to drill. Haith would often defer to his assistants during practices, while Larranaga is constantly teaching. "I think coach L harps on all the little things because he knows what it takes to win and what it takes to be successful," Grant said.

- C Reggie Johnson has lost 20 pounds since last season even though he is rehabbing from an ACL injury he sustained in the offseason. Johnson is down to 284 pounds and credits a lot of that weight loss to a new workout regimen of swimming and boxing. Johnson's goal is to eventually get down to 275 pounds and he believes once he is back to playing full court basketball he will get there. Johnson is on track to return some time at the beginning of ACC play in January.

Luke Winn's Top 16 Shooters - No. 6 Malcolm Grant

Sports Illustrated.com
October 25, 2011
Luke Winn

Malcolm Grant

Sr., Miami

Grant was the focal point of every Miami opponent's game plan, yet managed to make 94 of 222 three-point attempts (42.3 percent) as a junior, as well as make teams pay for fouling him, shooting 85.3 percent from the stripe.

Larranaga wants to make Hurricane hoops popular

AP
October 25, 2011

CORAL GABLES, Fla. (AP) - The Miami Hurricanes held their version of Midnight Madness one recent evening at 8 p.m., inviting fans to watch practice at no charge and check out this season's team under new coach Jim Larranaga.

Why 8 p.m.?

"We were afraid if we did it at midnight, no one would show up," Larranaga said.

The former George Mason coach is under no illusions about the challenge he has accepted. Hurricanes basketball is a tough sell, even when it's free.

South Florida was flush with hoops fever a year ago, thanks to LeBron James and the Miami Heat, but the mania didn't spread to the Hurricanes. Their program, perennially overshadowed by professional sports, again finished last in the Atlantic Coast Conference in home attendance, averaging 4,763 fans.

Larranaga is intent on making college basketball in Miami more popular - and successful.

"We can build a championship-caliber program here," he said.

Coach Frank Haith struggled in vain for seven seasons to develop a winner, and when he departed in April for Missouri, the Hurricanes came up with a surprising successor in Larranaga.

After 14 seasons at George Mason, the 62-year-old Larranaga said he decided to make the change because of the chance to coach in the ACC. Another lure was that three of Larranaga's siblings live in Florida.

"I think this is where he wanted to be," junior guard Durand Scott said. "It feels like he's home. This is the perfect place for him."

Larranaga led George Mason to five NCAA tournament berths, including an improbable run to the Final Four in 2006. He inherited considerable fan apathy when he took over that program, and helped double attendance.

Now he wants to fill up the Hurricanes' 7,200-seat on-campus arena. Larranaga figures his timing is good given the NBA labor dispute.

"Thanks to the excitement of LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh, here in Miami now there's tremendous interest in basketball," Larranaga said. "With the lockout, hopefully NBA fans will turn to the Miami Hurricanes to get their basketball fix."

That sounds good to Larranaga's players.

"I go to Publix down the street," senior swingman DeQuan Jones said, "and there's one guy who sees me every day and says, 'You know, y'all are going to be our version of the Miami Heat until the lockout is over.' He's joking, but we take it seriously."

The Hurricanes went 43-69 in the ACC under Haith, but they're picked for a first-division finish this season. That's a reflection of Larranaga's reputation, because a year ago the Hurricanes were a disappointing 21-15 overall and 6-10 in the league. And their best player, center Reggie Johnson, is expected to be sidelined until January recovering from right knee surgery.

The Hurricanes do return their top scorers, guards Malcolm Grant (14.8 points per game) and Scott (13.6). Newcomers include redshirt sophomore center Kenny Kadji, a Florida Gators transfer, and freshman guard Shane Larkin, son of former All-Star shortstop Barry Larkin.

Also on the roster - for now, at least - is Jones, a part-time starter last season implicated in the athletic department scandal that prompted an NCAA investigation.

Larranaga said that he was unaware of the investigation when he became coach, and that the outcome is beyond his control.

"I'm focused on just practicing and not worrying about anything or discussing anything about the investigation," he said. "That's someone else's responsibilities."

Instead, he's intent on drumming up interest in his program. Larranaga said he and his staff send out daily emails to a thousand high school coaches to keep them informed about the Hurricanes. In recent months, the Miami staff held a free clinic for prep coaches, a four-week camp for youngsters, another camp for elite prep players and a senior league for players 35 and older.

On Sunday afternoons, Hurricanes players have begun coaching kids in kindergarten through sixth grade.

"We're hoping those youngsters will become fans of our program and encourage their parents to bring them to games," Larranaga said. "We're hoping their parents will then bring their friends, and we'll build a grass-roots network of fans."

It'll take time. There was only a modest turnout at Midnight Madness - or rather 8 p.m. Madness. Larranaga joked that the largest crowd he has seen in the team's arena was for the Latin Music Awards.

"People here come to see our opponents when North Carolina and Duke are in town," he said. "But you want people to come watch you."

Enthusiasm reigns for men's, women's hoops

CaneSport.com
October 22, 2011
by Jim Martz

Their enthusiasm is infectious. If Jim Larranaga and Katie Meier can't get you fired up over University of Miami basketball, then you must not have a pulse.

They have Jimmy Johnson and Sam Jankovich type of enthusiasm. Doubled. Really.

"It's great ... to be ... a Miami Hurricane!" Meier hollered over and over as she waived her arms and rushed onto the court at the beginning of Miami Madness Thursday night at the Bank United Center.

Maybe basketball will finally matter at UM.

Oh, it has at times, such as when Ferne Labati took the women's team to the NCAA East Regional in 1992 and Leonard Hamilton guided the men's team to the Sweet 16 in 2000.

But I mean really matter. And we may be on the threshold of that.

Meier, the national women's Coach of the Year last season, returns the heart of her ACC co-championship team and goes into this season as the conference favorite and a national ranking as high as the top five.

Larranaga, the new men's coach who sounds like Dick Vitale, is the first coach in the program's history to have taken a team to the Final Four (at George Mason in 2006). His Hurricanes are picked by the media to finish fifth in the ACC, a lofty ranking that surely reflects the respect he has earned and the fact that 11 of 12 players return from last year's ninth place team.

"I think Miami has become a basketball school!" Meier shouted to the couple thousand fans who attended the student-oriented Miami Madness.

Imagine that. As someone who was born in Indiana and raised on Hoosier Hysteria, I'm eager for the start of the season. Hurricane Nation should be excited, too.

If you aren't yet, just give Meier and Larranaga time.

"You've got two fun-loving personalities in Jim and myself," Meier said, "and I think we can really build on it."

Meier has embraced the arrival of Larranaga, and Coach L embraces what Meier is accomplishing and he hopes to duplicate it.

"He's great," Meier said. "He's been great for Miami and he's doing so much in the community. He's rallying the troops and he's in the dorms and at the fraternities and he's trying to get people involved. We welcome that. We want fans and we've got to do our part as well."

Larranaga about Meier: "She's awesome. She's done already what our coaching staff needs to do. She's built a championship caliber team, she's already won an ACC title, she's already ranked in the top five or 10 teams in the country and she's done it through a lot of hard work. They're very dedicated, positive and warm and friendly with the community and student body and that's what we're trying to do."

Meier made a couple of bold predictions to the fans Thursday night.

"I think there's a shot we might bring home two ACC championships," she said.

The women clearly have a shot at making that happen. The men are a long shot in a confer-

ence that features North Carolina, a potential Final Four team, and Duke, invariably a threat to make a deep run in March Madness.

"He's going to get this place full," Meier added.

That really could come true in a fickle town where college basketball is a tough sell, and for more than just the North Carolina game on Feb. 15.

Larranaga is even talking of filling the Bank United Center for Miami Madness.

"What we want in the next Miami Madness is to have the place packed from the first row to the top of the rafters," he said.

I said to coach L that I believe the enthusiasm he and Meier have is infectious, and I wonder if it's already having an effect in the community.

"I hope it is," he said. "My joy is in watching others have fun, whether it's my own basketball team or the students. This past Sunday a little boy in the sixth grade made a game-winning shot, 120 other kids were watching him and probably 100 parents were watching when he made that shot.

"I know that little boy will never forget that for the rest of his life. It was a life-long experience, and that kind of joy is what we want to bring to the community, where they feel connected to the UM basketball programs."

Are you ready for some basketball?

NBA players among fans watching Hurricanes 'Miami Madness'

Miami Herald
Oct. 20, 2011
By Michelle Kaufman

A handful of locked-out NBA players had some free time on their hands, so they showed up at the BankUnited Center along with a few thousand University of Miami basketball fans Thursday night for Miami Madness, the Hurricanes' basketball season preview event.

Indiana Pacers forward James Posey, who still has a house in Miami from his Heat days, was among the players courtside for the festivities. Others included Hornets guard Jarrett Jack, Bulls guard Jannero Pargo, Cavs forward Christian Eyenga, Thunder power forward Serge Ibaka and former Bulls guard Jay Williams. They have been working out at UM, and new Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga invited them to stay for the fun.

"We have a group of guys working out here in Miami, motivating each other to stay in shape for whenever this thing gets worked out," Posey said of the lockout. "We still have guys who love the game and are hungry for the game, and we're working hard. I miss being in camp, but it is what it is, and all we can do is stay in shape and wait."

The players have been working out under the direction of Irv Roland, a former NBA trainer who recently moved to Miami and started Blueprint Basketball Training Camp in conjunction with strength and conditioning companies Legacy Fit and Miami Flex.

"I heard that Miami loves star power, that if stars come and sit courtside then fans will think it's a worthwhile event and show up, so we're reaching out to those guys, and we'll be inviting LeBron [James] and Dwyane Wade to our games," said Larranaga, who joked that the biggest crowd he has seen at the BUC since his arrival was for the Latin Music Awards. "But the most important thing is

to build the kind of team everybody wants to watch. People here come to see our opponents when Carolina and Duke are in town, but you want people to come watch you."

He went on to praise UM women's coach Katie Meier, whose team is generating quite a bit of national buzz. The Hurricanes return every player from last year's 28-5 team and were picked to finish as high as fourth and fifth in some national preseason polls. This week, they were selected to win the ACC title, ahead of Duke.

Dynamic duo Shenise "Moe-Moe" Johnson and Riquna "Bay-Bay" Williams both were named to the All-ACC Preseason First team, and Johnson was selected to repeat as ACC Player of the Year. Shawnice "Pepper" Wilson, a 6-6 Pitt transfer, will add needed size in the paint.

"Katie's done already what our coaching staff is trying to do," Larranaga said. "She built a championship caliber team, won an ACC title, and they are ranked in the Top 5-10 in the country. It came from hard work. Her staff is very dedicated, passionate, and has great energy with the student body. That's what we're trying to do."

Meier described the first-place ACC prediction as "pretty cool" and went on to say: "We were picked 12th and then 11th and 8th, and you wake up one morning and find out people think you're the best team in one of the nation's best conferences. It signifies a lot of hard work. But we are staying humble because we realize it's preseason and it doesn't really mean much."

Meier and the equally energetic "Coach L," as Larranaga is known, coached against each other Thursday night.

Each had a team made up of men's players, women's players and fans. For the record, Meier's team won.

Miami hoops looks to enter ACC's upper echelon

Sporting News
Oct. 20, 2011
by **Barry Reeves**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Durand Scott is happy, just happy to be talking basketball. Anything but talking about the NCAA investigation that has consumed the University of Miami athletics department for months.

"It's been a lot more football than basketball," Scott said Wednesday during the ACC media days. "That said, there is nothing you can really do about it. We've just moved on and hope for the best."

"We just try to be positive and look forward."

Scott, a junior guard, is excited about the challenge of lifting the Hurricanes back up the ACC standing after a 6-10 conference record last year. The Hurricanes are aiming for No. 1 but would be happy to land in No. 3 in the league, the sweet spot behind North Carolina and Duke.

The team's top three scorers -- Scott, guard Malcolm Grant and center Reggie Johnson -- return. Johnson, out until January while rehabbing an offseason knee injury, should return early in the ACC season and make an impact. "Nobody's working harder than Reggie," Scott said.

Johnson (6-10, 300) is the big body who could balance the floor and clear room for Grant and Scott. North Carolina big man John Henson says Johnson is the toughest guy in the league to defend.

"He's just so big and powerful; he's hard to move off the block," Henson said.

The recovery of Johnson and the integration into new coach Jim Larranaga's system, not the NCAA investigation, are top of mind for the Hurricanes.

"Coach L is the best thing to happen to this program," Scott said. "He's taught us how to do things the proper way, all things, from tying our shoe laces to form on our jump shots. Nothing gets by Coach L."

New coaches abound in the ACC

Freedom News Service
Oct. 20, 2011

At the Miami table, senior guard Malcolm Grant said the Hurricanes already have meshed well with the 62-year-old Larranaga, despite obvious gaps in age and pop culture preferences.

"There's so many differences like that we have with him," Grant said. "But he has so much experience with that age that you can't do nothing but listen to him and take every lesson that he gives you."

"He's like a father figure. He's fun. He's loving. He's just a great guy to be around and we're excited to play for him."

Grant added that Larranaga -- or the always-ready-to-tell-a-story "Coach L" -- has put an impressive talent on display during Miami practices.

"His whistling skills are amazing," Grant said. "First time I heard it, I jumped. I was like, 'wow.'"

Rumors hurting Miami's recruiting

ESPN.com
Oct. 20, 2011
Dick Vitale

In college basketball, the world of recruiting can be vicious.

It is so tough because there are coaches out there who will do anything to secure a top prospect. Their goal is to get that special player, that talent, getting an edge over the competition they have to face.

Think about it, negative recruiting exists.

Down at Miami, there have been all sorts of rumors and allegations about the basketball program. There were reports of wrongdoing and illegal activity during a prior period in both football and basketball. We have heard and read a lot about booster Nevin Shapiro.

All of this happened prior to the arrival of football coach Al Golden and basketball coach Jim Larranaga. Nothing has been proven as of now.

I recently spoke to Larranaga, the new guy on the block. In a very tough situation, he and his staff have come aboard and done everything the right way. Over the years, Golden and Larranaga have been praised about their integrity and loyalty.

Right now, Miami is going up against recruiters who are out there telling people that they should forget about the Hurricanes, that the future will include penalties and probation.

You'd better believe that the word "probation" can scare off a future star. Let me tell you, nothing has been proved, nothing has been ruled on, so this situation is so unfair.

Golden and Larranaga are quality guys who took over head coaching jobs at a time when they were not notified about the potential scenario of Miami being in trouble.

These guys are hard workers, and they are winners. They will get through this and rebuild. They are competitors who know how to do things the right way.

Miami basketball has already suffered a tough blow with the absence of inside presence Reggie Johnson until January. He is recovering from knee surgery. The Hurricanes expect to have solid perimeter play with Durand Scott and Malcolm Grant leading the way.

Scott is one of the most versatile players out there. Grant, who came over from Villanova as a transfer, is one of the best perimeter shooters that Larranaga has seen in a while.

Don't count Miami out as this team will scrap and claw based on the personality of Larranaga. The coach is a fighter and showed his personality when he played at Providence. He has displayed his coaching ability as a long-time assistant at Virginia, and then at Bowling Green and George Mason.

Larranaga's run with the Patriots, getting to the 2006 Final Four, is one of the best streaks in tournament history.

Keep a eye on Miami despite some tumultuous times in the athletic program. Larranaga and Golden deserve the opportunity to show they run their programs the proper way, without the short cuts that have apparently occurred in the past.

Excitement Surrounds UM Hoops at Miami Madness

CaneSport.com
October 20, 2011
by Matt Shodell

The Hurricane basketball season technically kicked off last week with practices starting.

But tonight at the BankUnited Center could be considered the official start of the season.

The Canes held their version of Midnight Madness, called "Miami Madness," starting at 8 p.m.. It was a one-and-a-half hour event for fans.

The men's and women's basketball teams each held scrimmages as fans watched on and cheered. The lower level was roped off and almost completely full.

"Let's go Miami, get up, get up!" women's coach Katie Meier shouted as she took the floor before leading a chant of "It's great ... to be ... a Miami Hurricane."

When men's coach Jim Larranaga was introduced he told the crowd "I have great memories of when we went to the Final Four, and that's where I want to take this Miami team."

Larranaga then had the UM band play Bon Jovi's "Living on a Prayer," the theme song of that George Mason Final Four team.

Larranaga and Meier took up the microphone throughout the evening, emceeing as their teams were on the floor.

"I think Miami has become a basketball school all of a sudden, and I'm excited about that," Meier said. "I think there's a real good shot we might win two ACC championships this year."

Highlights of the short scrimmages (with squads split into two teams and playing about 10 minutes each):

On the men's side there wasn't a lot of defense ... by design. Included in the prolific scoring: Back-to-back opening three-pointers from Malcolm Grant, a dunk from Raphael Akpejori, an alley-oop dunk to Erik Swoope and rim-rattling dunks from Kenny Kadji and Shane Larkin. A slam dunk contest preceding the scrimmage that drew "oohs" from fans.

After the men's scrimmage DeQuan Jones wowed fans with a 360 dunk during organized dunk drills.

Former NBA player (and current ESPN analyst) Jay Williams helped coach during the men's scrimmage. Other NBA players in attendance: James Posey, Jannero Pargo, Jarrett Jack and Serge Ibaka.

Larranaga said afterward that he hopes NBA players will come out for regular season games as well.

"We're going to try to recruit those guys to our games," Larranaga said. "If a celebrity like a LeBron James or D Wade or Chris Bosh shows up, then it must be a worthwhile event."

"What we have to do is build the kind of team that everybody wants to watch."

During the women's scrimmage there was a lot of solid defense and missed shots, but also a nice pull-up jumper from Shenise Johnson, a wide open layup on a nice pass for Stephanie Gardner, and a breakaway layup at the buzzer for Stefanie Yderstrom.

It was a fan-friendly event, with on-court promotions and contests as well as crowd competitions and giveaways.

On hand were the University of Miami Frost Band of the Hour, cheerleaders, Sebastian the Ibis, the Sunsations and other school dance groups.

Both coaches spoke afterward and gave their thoughts on the night.

"What we want for the next Miami Madness is to have the place packed from the first row to the top of the rafters, but this was a great start," Larranaga said. "The students are very excited, thought the evening went well, and honestly it's all about the students. If they had a good time, they'll come back."

Meier added, "We're really making efforts to get the students involved. We were trying to make student activities and team activities. You have two fun-loving personalities with me and coach L, and we can build off this."

Larranaga's team was picked to finish fifth in the ACC at recent league meetings.

Meier's was chosen to win the ACC, with Shenise Johnson the pre-season Player of the Year.

"Expectations are supposed to make it not fun, but that's not going to happen with me," Meier said. "We're going to celebrate it. It's someone else's opinion, but I'm not going to shy away from it."

Five things to look forward to this season

The Miami Hurricane
Oct. 19, 2011
David Furones

Coach L. bringing more W's
You already know what he was able to do at George Mason. He put them on the map. He's the reason why men's basketball comes to mind before the Virginia delegate at the Constitutional Convention when someone says "George Mason." Who could forget the way he stole the hearts of the whole nation with his miraculous 2006 run to the Final Four as an 11-seed? In 14 seasons with the Patriots, Jim Larranaga earned the most wins both in school history and Colonial Athletic Association history. It's going to be something special to see what he can do with this talented Hurricanes team.

No more blown leads
When Miami collapsed and blew a 19-point lead to get eliminated by North Carolina in the ACC Tournament, it was an all-too-familiar feeling for Cane fans. Those 10 minutes, and the final buzzer-beating layup by Tyler Zeller, were a microcosm of the entire season synonymous with the struggles that plagued the Canes all year. They were unable to finish games and failed in pressure situations. Hopefully with a new coaching staff the team will become mentally tougher in the clutch, give up fewer three-pointers playing that horrid 2-3 zone that let teams back into games, and minimize wasted possessions where the ball is passed around the perimeter leading to an ill-advised jumper with the shot clock expiring.

An exciting schedule
Playing basketball in the ACC always comes with the thrill of seeing your team play the Dukes and the North Carolinas of the world. This year is no different. But Cane fans will also get to enjoy a very strong out-of-conference schedule, including road games against West Virginia, Purdue and Ole Miss. In addition, Memphis and Rutgers will be swinging by the BankUnited Center. The atmosphere for these games early in the season is sure to get fans hyped for the later slate of ACC games.

A strong backcourt
With Malcolm Grant, now a senior, and junior Durand Scott, the Miami backcourt has the leadership it needs from its two most prolific perimeter players. Scott is lethal driving to the basket with a quick first step and the ability to stop on a dime and change direction. He gets to the basket at will and knows how to finish. Grant is just as quick and is also a threat from beyond the arc. Another player to look out for is sophomore Rion Brown. Though he got limited playing time as a freshman last year, the talented youngster will see a lot more of the court this season. He had his coming out party last year against Virginia. Expect to see more moments like that.

A speedy recovery for Reggie
Big Reggie Johnson is working on getting back to action after tearing the meniscus in his right knee. He's expected to come back around January, just in time for ACC play, but he'll miss all the big non-conference games the Canes have in store for them. The team's frontcourt was dealt another blow later in the offseason when Julian Gamble tore his ACL; he's likely to miss the entire season. Florida transfer Kenny Kadji will be the team's go-to guy in the middle, and Raphael Akpejiori will see more of the court as well because of the two injuries.

ACC lacks proven backcourt scorers, but potential exists

DailyPress.com
Oct. 19, 2011
By Norm Wood

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — As one half of the Atlantic Coast Conference's top returning scoring backcourt, Miami's Malcolm Grant thinks he and teammate Durand Scott have earned at least a little respect.

So, when Grant's phone rang recently and a family member told him he and Scott weren't included in a ranking of the nation's top backcourts headed into the coming season by a certain "world-wide leader" in sports broadcasting, Grant was spitting angry.

"That hit home," said Grant, who is the ACC's leading returning scorer from the guard position, after finishing ninth in the conference last season with 14.8 points per game. "I (texted) Durand immediately and said, 'We're not getting credit. We're some of the best guards in the nation, and we're not getting credit for it. This needs to be the year we show everybody.' He texted me back and said, 'I'm ready.'"

Grant and Scott represent the only returning backcourt duo in the ACC to prove its collective scoring prowess last season. Among the ACC's top 13 scorers last season, eight of the players were guards.

Six of those guards – Duke's Nolan Smith (the ACC's leading scorer with 20.6 points per game last season), Virginia Tech's Malcolm Delaney (18.7), Boston College's Reggie Jackson (18.2) Georgia Tech's Iman Shumpert (17.3), Clemson's Demontez Stitt (14.5) and Virginia's Mustapha Farrakhan (13.5) – have departed the conference.

Only Grant and Scott, who was 12th in the ACC last season with 13.6 points per game, remain from those top eight guards.

Hoops weight room results show huge gains

CaneSport.com
October 18, 2011
By Matt Shodell

When coach Jim Larranaga took over as head men's basketball coach, one of his first orders of business was finding a strength coach.

And he quickly found one in Arizona's Jim Krumpo.

They share a similar philosophy in what they want to accomplish with the team.

"It's a different philosophy," Krumpo said. "The philosophy previously was about mobility and flexibility training, core stuff. Coach L comes in, and me and him get along great because our philosophy is the same, and that's a big reason why he hired me - we're going to lift weights. We want guys getting bigger, getting stronger.

"The different philosophies go along with different styles of play. Coach L is going to have a very physical, man-to-man team, a very physical team on the boards. So he wants guys with good upper body strength so they can post up, good hip strength so they can maintain their position, good core strength so they can play that style defense, get those rebounds and also stay healthy throughout the season."

Krumpo worked players hard in the weight room - a converted storage room inside the BankUnited Center - four days a week leading up to practice which began last week.

The team, on average, has seen its bench improve from 231 pounds in April to 257 pounds. The average mile run time went from 7:24 to 5:50. And the average vertical went from 32.4 inches to 34.4.

"I'm very happy with the progress," Krumpo said. "It's a combination of their hard work, buying into a new system, being consistent. We've got some good athletes on this team, really high end guys. These are really good athletes with a lot of genetic potential."

With the results and the work needed to accomplish that, it's no wonder players took to calling Krumpo by his now widely used nickname "Killer K."

He pushed these guys to the limit during one-and-a-half hour sessions to get results.

"It's a cool nickname - I don't care what they call me as long as they come in here and keep getting better," Krumpo said. "I expect a level of intensity in here every day."

Krumpo broke down some of the players:

* Garrius Adams' initial mile time wasn't entirely accurate, as he stopped part way through before finishing.

Asked about Adams' progress, Krumpo said, "With our wings, we don't want them to necessarily gain 15 pounds. We want them to stay very athletic, very mobile. Keeping them healthy, their verticals up are the most important thing. He's a guy that was very lean. I'm happy he did gain some weight. Him, like Rion Brown, his game got better because he got stronger. He's able to get off the ground better, is able to maintain position better.

"A big part is that confidence, knowing that you're stronger, being confident in your body and having it transfer over to the court - you feel tougher, have a bit of muscle. That's part of it, too."

Adams' vertical jump decreased in testing because of some tendonitis issues he was having with his knees.

* Of Malcolm Grant, Krumpo said, "He's been a verbal leader, pushing guys. He's come in here and gotten after it. Especially for a guard, some of the guards were a little hesitant at first - 'Oh, I'm going to gain so much weight, my shot (might change).' There are still some of those old school stereotypes with the guards. Now he sees he's shooting as good as ever; is probably shooting better because he can consistently get off the ground at advanced intensity.

"He's bought into it. He's worked hard. He's gotten leaner but also gotten stronger."

* Of Reggie Johnson, who is coming off surgery, Krumpo said, "He's worked hard."

Johnson has improved his upper body strength but isn't doing lower body workouts yet.

* Krumpo says of DeQuan Jones that "any physical endeavor, I'd say 'DJ can do that.' Whether it's basketball-wise, power-wise, lifting-wise, if he puts his mind to it he can do whatever he wants."

* Krumpo says Kenny Kadji's vertical is deceptive because he has such long arms.

"He almost can clear the whole thing - his reach plus his vertical, he actually can touch 144 inches, which is two feet over the rim," Krumpo said. "He's a freak athletically."

*Durand Scott had a stress fracture that held him back this off-season, but he still improved over 20 percent in his bench in barely over three months (from 235 to 275).

"He physically is just a freak," Krumpo said.

Scott's original 8:45 mile time was inflated because he'd done a workout first and was dealing with a stress fracture so he had to take it easy during the run.

* Of Shane Larkin, who he's only had since the end of August, Krumpo said, "You look at those numbers - he's just getting to the beginning of the program. His vertical did go up just from doing consistent leg training. He went to a 41 inch vertical, which is just crazy. Trey McKinney Jones, who is a track athlete is at 38. Anyth9ing over 36 is pretty nice; over 40 is elite level.

"And what he has too, Shane played football in high school. So he had injuries to his upper body he never got to correct. He's going to get a lot better. Shane in seven weeks put a half inch on his arm and a half inch on his chest. That's not Burger King weight. That's great genetics and hard work."

* The ultimate compliments for Krumpo?

He's already heard them from Cane players.

"I'm really feeling bouncy," one player told him.

"I'm able to do things on the court I wasn't able to do before," another said.

- When reading the weight lifting chart included in this article, note that "chin-up" refers to a players' normal body weight (top number) listed next to their weights when wearing a belt (bottom number).

- The "1 step" vertical measures, in a 15 foot area from the testing area, how high you can jump off a moving one step vertical.

- The leg press measurements indicate how many reps of how much weight each player did.

Miami Hurricanes players get teachable moments from new coach Jim Larranaga

Miami Herald
Oct. 17, 2011
By Michelle Kaufman

New UM basketball coach Jim Larranaga is installing new rules in the program, which he hopes will make the team more disciplined.

An untied shoelace taught Durand Scott everything he needed to know about new University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larranaga. When Scott showed up at practice with a sneaker untied, Larranaga slapped him with one of his legendary "Reminders," and banished him to the stationery bike for 20 minutes.

"At first I didn't think he was serious, and he said, 'Oh, yeah, I'm dead serious,' " Scott recalled Sunday, after the team's first open-to-the-media practice. "He teaches us that everything is important when you step on the court. Tying your shoelace is as important as making a bucket."

Has he shown up with loose laces again? "Nope, keep them double-knotted," Scott said, smiling.

Larranaga said he adopted the shoe lesson from Jack Curran, his coach at Archbishop Molloy High School in New York, and also his JV coach there, Brother Kevin Handibode, now president at Miami Columbus High.

The Hurricanes held their first official practice under Larranaga on Friday, and their first open-to-the-media workout on Sunday. Since replacing Frank Haith last spring, "Coach L," as he is affectionately known, has been stressing fundamentals. Sunday, using a microphone to get his message across loud and clear, he regularly stopped the practice to offer instruction.

After the workout, he gave his players and staff a rare lesson in media relations, asking them to introduce themselves one by one to the reporters and shake their hands.

"There has been a lot more teaching going on, about how to play the game the right way," said senior forward DeQuan Jones. "Coach L uses terminology I've never heard before. He puts things in perspective and makes me think about the game in a way I never did before. I learn something new every single day."

Jones is awaiting clearance from the NCAA in the wake of the Nevin Shapiro scandal. The rogue UM booster claimed that he gave former UM assistant Jake Morton \$10,000 to secure then-recruit Jones' commitment. Jones and his family vehemently denied the allegation.

"I'm just focusing on the season, and not really fazed at all about that anymore," Jones said of the investigation. "That whole ordeal taught me how to deal with negativity. I've grown a lot, learned about myself and the people around me."

UM fans will get their first chance to see the men's and women's basketball teams Thursday night at 8 during "Miami Madness," an early-bird version of Midnight Madness, in which the teams will run drills and interact with fans. Admission is free.

The Canes are coming off a 21-14 season in which they did not make the NCAA Tournament. Both of the team's 6-10 centers, Reggie Johnson and Julian Gamble, are out with knee injuries. Johnson is expected back in January and Gamble is lost for the season. Look for University of Florida transfer Kenny Kadji, a 6-11 native of Cameroon, to fill in.

Coach L said not to read anything into the line-

ups for Sunday's scrimmages, but Kadji spent a lot of time on the court with returning starters Scott, DeQuan Jones and Malcolm Grant. Guard Trey McKinney Jones, a transfer from Missouri-Kansas City, was also in the rotation. He is one of the strongest players on the team in the weight room, and was a state champion triple jumper and runner-up in the long jump. His uncle, Mark Jones, played in the NBA and his aunt, Esther Jones, was an Olympic gold medal sprinter.

Another promising player with athletic lineage is freshman guard Shane Larkin, son of Barry Larkin, the former Cincinnati Reds 12-time All-Star shortstop. The Orlando native originally committed to DePaul but left the school in August for an undisclosed medical reason and transferred to Miami.

Freshman Daniels Brings Excitement

InsideTheU.com
Oct. 17, 2011
Christopher Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Not many people know about Bishop Daniels.

Not yet at least.

But the 6-foot-3, 175-pound freshman is an explosive, dynamic guard that can jump out of the gym and soon will be a crowd favorite in Coral Gables.

“Athleticism-wise, wherever I go, I don’t think anybody is really going to be able to stop me with some of the things I do like rebounding, speed, dunking, and stuff like that,” Daniels said. “I feel I have top-notch athleticism and I’m an elite athlete. I don’t think anybody is really going to stop that.”

He’s looking to make an impact in his first campaign.

“I think if I work hard enough I’ll be able to make an impact,” Daniels said. “I’m not sure what the coach has planned for any of the guys right now because it’s a little early, but hopefully I can make an impact.”

In order to contribute, he knows he needs to continue to work on his game.

“I want to continue to work on developing into a better player as a guard and understanding everything and my role on the team,” Daniels said.

Consider New York-native Durand Scott as one that is impressed with Daniels.

Bishop Daniels was relegated to riding the exercise bike during Sunday’s practice.

“Over the summer I thought very high of his game,” Scott said. “There were a lot of times we came to the gym to get some work done

because I really believed in him. I like his game a lot and I see him as a New York guard, that’s why I kind of related to him, but since practice has started he’s been hurt so he hasn’t really had a chance to prove himself, but I think when he gets back he’s going to give us great minutes and do a great job with his presence, his athletic ability, his passing, and how fast he is on the court with the basketball.”

Daniels hails from Raleigh, N.C. and attended Word of God Christian Academy, the same school that produced Washington Wizards top pick John Wall two years ago.

Daniels averaged 18 points, five rebounds, and four assists a game as a senior. He picked Miami over Purdue, Colorado, and DePaul. He originally committed in October 2010 and de-committed briefly after Frank Haith left before sticking with UM.

“The decision to come down here was based solely on me getting to know all of the coaches,” Daniels said. “I think coach (Jim) Larranaga is a great man. Outside of basketball he will somebody do whatever they need to even if it doesn’t work out with the situation of me being here or anyone else being here. I believe he is a good man and that’s why I chose to come here.”

Daniels first arrived at UM in the summer and began working out with the team, which has helped with the transition to college.

“It’s different,” he said. “It’s always going to be different with the transition from high school to college, but all I’m worried about is working hard and being able to play this year.”

In the early going, he’s been able to show off some of his athleticism driving to the basket and throwing down dunks.

“Competing against this guys and a couple of them are considered top level guys in the ACC and in the country so it’s just making me

better,” Daniels said. “It’s making me more confident that I can play at this level and in the ACC.”

Daniels sat out of Sunday’s practice with a minor toe injury, but expects to be back practicing on Monday.

“I’ve been practicing the last two days, but today my toe was a little sore so they told me to sit it out for the day,” Daniels said. “I’ll definitely be back tomorrow and for the rest of the year.”

And when healthy, expect to see highlight-reel dunks.

Hoops Buzz: 10/16

InsideTheU.com
Oct. 16, 2011
Christopher Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The Miami Hurricanes basketball team began practice on Friday in their first year under head coach Jim Larranaga.

Larranaga, 61, takes over for Frank Haith after 14 years at George Mason, where he took the team to the Final Four in 2006.

UM welcomes back nine players from last year’s 21-14 team as well as two transfers (Kenny Kadji, Florida and Trey McKinney-Jones, UMKC) who practiced with the team last year and are now eligible to play.

But with a new coaching staff in place, it takes time to adjust.

“We are at the infant stages,” Larranaga said. “We talk about the three levels of growth. The first is dependent—you need someone else to show you the way and that’s my coaches’ responsibility. The second level is they think they’ve learned it and they don’t need any help anymore, but the level we’re trying to get to is the third level, which is called interdependence where everybody works well together. That takes quite a well to develop an understanding of what you’re responsible for and for what your teammates are responsible for. Do your job and help them do their job.”

Three practices into the fall and Larranaga has been most impressed with the team’s attitude and work ethic.

“One of the things that’s most important to us is the attitude that our players will bring to practice and the work ethic,” Larranaga said. “The attitude has been tremendous, very, very positive and upbeat. The work ethic has been very, very good with the understanding that we play an entirely different style than what they’re accustomed to and so it’s pretty normal for them to stop in the middle of the play and observe. Or if the ball goes out of bounds, in our system, you don’t. You chase every ball even if it goes out of bounds. You rebound every shot even if it goes through the hoop and to develop the habits we’re looking for is going to take quite a bit of time.”

On Sunday, the Hurricanes held an open practice to the media for nearly two hours as the team went through a number of drills split into two teams with scores for each drill displayed on the scoreboard.

News & Notes
Freshman PG Shane Larkin has been impressive in the first three practices.

- One noticeable thing that every observer picked up on when watching practice was that Larranaga used a microphone that was hooked up to the gym’s speakers to talk to his team. It’s something new he started on Friday after he had to use it to speak to people at an event and decided to continue it. “I kind of liked it and asked if we could keep using it at practice so I don’t have to raise my voice too loud,” Larranaga said.

- The first unit was in white jerseys with six players ro-

tating in and the second unit was in green. The groups are expected to change for Monday’s practice as the team tries to find the right combination of players. “Some players just naturally fit better with other guys and we’ll be looking for that nice blend for a substitution pattern that works so every player can be successful,” Larranaga said. The first unit consisted of PG Malcolm Grant, SG Durand Scott, SG Garrus Adams, SF DeQuan Jones, SF Trey McKinney-Jones, and C Kenny Kadji.

- The second unit consisted of PG Shane Larkin, PG Ryan Quiglar, SG Rion Brown, SF Erik Swoope, and PF Raphael Akpejiori. Walk-on PG Justin Heller was on the green team, but rarely subbed in.

- The second unit had a much better day than the first as they won a full-court 5-on-5 five-minute drill 7-3 awarding points for made shots, rebounds, and turnovers. Then, they split a rebounding drill in which an assistant coach fired up a long shot and the two teams battled for the rebound with the first team to three wins. Both teams won 3-2 when they had the defensive position. Then, in the final drill of the day, the teams had another a full-game 5-on-5 scrimmage with the first team to 21 winning. Again, points were awarded for scoring, rebounding, and turnovers and the green team won 21-16 keyed by a pair of late three-pointers by Larkin. Swoope had the game’s final bucket, an offensive tip putback and sank the free-throw to seal the win.

- The Hurricanes will be one of three schools wearing the new LEBRON 9 basketball shoes made by Nike. Many of the players are wearing them during practice. Kentucky and Ohio State are the other two schools. “We really appreciate it,” Jones said. “In a sense I still come back to my locker and I’m like, oh man those are mine. It’s just a great experience and we appreciate Nike in having the opportunity to be one of those elite schools.”

- Freshman PG Shane Larkin enrolled at DePaul this summer before personal health issues arose forcing him to transfer closer to his Orlando home. He has submitted a request to the NCAA to allow him to play this year, but has not received word on his request. “I don’t know really what stage that’s at, but he’s practicing and practicing very well,” Larranaga said. “We’re very happy to have him.” Larkin is a very smooth ballhandler, who can knock down the outside shot. He’s a very savvy player, who creates plays on both ends of the court. In one sequence, Larkin created back-to-back steals on tipped passes when applying solid on-ball defense.

- SF DeQuan Jones was listed in the Nevin Shapiro report, but UM has not heard whether or not he’s been cleared to play or not. He is practicing. Larranaga did not want to address the situation, instead he replied, “We’re just focused on what we’re able to do which is practice hard, put in our offense and defense, trying to develop a philosophy amongst the players, the coaches know the philosophy so we have to put those into practice and DeQuan is doing a great job of doing that every day.” Jones switched his number to 5 this season after wearing 31 his first three years. “Five has always been my favorite number and my lucky number and with everything going on I just figured it was a change in the positive,” Jones said.

- C Reggie Johnson did individual work as he’s recovering from a torn meniscus in his right knee suffered in July. Johnson was able to do lane slides with the heavy

ball, rebounds with the heavy ball, and took a number of 15-foot jumpers from the baseline and free-throw line extended. He has trimmed weight and looked to be moving well. The early prognosis was a January return. It’s unknown at this time of his prognosis.

A first look at the LEBRON 9 shoes the team will be wearing this season.

- Freshman SG Bishop Daniels did not participate in Sunday’s practice due to a minor toe injury as he was relegated to riding the exercise bike. The explosive guard says he’ll be back to practice Monday and does not expect the injury to linger. “I’ll definitely be back tomorrow and for the rest of the year,” Daniels said.

- Florida transfer C Kenny Kadji did not do much offensively in the practice, but was active and showed his length on defense. He made a nice block on Akpejiori on one play and was active on the boards although during the rebounding drill he allowed a pair of defensive rebounds to slip through his hands as he did not grab the ball at the top of the jump. Also, Kadji tends to find himself a bit off-balanced when trying to make plays, which limits his effectiveness. He’ll need to continue to develop as one of only two healthy big men on the team.

- With the lack of healthy big men, UM will look to play a lot of four man out, one man in with their offense as well as looking to score in their transition game. The strength of their team is their wings so it only makes sense to take advantage of what they have on the roster.

- Strength and conditioning has been a major focus for the new coaching staff. When they took over and did initial testing nobody was doing a sub-6:00 mile and only one person did at least 14 bench press reps of 185 pounds. Now, nearly everyone is under six minutes and at least four guys have eclipsed 20 bench press reps. Strength and conditioning coach Jim Krumpas, nicknamed “Killer K” is someone the players enjoy working with and credit for their improvements.

- Here’s a list of weight changes from this year’s roster compared to last year: Adams -3, Akpejiori +1, Brown +6, Gamble +7, Grant +8, Johnson -19, Jones +2, Kadji -4, McKinney-Jones +2, Scott +2, Swoope 0.

- With the NBA’s on-going lockout, the UM program is hoping that the South Florida basketball fan will look to get their basketball fix with the Hurricanes this season. It’s the kind of attention Larragana yearns for. “We would love that kind of attention,” he said. “In terms of our scheduling philosophy we always try to schedule as many games as we can that are made for TV. We will be negotiating with ESPN looking to develop a long-term relationship with them during exempt events. If we can we want to play on TV as often as we possibly we can.”

- UM will host “Miami Madness” on Thursday at 8:00 p.m. in a free event in which fans are invited to watch the men’s and women’s team scrimmage at the BankUnited Center.

- The season begins November 11 against Tennessee Tech.

Larranaga, players talk team, goals

CaneSport.com
Oct. 17, 2011
Matt Shodell

The Hurricane men’s basketball team has began practicing for the upcoming season.

And on Sunday coach Jim Larranaga and players gave their thoughts after a one-and-a-half hour practice.

Larranaga said the team has a long way to go in learning what he wants from them.

“We’re at the infant stages.” Larranaga. We talk about the three levels of growth. The first is dependent - you need somebody else to show you the way, and that’s my coaches’ responsibility. The second level of growth is independent - they think they’ve learned it and they don’t need any help anymore. But the level we’re trying to get to is the third level, which is called interdependence where everybody works well together. That takes quite a while to develop.”

Larranaga also praised the work ethic considering his new system is completely different. As an example he said that in practice when a ball goes out of bounds players have to fight and dive for it, something the team didn’t do in practices under Frank Haith.

“To develop the habits we’re looking for is going to take quite a bit of time,” Larranaga said.

Asked about personnel, Larranaga said coaches are in the process of evaluating every payer and who plays well together to figure out the ultimate rotation.

“We’ll be looking for that nice blend so we can work a substitution system that works,” he said.

* Guard Durand Scott shared a story that Larranaga told the team.

“He told a story about when he took his (George Mason) team to the Final Four,” Scott said. “He told us about a dream one of his players had, saying that they were going to go to the Final Four. And after they lost in the Final Four coach was upset at him, said ‘Why didn’t you dream that we’d win the championship?’”

Scott adds that “I’m going to dream, and I want that championship.”

* Freshman PG Shane Larkin looked excellent in practice, but Larranaga said the school hasn’t heard yet if he’ll be eligible to play this season after transferring due to family issues.

“He’s practicing very well,” Larranaga said of Larkin.

* Larranaga also said he has no update on if DeQuan Jones will be eligible - he was reported as a player involved in the Nevin Shapiro allegations.

Jones says he has no idea when he’ll hear if he’s going to have any eligibility issues. He says he expects to be playing this season.

“I’m just focusing on the upcoming season, every day coming out and playing,” he said.

He adds that “I can’t say it’s affected me much. It’s not hard at all (to keep it out of his mind). That whole ordeal has taught me a lot about myself and the people around me, and I’ve matured. I’m not putting so much emphasis on negativity, am taking it one day at a time.”

- Of how far this team is from understanding where Larranaga wants the team, Jones said, “We can see the progression as far as when we first got here - we see the progression every day as far as the defensive scheme, offensive plays. We’re not to the point where the offensive plays are second nature. But we see the big picture, and we’re optimistic about it. Every little thing we do, we know it has a big impact on the overall offense, overall play. We pay attention to detail and try to do it to the best of our abilities.”

* In fitness testing, Larranaga said the entire team ran under a six-minute mile in pre-practice testing. And that was despite no one being able to run a six-minute mile when Larranaga first arrived.

The team also is much stronger. Larranaga said when he first arrived the most reps any player could do of 185 pound was 14 times.

“Now we have four or five guys that are over 20 (reps), which is a tremendous improvement,” he said, adding that “not many” players are under 14 reps now.

* Larranaga used a microphone to talk to his players on the court, saving his voice.

Where’d he get that idea?

“It started on Friday - we had an event here and my director of basketball operations set it up so I could make announcements, gave me the microphone,” Larranaga said. “I liked it, asked if we could keep it during practice so I didn’t have to raise my voice too loud.

* Malcolm Grant said Larranaga is giving inspiring messages to the team every day.

“Coach L is a great coach, teacher of the game, gets the best out of us,” Grant said. “Every day is a learning experience.

“His method is so different. We start off practice with a thought of the day and everyone needs to know it. That’s helping us become a team and family. Like today it was ‘success is not the key to happiness; happiness is the key to success.’ Little things like that keep us on the same page.”

Asked players that fans may not know about yet who could have a big impact, Grant said, “I’m not sure if Shane (Larkin) is playing yet (as he awaits word on an NCAA waiver after transferring), but he’s an amazing player. Kenny (Kadji) is going to be a great help for us; he can score the ball. Trey McKinney is going to be outstanding. He’s 6-4, a big guard. You have guys like that, that’s really going to help us add on to the weapons on our team.”

* Scott says he’s “100 percent” coming off a stress fracture.

Asked about how this offense differs from last year, Scott said, “It’s more structured, there’s more movement. It makes it more difficult for the other team. We were easy to read last year. I love (Larranaga’s) philosophy, the way he teaches us, his mindset. With the things he has on the table for us we should be a well-groomed team.”

Scott has high hopes for this team.

“Ever since last year ended I knew this would be the year we’d turn it around,” Scott said. “Not knowing we’d have a new coach, I knew us as players would turn it around. I still believe that. And when coach L came in he raised that expectation.

“My expectations (before Larranaga came in was) to make the NCAA tournament. Now my expectation is to win it.”

- Scott said he feels he’s gotten a lot stronger already under new basketball strength coach Jim Krumpus.

“I pretty much came from the bottom to the top,” Scott said. The first time I benched 235, and the second time we tested I was 275. Coach wants us all at 300, so I’m trying to get there. Those were my numbers, and I’m pretty sure everyone on the team increased also.”

Larranaga said of Krumpus, who previously was the associate director of performance enhancement for the University of Arizona, that “They call him Killer K. Killer Krump. I think it’s because he pushes them so hard. They want to be strong, well conditioned athletes, and he’s helping them achieve that goal.”

- Scott recounted how he first got on trouble under Larranaga.

“I walked one the court without tying my shoelaces,” Scott said. “You might not think that’s important, but it’s important. The little things, that’s what he instilled in me.

“I got in trouble (for the shoelaces). He yelled at me, does a little thing called ‘The Reminder.’ So I had to get on the bike and run a little bit. When he first told me I didn’t think he was serious, but I was like ‘Are you serious.’ And he was like ‘Yes, I’m really serious.’”

Scott says he now double knots his shoes.

* The team will hold a “Midnight Madness” practice open to the public on Thursday starting at 8 p.m.

“I’m really looking forward to it,” Jones said. “Just the fact we’re having the event is exciting.”

After resurrecting George Mason basketball,

Jim Larranaga faces new challenges with Miami

Washington Post
October 10, 2011
By Amy Shipley

Coral Gables, Fla. — Jim Larranaga took three out-of-state recruiting trips — one overseas — two weeks ago, leaving himself with a jammed calendar on his lone weekday in town. Hours after returning on a midnight flight, he showed up at the University of Miami’s basketball offices in an orange and green polo shirt facing no fewer than five formal meetings, a host of informal ones, a luncheon and a tryout for prospective walk-ons.

Larranaga mastered the art of managing the round-the-clock bustle of college basketball as he resurrected George Mason from non-competitive commuter school to a perennial overachiever, but the race he’s gotten himself into in Miami is both fast and, Larranaga admitted, complicated. Since Larranaga agreed on April 21 to leave George Mason and take over as the Hurricanes’ coach, he has faced challenges he expected, and many he didn’t.

“I would have loved for it to have been smoother, for the circumstances to have been a little more comfortable for me and my family,” Larranaga said from behind the desk in his new office, whose shelves and coffee table are bedecked with a host of photos from his days at George Mason. “It got more complicated than I would have liked.”

What was complicated? Better question: What wasn’t? Nothing about his departure from Fairfax, or arrival in Miami, went smoothly. Five months after he agreed to lead the Hurricanes, the NCAA’s investigation of allegations that a jailed former booster gave improper benefits to football players and coaches at Miami — and to current basketball reserve player DeQuan Jones — became public. Larranaga, who had known nothing about the probe when he accepted the job, found the task of competing with the ACC’s powerhouse schools for recruits more trying than he imagined.

“For the players, it’s business as usual,” Larranaga said. “For the coaching staff and I, it’s a little more complicated. I get questions all the time, and quite frankly, I just don’t have any answers now. It’s definitely impacted our recruiting. ... Are some students eliminating us because of concerns? The answer to that is yes. But we then just have to beat the bushes harder.

“It certainly complicates my job. It wasn’t what I was anticipating, but I can’t look in the rearview mirror. I have to look straight ahead. The best way is to continue in the direction I planned on going.”

Other setbacks came on the court: losing star center

Reggie Johnson to a knee injury in June that will keep him out until December or January, and forward-center Julian Gamble for the year because of a torn anterior cruciate ligament. Larranaga said he has tried to respond by leaning on sound work habits honed over 27 years as a head coach, with 11 at Bowling Green before he joined George Mason in 1997 and kicked off 13 straight winning seasons.

“The last few months have been about injuries,” Larranaga said. “It’s frustrating that not everyone is out there every day. [Actually] I wouldn’t use the word frustrating; I’d just like them to be there.”

Planning ahead

To cope, Larranaga has schooled his players about the importance of planning and being proactive, instructing them on “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” by self-help author Steven B. Covey.

He’s also sought to form friendly ties throughout the campus, local community and state of Florida. He figures more excitement about a team usually dwarfed regionally by the NFL, college football and the NBA will help create a winning environment. He and the trio of assistants he brought from George Mason, Eric Konkol, Michael Huger and Chris Caputo, looked outward as much as inside the roster when they first arrived, sending out about 1,000 e-mails a day three or four days a week.

The e-mail blasts usually contained inspiring thoughts or other messages designed to connect with potential allies and community figures in a personal way. Miami, which finished 21-14 last year and missed an NCAA tournament bid, averaged just 4,763 fans a game. During his tenure at George Mason, attendance at men’s basketball games grew from around 3,000 fans per game to nearly 6,000.

Larranaga knew a priority would be shaking hands and making himself known. Indeed, he believed he was an afterthought in the minds of Miami’s decision-makers when a replacement for former coach Frank Haith was sought. Larranaga believes he drummed up interest by calling upon longtime friends and associates to speak on his behalf.

What puzzled and disturbed him, he said, was feeling like an afterthought at his own university.

“I guess what I had anticipated was George Mason, having been through 14 years of my leadership, I’d been there the entire time, that they would have responded immediately to any overture from another school,” Larranaga said. “By that not happening, it allowed the process with Miami to develop more and more. When Miami made the offer, I was ready to make the decision to go.”

George Mason Athletic Director Tom O’Connor disputes

the assertion that there was anything slow about the school’s response. O’Connor claimed he had to wait on Larranaga’s own lawyer, but yet pushed the process of getting raises and contract extensions for Larranaga — who last year earned \$525,000 — and his assistant coaches as fast as he could get approval from above his head.

“I wanted to make sure we were doing the right thing,” O’Connor said. “Everyone wanted Jim to stay.”

Difficult decision

Larranaga said he considered the decision from every angle, professional and personal. He had grandchildren in the Washington area, but three siblings in Florida. What proved decisive was the list of goals he had kept for years, checking them off one by one. He’d ticked off “advancing to the Final Four” via George Mason’s improbable run in 2006, leaving only two big ones: Win a national championship. Coach in the Atlantic Coast Conference, where he had spent seven years as an assistant with Virginia from 1979-86.

“Being a head coach in the ACC has been on the list since 1986,” he said. “it’s something that has always been in the back of my mind. It’s something that I wondered if I would ever get a chance to do.”

To Larranaga, the ACC represents the top of the college basketball mountain. And even though Miami was coming off a disappointing season, he believed the conference’s financial security, long tradition and the school’s location would help him reach his primary goal, winning a national title, earlier than he could do it at George Mason.

Still, one question nagged him and his wife, Liz, he said: “Were we willing to give up the joy and happiness we had? I loved every minute of it at George Mason.”

Larranaga brushed away a question about whether he would consider trying to get out of his contract should Miami get hit with NCAA sanctions; he said his only contract “option” was to win. That, of course, is what he did — against seemingly all odds — at George Mason.

“That’s something my wife says to me,” Larranaga said. “Can we do it all again?”

Top 50 countdown: No. 46 Miami (Fla.)

Sporting News
by **Ken Tysiac**

Miami has endured years of mediocrity in a city where ACC basketball barely registers as a blip on the cultural radar screen.

First-year coach Jim Larranaga, however, is determined to make the Hurricanes relevant. It seems a daunting task at a school that has been to just one NCAA Tournament in the last nine seasons.

But Larranaga demonstrated the ability to exceed expectations in 2006, when he took George Mason of the Colonial Athletic Association to the Final Four. Larranaga is confident he can create similar success with the resources available to him at an ACC program.

And the new coach is confident the community will embrace the Hurricanes if they win.

“We are going to create the kind of team here where people will want to be part of our program,” Larranaga said.

Unlike some of the other first-year coaches in the ACC, Larranaga has the talent in place to contend right away for an NCAA Tournament bid. Miami brings back one of the top returning backcourt duos in the nation in Malcolm Grant (14.8 points per game) and Durand Scott (13.6).

Larranaga said he would not have left a top-25-caliber George Mason squad unless the Hurricanes had a team in place with significant talent.

“The talent level that we have here ... I think we can have a very special season (this) year, and that is my hope,” Larranaga said. “I hope it’s the dreams of (the players).”

However, the Hurricanes sustained a blow in the offseason when 6-10 junior Reggie Johnson (11.9 points, 9.6 rebounds) tore his menis-

cus in his right knee. Johnson, who flirted with the ‘11 NBA Draft before pulling his name out, had surgery in July and likely won’t be back until ACC play begins in January.

Larranaga’s defensive style will be a significant shift from that of previous coach Frank Haith, who left for Missouri after a record of 129-101 in seven seasons with one NCAA Tournament appearance.

Haith used a lot of matchup-zone defense. Larranaga’s teams, though, are founded on the philosophy that one player guards the ball aggressively and four teammates are ready to help. Larranaga also likes to have his players scramble and trap on defense in hopes of creating turnovers and fast-break opportunities.

That will be a change for Miami, as the Hurricanes ranked 10th in the ACC in steals last season.

“Our philosophy is to create fast-break layups and open 3s in transition,” Larranaga said. “That will not change. ... We know we already have some terrific 3-point shooters. We know we have some guys who can post up and score with their back to the basket.”

In Scott, the Hurricanes have a penetrating guard who excels at making plays in the lane and creating for teammates. Grant was last season’s ACC leader in 3-point percentage (.423) and 3-pointers made (94).

Teammate Adrian Thomas was just one 3-pointer (93) behind Grant for the league lead last season, and Garrius Adams and Rion Brown each hit at least 32 3-pointers.

“With the talent I know we already have on hand, I think we can be headed in the right direction to challenge the best programs in our league and the country to get the ‘U’ back to the NCAA Tournament and hopefully do something very special again,” Larranaga said.

If that happens, the next step (besides recruiting) will be to get the apathetic fan base involved. The Hurricanes averaged just 4,763 fans in the 7,000-seat BankUnited Center.

Larranaga vowed he and his staff will be in the dormitories, recruiting students to support the team. He wants faculty to get interested in the team and plans to reach out to all the different elements of the community.

In time, Larranaga must prove himself as a recruiter after coaching at a school that doesn’t have to compete for top-100 recruits. He wants to concentrate locally in Florida but also have a national reach.

For now, though, he is fortunate to inherit a team capable of finally generating interest.

“Our challenge is to build a program ... that can sustain success over an extended period of time, so that everybody in our community is going to be dying to get a ticket,” Larranaga said.

Larranaga Building the UM Program

InsideTheU.com
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Christopher Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Jim Larranaga is a 62-year old from the Bronx.

He led George Mason to the Final Four in 2006 and to 13 straight winning seasons.

He’s charismatic, personable, and colorful.

He uses a microphone to talk to his players during practice.

He’s the head coach of the Miami Hurricanes. And six months into the job, he feels right at home.

“The reception that my wife and I have received, my assistant coaches and their families have received, has been absolutely wonderful,” Larranaga said. “People have been very warm and friendly.”

Junior guard Durant Scott, the team’s second-leading returning scorer, senses that Larranaga is comfortable in Coral Gables.

“I think it feels like its home,” Scott said. “I don’t think he’s going to go anywhere else. He just feels so comfortable, like this is the perfect place for him. This is where he wanted to be. He’s happy about it and is always around to help guys. When he first came in I didn’t know what to expect. This is not the group he recruited so I didn’t think he would give us attention and care, but you can tell he’s very serious about us. Nothing goes by him so I know he’s taken the job seriously.”

Frank Haith left Miami for Missouri in the spring after seven years with just one NCAA tournament appearance and a program that was in dire need of a fresh face. Attendance was down and there was little buzz from the fanbase after the team’s lone tournament appearance in 2008.

With Haith out and Larranaga in, senior DeQuan Jones can already sense a difference with the program with the new staff.

“Just the style and the overall environment they provide,” Jones said. “You can look around and in some aspect you can see the progression as far as how far the program has come already. They have been here six or seven months and you can already see. I’m just excited all-around.”

Teaching, instructing, and communication are key components Larranaga excels in as a coach.

“We really enjoy it,” Jones said. “In some aspects he’s really interactive with us players and at the same time it’s a fun system to play in. He teaches us how to play the game the right way--how to utilize our strengths and in a sense hide our weaknesses. He’s a teacher. I learn something new every day in practice. He’s a great teacher and a great motivator.”

As far as the microphone goes, it’s something new Larranaga started last week.

“When he first did it we were kind of shocked, but now we have no excuses to say that we can’t hear him,” Scott said. “We have no way to get out of anything.”

Jones said: “What’s crazy is with or without the microphone his voice is at the same level. I guess that’s his new thing, but we’ve adjusted to it.”

Jones expects Larranaga’s frantic defensive style and up-tempo transition game on the offensive side is a style the players are enjoying playing in and the fans will like watching.

Senior SF DeQuan Jones is looking to end his UM career on a positive note.

“I’m extremely excited under the new system, the new coaching staff, and new management,” Jones said. “I’m just excited to go out and play with my teammates. It’s a fun system to play in and a more fun system to watch as a fan.”

Larranaga’s philosophies and goals for the program to being a perennial tournament team as well as competing for ACC crowns are visions his players have begun to see.

“I just think he’s great,” Scott said. “It makes it obvious to us that he has a plan and a goal and that he’s sticking to his vision. He’s just riding it out. We’re here doing the right things and living by what he has to say because little things make us better. He makes the little things so important to us and we just have to follow and that is what’s going to make us a great team.”

Although he’s 40 years older than his players, Larranaga keeps a lively upbeat attitude in practice.

“He doesn’t act really old,” Scott said. “He thinks he’s still young. He wants to go out there and demonstrate these drills and make sure everyone’s doing the right thing.”

So what does all this mean? Can the Hurricanes find themselves in the tournament in March after four years away from the big dance?

“I feel we have the potential to be a tournament team, but I’m not really going to say right now where we’ll finish,” Jones said. “It’s just one of those things that we’ll have to wait and see along the way.”

Creating a Fanbase
UM’s home arena, the BankUnited Center, holds 7,200. Last season, there was an average of 2,515 paid attendance—a number that was inflated by tickets sold compared to actual people in the stands.

Still, an average of attendance of just over 33 percent shows that the fanbase did not have a lot of interest in the program, despite a 21-14 season.

Larranaga has already made strides to reaching out to the community in hopes of generating more buzz surrounding the program. He calls it a “major goal” to get people more involved in UM basketball.

His staff sends out 1,000 emails a day to high school and AAU coaches to inform of them of their program.

They have also had a free clinic for the high school coaches in the area.

Larranaga has also been cognizant of getting the youth interested in their program. They held a summer day camp for four weeks, which was nearly sold out, a free youth clinic in August, and they are currently active with their Cane Nation program. The Cane Nation program is a two-hour event on Sundays for kindergarten to sixth graders in which the players instruct the kids.

“We’re hoping that those youngsters will become friendly with their coaches, fans of our program, and encourage their parents to bring them to games,” Larranaga said. “We then hope the parents will bring their friends and we’ll build a grassroots network of fans for our program so that we have loyal fans coming in consistently to the BankUnited Center.”

In addition to the youth, Larranaga’s staff created a Senior Elite Classic program in which men 35 years or older were invited to play in their facilities over the weekend. Men from 15 different states attended the event and many are either season ticket holders or are expected to buy season tickets.

“They all loved it,” Larranaga said.

Having the Miami Heat in town certainly revs up the basketball interest in the community.

“With the excitement of LeBron James, D-Wade, and Chris Bosh here in Miami and the Heat making it to the Finals, there’s tremendous interest in basketball right now,” Larranaga said.

Fans are invited to attend Miami Madness Thursday at 8 p.m. as the team, along with the women’s team, will hold a free scrimmage.

Recruiting Florida
The 2011-12 roster has just one player—Shane Larkin—from the state of Florida.

Larranaga vows to change that.

“We want to recruit the State of Miami,” Larranaga said. “I think Howard Schnellenger did that (for football). By the state of Miami, I’m referring to the city of Miami north to Jacksonville, west through Orlando over to Tampa, down I-75 to Naples and Fort Myers and across alligator alley back to the city of Miami.”

Larranaga is confident in the state’s talent pool, which includes three players in the 247Sports 2012 top 100 and four in the 2013 top 50. In August, UM hosted a camp inviting the top players in the state.

“I think one of the reasons our coaching staff is so confident we can build a championship-caliber program here at the University of Miami is because of the great high school basketball talent that has been developed over the last 25 years,” Larranaga said.

Mr. Right Now - Miami’s Durand Scott has an infectious competitive edge

SLAM Magazine

Oct. 10, 2011

By Jeremy Bauman

“Not hold anything back and just go as hard as I can, pretty much,” burst Durand Scott’s voice through the phone. “That’s my objective, that’s my goal. That’s something that everybody is expecting out of me, so that’s something I definitely want to do.”

Since the age of 14, Durand Scott has been living with this moniker in mind. When his father, Duke W. Scott, passed away abruptly following a heart attack, Scott was at the tail end of eighth grade and entering a crucial stretch for any teenager.

Rather than let the emotions of this tragic experience overtake him, Scott took the tougher and more mature angle to the situation.

“Pretty much after he passed, I just wanted to take everything I do in life more seriously,” explained Scott. “I just wanted to make sure that, since I play basketball, I take it as seriously as I can for him.”

Though the times were rough for Scott, he was fortunate to have a bevy of close friends and family by his side then and for as long as he can remember. Chris Fouch, a lethal scoring guard for the Drexel Dragons, and Scott have been best friends since they were eight years old. They grew up playing together with the famed New York Gauchos AAU team in the South Bronx, and over time formed a strong, familial bond with their teammates on the AAU circuit. Among the group is current Charlotte Bobcats point guard Kemba Walker, WVU point guard Darryl “Truck” Bryant, Marist small forward Darvell Carter, and Seton Hall point guard Jordan Theodore—all of whom have added “F4L” to their body in some form or fashion to remind them of their “Family 4 Life” bond.

A superb outlook on life is one thing, but killer instinct on the court simply cannot be taught.

One thing is certain: For as far back as anybody can remember, Durand Scott has possessed an assassin’s edge when he laces up his sneakers and hits the pine.

As a witness to his cold-blooded nature, I can remember when Durand Scott was playing up for the first time on my 16U level Gauchos team (yes, I was a member) at the annual Gym Rat Challenge in Albany, NY. After a grueling Sunday consisting of about seven games without much rest, we were down by two in the final minute of a game against the New Jersey Shore Shots.

Who stepped up and confidently knocked home the tournament-clinching triple from the corner in the waning seconds? None other than Durand.

In talking with his former assistant with the New York Gauchos and current Hoop Group Director Chad Babel, it’s easy to see why Scott has been able to excel thus far in his collegiate career.

“My thing with Durand is that it was easy to tell he was a special kid at an early age,” explained Mr. Babel. “His willingness to compete and desire to win stood out from the rest of the players.

“I guess the example that personifies that competitiveness was the 2008 Memorial Day Classic. Durand played with a broken hand and was literally carrying us all weekend. He

averaged 28-30 points per game, all the way to through the championship game.”

But Scott wasn’t just an offensive player, and this next story helps to give the reader even more of a peak into the type of player and person he is.

According to Babel, Scott was a versatile defender on the court—he was routinely assigned to the other team’s most dynamic offensive weapon, regardless of position—and was always up for a new challenge. It’s not that this is the only time that an occurrence like this happened, but Mr. Babel pointed to this particular episode to help quantify the heart that Scott has on and away from the hardwood.

“There was one time where there was a 6-9, 300-pound kid named Marcus Good from the Carolina Ravens, who was doing work in the post all game,” elaborated Babel. “He was a load, and Durand came into the huddle and said ‘Coach, I want him!’ We all looked at Durand and told him to do what he does. He fronted the post the first time and they couldn’t get it in. He fronted him again, and stole the ball. The third time he fronted him and forced a rushed shot.”

Continued Babel, “His willingness to take adversity head on, not just in basketball but in life, that has to be his most unique trait.”

During those formative AAU years with his close friends, the Gauchos put together one of the most memorable and improbable stretches in recent memory. The team won four straight tournaments—the Cactus Classic, Nike Main Event, Pittsburgh Jam Fest, and Peach Jam—against national competition.

“Having fun,” recalls Scott of his team’s glory. “Everybody was just happy. It didn’t matter how we won because we were so close. Those were probably some of the best times.”

These days, Scott is still all about business on the hardwood. At 6-4 he boasts the handle and quickness of players who are shorter than he is, combined with an unorthodox yet rapidly improving jump shot with range, and an ever-improving feel for when and how to share the ball with his teammates.

When discussing the off-season and upcoming 2011-12 season with Durand Scott, his tenacity jumps through the phone. Being a starter for the past two seasons at the University has been nice, but the junior point guard expects more. He expects to win when he takes the floor, and he hasn’t quite done that yet so far in his tenure at The U, so he has done everything in his power to change that.

“I’ve been doing a little traveling,” explained Scott. “I spent most of my time training in Las Vegas (at Impact Academy) over the summer and then I headed to upstate New York. I didn’t even get to go home, I just went to upstate NY and those were pretty much my two locations for working out this summer until I came back to school.”

What did he work on?

“I definitely want to make my ball-handling—I want to perfect that,” boomed Scott. “I want to get more out of my dribble, so that was my main focus and I think that should help me to keep my turnovers down.

“Also, I want to have a more consistent jump shot. You can choose between those two as my primary [areas of improvement] but there’s never anywhere perfect in your game, so I just have to try to work on different parts of it. I listen to

different people to learn about different ideas, to see what they think of me—about where my game should be and where it’s at right at this moment.”

In his first two seasons at Miami, Scott’s averaged 12 points, 3.3 assists and 4.1 rebounds in 30 minutes per game for two inconsistent, up-and-down teams. With George Mason Coach Jim Larranaga taking over following an abrupt departure by Coach Frank Haith to the University of Missouri, it’s no surprise that Scott is optimistic and energetic about the second half of his career as a Hurricane.

“Coach Larranaga preaches about defense a lot and I think I’ll catch onto that real quickly,” stated Scott. “Coming from Rice [in NYC], man-to-man is all we played, so this should be nothing new to me.

“As far as offensively, I only hear things are hurried up. He’s a great coach and he coaches the way I want to play so I’m just looking forward to seeing what’s going to happen. I like his goals, I like his vision, the way he has things in place for us. I’m just ready to go out there, get ready for the season, and get some Ws.”

“I know he’s always watching out from above,” explained Scott of his father. “He’s not the only one that inspired me—I have a lot of family and friends that mean a lot to me—but he definitely inspired me the most.”

Durand Scott has nine stars tattooed on his right arm for family members and friends who have all passed away and really meant something to his life. He plays the game and lives life for those people just as much as he does himself. For the upcoming season, Scott has even designed a pair of kicks that will be dedicated to his late father and his mother. He named them “My Parents,” and is excited to bring take the freshies out of the box and put them to good use this season.

As far as the future—life after college—is concerned, Scott doesn’t seem to be in any kind of rush to leave Coral Gables, FL.

“I’m really not thinking about the future—I’m just thinking about work right now,” said a stern Scott. “As far into the future I can go is tomorrow. I’m just trying to do everything I can to help my teammates, and when that time comes, I’ll have to figure it out. But right now all I’m thinking about is now.”

Hard work, friendships, family, a caring attitude, and a healthy competitive spirit are some of the characteristics that Durand Scott is comprised of.

A marvelous hunger to become better at his craft, the pursuit of creating a winning team, and honoring those stars on his right arm will help ensure that he attains his goals—both on and off the court—throughout his life.

***Shoutout to F4L. Chris Fouch at Drexel, Kemba Walker in the League, Darryl Truck Bryant at West Virginia, Darvell Carter at Marist and Jordan Theodore at Seton Hall.

Larranaga Doing Best He Can With MASH Unit

CaneSport.com

Sept. 23, 2011

by Matt Shodell

First-year Cane coach Jim Larranaga, through all his coaching years, showed an uncanny knack for getting the most out of his teams.

And perhaps this season will pose one of his biggest challenges, as injuries to key players continue to pop up. First it was All-ACC center Reggie Johnson going down with a knee injury. He is expected out until at least January.

Then it was the team’s other big man starter, Julian Gamble, going down for the season. Larranaga is hopeful Gamble can get a medical redshirt and return next season. Freshman guard Bishop Daniels has also been on the shelf since mid-summer due to injury, and Larranaga is hopeful he will begin working out soon.

Most recently it was second-leading scorer Durand Scott (13.6 points, 4.2 rebounds, 3.1 assists) going down with a stress reaction. He isn’t expected to return until sometime next month.

“We’re kind of a MASH unit right now,” Larranaga says. But Larranaga says he’s not frustrated, disappointed or upset.

Those words aren’t in his vocabulary. The word he does stress? “Preparation.”

“I find my job is all about preparing,” Larranaga said. “How do we prepare them to be the best team we can be, a better defensive team than last year, better offensive team? The part of coaching I really enjoy is you have to have a lot of preparation for a season, know the personnel and take advantage of their strengths while minimizing weaknesses the opponent will try to exploit.

“Guys that aren’t there ... it’s not like I’m frustrated. I’d love for them to be healthy and out there, but these other guys are making nice progress.”

Larranaga adds that “When you have Durand and Reggie out, and you have Julian and Bishop Daniels and the uncertainty of Shane Larkin (a freshman who left DePaul and is appealing to the NCAA to play right away), you have a lot of question marks and not so many answers. The guys who are working out - Malcolm (Grant), Trey McKinney Jones, Garius (Adams), Rion Brown - are doing a terrific job. I’m very pleased with the work of (Kenny) Kadji and Raphael Akpejiori. Those guys are battling each other, just as Eric Swoope and DeQuan Jones are battling. The guys that are healthy are working hard, making progress.”

Without Johnson and Gamble in the front court the team will turn to Akpejiori and Kadji, the only players on the roster over 6-foot-7. Because of the lack of depth inside, Larranaga says it’s possible he’ll use the 6-7 Jones at center in certain situations and the 6-foot-5 McKinney Jones at power forward.

“My coaches and I are a very flexible group,” Larranaga said. “We have a number of different ways to play offense and defense based on our personnel. Some of it has to do with having coached so long, coaching so many different players. There were times even last season where I played four guards together because of how well that group played

offense and how well they were able to play team defense. Other teams I had were very big. It was the way they were able to play together that determined it.”

That’s the big emphasis now - teaching this group, the healthy ones at least, how to play team defense and work together efficiently on offense. And defensively the focus hasn’t been on the scramble for which Larranaga’s teams are so well known. For now it’s all about how to stop another team going one-on-one.

“Our primary defense is straight up man to man with pressure on the ball,” Larranaga said. “Our goal is to have a defensive field goal percentage overall of 40 percent or less. We have to begin teaching our man to man principles. Once they learn those we can institute our scramble defense which will complement the man to man.”

Formal practice doesn’t begin until Oct. 14. Currently coaches are allowed to spend eight hours a week with the team, with two of those on the basketball court. With so many players injured, there’s only so much progress the Canes can make as an overall team right now.

“It’s clear we have a lot of work ahead of us,” Larranaga said. “There’s going to be a major transition from what we’ve done in the past and what we’re expecting them to do now. The defensive philosophy is different, the offensive style of play, too.

“There’s a major learning curve with the defense we’re going to play, and it’s going to take some time. And I hope fans will be patient while they’re learning.”

* Syracuse and Pittsburgh will be joining the ACC, making an already tough conference that much more difficult.

“In my opinion the ACC is the best basketball conference in the country,” Larranaga said. “It’s the best and got better. For me as a coach, the reason I came to the University of Miami is to try and win the national championship. To do that you have to beat the best. If anything, playing against the likes of the Dukes, Carolinas, Syracuse, Pittsburghs will prepare our team for what will hopefully be a run at an ACC and national title. Is that easier now? No. Is it easier said than done? Absolutely. That’s the challenge my staff and players have. That’s what we all want.”

* Johnson continues to drop weight as he rehabs off knee surgery. The once portly center is now a relatively slim 289 pounds.

“When I took the job he weighed 313,” Larranaga said. “A lot of it is Reggie’s determination to get back on the floor. He knows the lighter he is the quicker his transition back to good shape will be.”

* Asked how much potential he sees on this team, Larranaga said, “No matter where we are to start the season I would expect we’ll be considerably better in January and better still in February and hopefully in March. I say that in the anticipation of having a more healthy team.”

* Regarding freshman Shane Larkin, who arrived on campus the day before classes began, Larranaga said, “We don’t know his status yet as to whether he will be eligible to play or if he’ll be classified as a transfer from DePaul (he withdrew from DePaul in early August following a medical situation in his family). We have to submit some paperwork and that hasn’t been done yet and the NCAA has to have a ruling.”

* A key for this team will be getting Scott back at 100

percent.

“If Durand is able to come back and start practicing, learn the offense and defense - that’ll take him a while and he’s not even doing the stuff right now,” Larranaga said. “We start practice Oct. 14 and he’ll be behind. Right now he’s in the rehab stage and the trainer will let me know what his status is as we get closer to the start of practice. Right now he’s in a boot and only shooting free throws.

“Having Durand back and healthy will give us a chance to see how we can take advantage of his skills. In the meantime we’ll give someone else a chance to show what he can do. Trey McKinney Jones has really worked hard and shown a lot of promise.”

* Acknowledging that the team is “down in numbers up front,” Larranaga jokes of walkon tryouts to be held Sept. 28 that “We’re hoping there will be a 7-2 walkon that wants to play, a real sleeper.”

* Asked if, other than Grant and Scott, there is anyone he knows will get starter minutes in games at this point, Larranaga said, “There’s absolutely nobody out of the running for substantial playing time right now. I’ve seen a lot of positives from every guy.”

* Of Daniels’ skills, Larranaga said, “I know he’s got great speed and jumping ability. He’s an athlete.”

With Daniels missing time due to injury Larranaga adds that “He has a lot he has to learn in terms of the game.”

Of Larkin, Larranaga said, “Shane is a true point guard. But he can also shoot. He gives us a dimension that you’re always looking for. He can not only be a good basketball player himself but help others to play well. He’s real good at getting ball to other guys.”

* Asked if there are any NCAA issues relating to the basketball team and if Jones, who was mentioned in the Nevin Shapiro allegations, will be okay to play this season, Larranaga said, “To be quite honest I don’t know any more than anybody else. I’m just waiting to hear what the status is.”

* Larranaga’s excited about his induction into the New York City Basketball Hall of Fame.

Larranaga, who grew up in the Bronx, joins a Hall of Fame that includes Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Red Auerbach, Bob Cousy, Clair Bee, Billy Cunningham, Pop Gates, Connie Hawkins, Dick McGuire and Adolph Schayes.

“When you grow up in New York City as a high school basketball player you quickly learn the history of basketball in the City,” Larranaga said. “Everybody follows the legends. Then, when I got into college coaching, I went back to New York City all the time. I always felt there were so many great players, so if you could get one a year you were doing very well. Now, 40 years after I started coaching, I’m joining a very select group of coaches and athletes, and that’s very special for me.”

Kadji Ready to Step Up

InsideTheU.com
Sept. 22, 2011
By Christopher Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- Kenny Kadji will be looking for a second chance to live up to the hype surrounding him coming out of high school.

As the nation's fifth-ranked center in 2008 and out of Pendleton/IMG Academy, where he averaged 28 points, 12 rebounds, and four blocks a game, he had two unproductive seasons at Florida.

The 6-11, 250-pound center originally from Cameroon averaged 3.7 points and 2.4 rebounds in 42 games for the Gators before suffering a herniated disc in his back ending his sophomore season.

He transferred to Miami last August and sat out last season due to NCAA transfer rules. UM went 21-14.

"It was tough sitting out," Kadji said. "We lost a lot of close games and I felt if I was there I could have helped and gave something extra for us to win. I learned a lot of things like how my teammates play. It was tough, but I feel this year we are going to get over that hump."

Kadji says he's learned a lot from his time at Florida.

"I learned how the game is played, how different high school is from college," he said. "You have to come prepared every day and every practice. You can't fall back or relax. Whenever you start in November until March, you have to be ready every practice and come focused."

Last year was also a learning experience from him.

"I'd say my work ethic has gotten better," Kadji said. "Coming back mentally and be ready to take care of body because of injuries. My bas-

ketball IQ has gotten better because of all that time on the bench, watching film, I almost felt like an assistant coach these last two years."

Now, he's looking to be a big contributor for the Hurricanes in 2011-12.

"I just thought Miami was an upcoming program with Durand Scott, Malcolm Grant, and Reggie Johnson," Kadji said. "I knew we could have a great time and I wanted to come here, be coached, and have a chance to win a championship and I still feel like this team can do it."

Kadji's impact will need to be even greater this season with Johnson expected to be out until January and forward/center Julian Gamble out for the season with an ACL injury.

"I feel like I'm ready for whatever coaches want me to do," Kadji said. "Obviously with Julian and Reggie out, we're counting on me and Ralph (Akpejiori). It's going to be a whole team effort. Reggie was one of the best big men in the ACC last year, it's big shoes to feel, and it's going to take the whole team."

Kadji, a projected starter, says he doesn't feel pressure to perform in his first season with the injuries to two key big men.

"Not really, but even if there is pressure, I kind of like it," Kadji said. "I've had pressure since I came out of high school with what I did in high school so that's not really a problem. The coaches haven't really put any pressure on me. I haven't paid attention to what fans or anyone else has said. I just want to help the team any way I can."

Kadji and the team have been busy with individual workouts in the off-season including working on his post moves and lifting weights. Last week, the team began doing workouts as

a group as they prepare for the season, which begins with an exhibition game on November 11.

Everyone has been getting used to what new coach Jim Larranaga expects and the style he wants to bring to the team.

"He's been great so far," Kadji said. "He just wants us to learn a lot with the way he plays. The way we played last year, it's going to be different. Right now we are learning a lot, watching a lot of film, he talks to us every day about what he wants and he's been great for us."

As far as the differences between this year's team under Larranaga compared to Frank Haith's squad a year ago, Kadji said: "A lot of sharing the ball, unselfish plays, running, and defense has been our main focus. I think we are going to be better on defense."

Top 68 Team Previews: #30 Miami Hurricanes

The Hoops Report
September 23, 2011
By Ryan Feldman

Miami Hurricanes
Last Season: 21-15 (6-10)
Key Losses: Adrian Thomas
Head Coach: Jim Larranaga

Projected Starting Lineup
PG: Malcolm Grant 6-1 Sr.
SG: Durand Scott 6-4 Jr.
SF: Garrius Adams 6-6 Jr.
PF: Kenny Kadji 6-11 So.
C: Reggie Johnson 6-10 Jr.
Key Reserves: DeQuan Jones 6-7 Sr. SF, Rion Brown 6-6 So. SG, Trey McKinney-Jones 6-5 Jr. SG, Bishop Daniels 6-3 Fr. SG

If the Miami Hurricanes have their full array of talent this season, they will be a force to be reckoned with in the ACC.

But there's no guarantee they will have their full array. Star center Reggie Johnson, who withdrew from the NBA Draft to return to Miami for his junior year, is coming off knee surgery after tearing his meniscus during the offseason. The good news is that he reportedly lost 20 pounds while rehabbing and is now down to about 285 pounds. The bad news is that Johnson may not return until after the New Year.

Johnson, who is a load down low and perhaps the most valuable player on the Hurricanes roster, is the main focus of concern for Miami fans, but he isn't the only one whose playing status is uncertain. DeQuan Jones, a 6-foot-7 talented senior wing, was accused of accepting illegal benefits and is under investigation by the NCAA.

Losing Jones wouldn't affect the outlook for the Hurricanes too much, but other players will have to step up while Johnson is out. That

includes incoming transfer Kenny Kadji, a 6-foot-10 big man who comes to Miami from the University of Florida. Kadji averaged 4.4 points and 2.7 rebounds per game as a freshman at Florida before being injured early in his sophomore year. Kadji will now be a fourth-year sophomore at Miami. With Kadji and Johnson playing together, they will be a powerful force down low in the ACC. But without Johnson, Kadji will have to step up as the Hurricanes' primary option in the frontcourt.

While Johnson is out, the Hurricanes will be thin up front with 6-foot-10 senior Julian Gamble likely out for the season with a torn ACL. That means Kadji will really have to step up and stay out of foul trouble.

Other than Johnson and Kadji, the Hurricanes have a slew of guards and wings. It starts with Malcolm Grant and Durand Scott, a high-powered New York backcourt duo. Neither is a pure point guard, but both can handle the ball and score.

Grant and Scott are both play-makers. Grant, a 6-foot-1 junior guard, likes to do most of his scoring from the perimeter. He shot 42.3 percent from 3-point range last season while attempting more than six 3-pointers per game. He led the team in scoring with 14.8 points per game while adding 3.2 assists per game.

Scott, a 6-foot-4 athletic guard, does most of his scoring around the basket. He uses his athleticism and play-making abilities to get to the rim. He averaged 13.6 points, 4.2 rebounds and 3.1 assists per game last season. Grant and Scott have the ball in their hands the majority of the time when they are on the floor. The Hurricanes rely on them to make things happen.

Garrius Adams will likely be the third guard in the Hurricanes starting backcourt. The 6-foot-6 junior averaged 7.3 points and 3.7 rebounds per game last season.

Backing up Grant, Scott and Adams will be Jones, Rion Brown, Trey McKinney-Jones and Bishop Daniels. Jones, as mentioned above, is an athletic wing who hasn't quite panned out into the star he was expected to be when he was recruited. Jones and Brown, a 6-foot-6 sophomore, each put up more than four points per game last season.

McKinney-Jones, a 6-foot-5 junior who transferred from UMKC, averaged 10.9 points per game during the 2009-10 season. Daniels, a 6-foot-3 freshman from Word of God in Raleigh, N.C. (same high school as John Wall), is a fast, athletic combo guard who can rise above the rim.

In his first season with the Hurricanes, head coach Jim Larranaga, who comes over from George Mason, will have a talented, experienced group that can compete in the ACC. The Hurricanes have increased their win total from 19 to 20 to 21 over the last three seasons. They hope to improve that total by more than one win this year, and they especially hope to improve upon their 6-10 finish in conference play last season.

Other than Johnson's health, Miami's biggest issue is not having a pure point guard. Grant and Scott are primed to turn the ball over often, but they also form a high-tempo scoring attack that is tough to stop. With their guard play combined with Johnson and Kadji down low, there is no reason the Hurricanes shouldn't be in the NCAA tournament in Larranaga's first season in South Beach.

Sitting Down On The Job

Sports Illustrated
September 20, 2011
George Dohrmann

The guard's summer conditioning drills were geared toward one thing: improving the biggest weakness in his game

DURAND SCOTT WILL REMEMBER THE 2011 OFF-SEASON AS THE WALL SIT SUMMER. The wall sit is a common conditioning drill during which the participant stands against a wall and then slowly lowers his body until his knees form a 90-degree angle. He must sit in this invisible chair for as long as he can. It is murder on the quads.

For several weeks last summer Scott, a New York City native, trained about 40 miles north at a gym in Peekskill, N.Y. His days were filled with wall sits and other drills designed to fix the one glaring weakness in his game: ball handling.

"I'm a big point guard [6' 4"], and last season I wouldn't get low enough, and guys could get under me and steal the ball," says Scott. "I worked on my whole game this summer, but most of all I worked on improving that one area."

If Scott's work pays off, he is poised to take a leap that could land Miami in the NCAA tournament for the first time in four seasons and land Scott in next summer's NBA draft. A skilled scorer, Scott hit a ceiling of sorts last season, as did his team. He scored with great efficiency (44.5% from the field, 39.1% on three-pointers), but he also turned the ball over far too often (100 for the season, including 10 in a game against Georgia Tech). When new coach Jim Larranaga arrived from George Mason, he had only to watch a few hours of film to see that taking care of the ball was at the top of Scott's, and the team's, to-do list.

"It was something I knew and also something Coach told me when he came in," says Scott. "So, I tried to do something about it."

Scott trained in Peekskill for several weeks, and it speaks to his dedication that he didn't regularly venture back to New York City to visit friends and family. Other than a few days in June around the NBA draft, when he celebrated with friend and former UConn guard Kemba Walker, Scott bunkered down in Peekskill working out with a trainer recommended by his AAU coach.

In addition to those wall sits, the trainer put Scott through drills in which he was forced to dribble low and move up the court while his trainer pushed against him. In another exercise Scott had to dribble while players grabbed his arms and legs. "I left with a lot more confidence in my ball handling," he says. "Decision-making will come with playing more and watching film, but I know I am better prepared now to handle the ball like I need to."

Scott's choice of Miami three years ago was a surprise, as he picked the school over UConn, UCLA and other top programs. He liked coach Frank Haith, and naturally he was disappointed when Haith bolted for Missouri last April. "But then [Larranaga] came in, and he's also from New York, and he connected with us and made us feel comfortable, and you see that he has some great ideas and expectations," Scott says.

One of Larranaga's expectations is that Scott will team with senior Malcolm Grant to form one of the best backcourts in the country. "They are both very experienced scorers and have provided great leadership for us during the transition," the coach says. Adds Scott, "Malcolm and I, we see that we aren't mentioned as one of the top backcourts, and we take offense to that. Especially after the summer I've had, I have so much confidence in myself and my team. We are going to open some eyes."

On Starting Over and the Things he can Control

Sports Illustrated
September 20, 2011
George Dohrmann

SI: You left George Mason, where you were happy and very successful. Has the Miami job been all that you expected?

JL: It was such a difficult decision because I enjoyed the school and loved every minute of my 14 years there. It helped that I wasn't making the transition by myself. My coaching staff came with me. It also helped that players here embraced us and made us feel at home.

SI: MOST PEOPLE DON'T THINK OF YOU AS A MIAMI KIND OF GUY. ARE YOU?

JL: MY FATHER WAS BORN AND RAISED IN KEY WEST. HIS FATHER WAS FROM CUBA. I WAS RAISED IN NEW YORK, BUT WE VACATIONED IN FLORIDA. SEVEN YEARS AGO MY WIFE AND I BOUGHT A HOUSE IN SARASOTA. I'M COMFORTABLE HERE.

SI: Since you took the job, a Yahoo! investigation alleged massive NCAA violations in the athletic department. Miami's reputation has taken another hit, and one of your players was named. How are you handling that with the team?

JL: I have told the players that our philosophy will be based on three things: attitude, commitment and class. Those are the things we can control, and we can't concern ourselves with things other people said or did or what is being reported.

Miami Hurricanes Preview

Sports Illustrated
September 20, 2011
George Dohrmann

Injuries and off-court issues will force Miami to lean heavily on its guards. Fortunately for new coach Jim Larranaga, that position is stocked with talent

WHEN ASSESSING A TEAM'S PROSPECTS, IT'S TYPICAL TO BEGIN with strengths, but in Jim Larranaga's first season in Coral Gables, the Hurricanes may well be defined by what they lack.

Star center Reggie Johnson injured his right knee over the summer and will be out until at least January. His backup, senior Julian Gamble, suffered a left-knee injury and is likely lost for the year. Add in the uncertain status of small forward DeQuan Jones—who was named in a Yahoo! report as having taken impermissible benefits from a booster (the NCAA is investigating)—and a giant VACANCY sign hangs over Miami's frontcourt.

"Early in the season we may not only play three guards, but we might play four," says Larranaga. "We don't have a choice."

The silver lining is that the Hurricanes have some stellar ball handlers. Senior Malcolm Grant and junior Durand Scott, a pair of New Yorkers, are dynamic scorers who combined to average 28.4 points (39.6% of Miami's total scoring). Two other established guards, junior Garrius Adams and sophomore Rion Brown, also return.

But going small means that the Hurricanes could be dominated on the boards. "It is going to be up to the guards to really help us compete [in the paint]," says Larranaga. "Everybody is going to have to rebound, and the guards who are going to play are going to be the ones who can help us in that area."

Miami must also get better at defending the three-point shot (it allowed teams to shoot 35.4% last season, which ranked ninth in the ACC) and cut down on turnovers. (Only Wake

Forest had a worse assist-to-turnover ratio.) "When I came here and watched the film, those were the two areas where it was clear we had to get better," says Larranaga.

In the best-case scenario, improving those trouble spots, combined with the scoring of Grant and Scott, will keep the Hurricanes afloat while the frontcourt gets sorted out. Kenny Kadji, a 6' 11" sophomore transfer from Florida, seems the surest bet to start along with the four guards.

"We are going to be small, but people shouldn't think we don't have any big men," Scott says. "Kenny might not be well known by a lot of people, but he is really talented. We feel like he can pick up the slack, and then when Reggie comes back, we will be deeper and even better."

TELLING NUMBERS

36 GAMES started by Malcolm Grant during 2010-11, a Miami single-season record. His 1,165 minutes played last year rank third all-time.

100 ASSISTS or more for Grant and fellow guard Durand Scott. They are the first Miami teammates with that many assists in two consecutive seasons since 1988-89.

15 GAMES decided by six points or less, including eight straight that were decided by four points or less, which is a conference record.

KEY GAME

PURDUE Miami's nonconference schedule isn't the stoutest, so snatching a road win against the rebuilding Boilermakers will help its NCAA tournament chances. This is a must-win before tougher tests against Memphis and at West Virginia.

PROJECTED STARTERS

G GARRIUS ADAMS JUNIOR

HEIGHT: 6' 6" 7.3 PPG 3.7 RPG 1.8 APG

The quietly efficient swingman may be the best bet to pick up the rebounding slack as Miami attempts to overcome a lack of size in the frontcourt.

G RION BROWN SOPHOMORE

HEIGHT: 6' 6" 4.4 PPG 2.0 RPG 0.6 APG

An up-and-down freshman season included some promising moments (19 points versus Maryland) and some frustrating ones (1 for 10 versus Florida State).

G MALCOLM GRANT SENIOR

HEIGHT: 6' 11" 14.8 PPG 1.8 RPG 3.2 APG

One of the nation's premier shooters, Grant was the ACC leader in three-point percentage (42.3) and free throw percentage (85.3).

G DURAND SCOTT JUNIOR

HEIGHT: 6' 4" 13.6 PPG 4.2 RPG 3.1 APG

He dramatically improved his free throw percentage (from 67.0 to 83.7) and his three-point shooting (27.6 to 39.1) in his sophomore season.

F-C KENNY KADJI SOPHOMORE

HEIGHT: 6' 11" 4.4 PPG 2.7 RPG 0.7 BPG*

Kadji was among the top prep centers in the class of 2008. The Hurricanes are hoping a change of scenery leads him to reach his potential.

TOP RESERVE

F ERIK SWOOPE SOPHOMORE

HEIGHT: 6' 6" 1.4 PPG 1.0 RPG 0.4 SPG

Made nine starts as a true freshman. Swoope averaged about 6½ minutes last season but will have an expanded role in a frontcourt decimated by injuries. An undersized forward, Swoope's strength and leaping ability will help him compete.

PLAYER TO WATCH

C REGGIE JOHNSON JUNIOR

HEIGHT: 6' 10" 11.9 PPG 9.7 APG 1.3 BPG

Should return from knee injury for ACC play. An All-ACC honorable mention as a sophomore, Johnson was second in the conference in offensive rebounds (3.5) and led the team in blocks (45). His 347 boards were the most by a Hurricanes player since Rick Barry's 475 in 1964-65.

Don't call Miami's Reggie Johnson fat

CBSSports.com

Sept. 2, 2011

by Jeff Goodman

CORAL GABLES, Fla. - When I walked into the weight room, I almost didn't recognize him.

A slimmed-down version of Reggie Johnson was in the midst of his rehab.

I'll be honest. I had written Johnson off the moment I heard the news back in early July that he would be out 5-6 months after suffering a major knee injury.

But that was when he was, well, fat (please don't tell him I said that).

That would put his return around the New Year - and usually, 300-plus pounders (Johnson played at about 310 a year ago) aren't able to come back quickly and in shape after being on the mend for such a lengthy period of time.

But Johnson has dropped about 20 or so pounds and is down in the 285 range - and Larranga and his staff are hopeful he will be able to make an impact when he returns, whether that be in December or January.

"I'm no doctor and just know the doctors told me it would be six months for him to be 100 percent," Larranaga said.

"We're going to have three different seasons," he added. "Without Reggie, when Reggie comes back and then with a healthy Reggie. We're obviously a different team with him."

Johnson gives the Hurricanes something few teams can boast these days: a legitimate inside presence and a guy who can score in the post. He averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds last season.

Larranga has already gone through plenty of

adversity since taking the job down in Miami - as I documented in my story last night - but the return of a sub-300 pound Johnson for ACC play would give the Hurricanes a chance to be an NCAA tournament team this season.

Miami's Reggie Johnson slims down during knee rehab

Sporting News
Sept. 2, 2011
Staff report

Miami center Reggie Johnson, who struggled to stay in shape even when healthy, has lost 20-plus pounds while rehabbing from a major knee injury.

Johnson, a 6-10 junior, averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds last season while playing at about 310 pounds. He now says he is down to 285 as he is rehabbing from a torn meniscus in late June. Rehab from surgery is going well, and Miami officials say he is on schedule to return to game action in late December or early January.

With senior swingman DeQuan Jones' eligibility status in limbo as the NCAA investigation allegations that he received \$10,000 from a Miami booster to attend the school, Johnson's recovery is even more important for the Hurricanes.

"I'm no doctor and just know the doctors told me it would be six months for him to be 100 percent," new Miami coach Jim Larranaga told CBS Sports. "We're going to have three different seasons: Without Reggie, when Reggie comes back and then with a healthy Reggie. We're obviously a different team with him."

While Johnson is out, Larranaga's first Miami team figures to be perimeter-oriented around Malcolm Grant and Durand Scott. Scott is a good penetrator, and Grant led the ACC in 3-point shooting (.423) last season.

Injuries thin front court

Injuries thin front court
Aug 24, 2011
By Allison Goodman

Julian Gamble, the Canes' fifth-year senior forward/center, is expected to miss the entire 2011-12 season after tearing his anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) Tuesday.

The veteran, who was expected to be a key contributor in Jim Larranaga's first season as head coach, played in all 35 games last year, starting 13. He averaged 3.8 points and four rebounds per game while placing second on the team in shooting percentage (58.6).

"We feel awful for Julian Gamble," said Jim Larranaga in a statement. "Tearing your ACL is a devastating injury at any time in your career, but particularly in your fifth year of eligibility."

For Gamble, his focus now shifts from the upcoming season to the rehabilitation of the knee ligament that has proved to be very troublesome for countless athletes before him.

"We will do everything we can to support him in his efforts to rehabilitate this injury," Larranaga said. "We know he will also be there supporting his teammates, because that is just the kind of person he is."

Gamble remains optimistic despite the devastating injury.

"I promise I will come back better and always keep my head up in hard times," Gamble tweeted Tuesday in the aftermath of the injury.

The news of Gamble's misfortune came less than two months after starting center Reggie Johnson underwent surgery to repair a torn meniscus in his right knee.

Johnson is expected to be held out for at least another four months and the team anticipates a mid-season return from the team's leading big man, who averaged a near double-double last season with 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds per game.

The injuries will force the Canes to get creative during the first few months of the season until Johnson's return. The 2011-2012 season schedule was released Wednesday afternoon, and features some challenging non-conference match-ups against NCAA tournament regulars.

With two of the Canes' best post players sidelined to start the season, Miami will rely heavily on redshirt sophomore center Kenny Kadji, who will be eligible to play for the Canes after sitting out the 2010-11 season due to his transfer from the University of Florida.

Kadji, a 6-foot-11-inch center from Cameroon, will be Larranaga's go-to option in the paint as sophomore Raphael Akpejori, of Nigeria, looks to gain playing time in a frontcourt that is spreading thin.

Larranaga, however, is no stranger to success without size up front.

His 2006 George Mason team that made its miraculous run to the Final Four did not have a single player taller than 6 feet 8 inches.

George Mason, which belongs to the Colonial Athletic Association, defeated storied programs like Michigan State, UNC and Connecticut en route to the Final Four that season.

James Jones Hangs With Middle Schoolers

NBCMiami.com
Aug 9, 2011
By JuliaBagg

LOS ANGELES, CA - "He's tall," said 13-year-old Lyonna Knight when she first spotted the Miami Heat's hometown star.

Knight is one of 57 foster kids at the James Jones Legacy Foundation Summer Youth Enrichment Camp.

It's a partnership with the state's Department of Children and Families, which runs 'Camps for Champions.' Florida International University and other volunteers also make it possible.

For two-days, Knight will meet new friends, learn new athletic games, and hear from motivational speakers.

"We want them to know we support them," said Jones, who shared pointers with kids on the court. "It's a great opportunity to have fun with your friends."

Organizers plan to make the experience an annual self-esteem building event for middle schoolers.

Before Knight leaves, there is one thing she wants from Jones.

"His autograph," she said.

Brown Motivated, Excited for Season

InsideTheU.com
July, 2011
By Christopher Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- It's easy to find motivation at the University of Miami basketball practice facility.

The 10,000-square foot Fieldhouse, built in 2007, often yields some of the game's best players during the off-season.

Last summer, it was the surprise visit of two-time league MVP LeBron James that made headlines. Not to mention Chris Paul and Chris Bosh joining in open gym workouts with the current Canes.

This summer, perennial NBA All-Stars Kevin Durant and Joe Johnson along with 2011 top overall draft pick Kyrie Irving have worked out at the Fieldhouse.

"That's great to be in the gym with those guys working out at the same time," UM sophomore guard Rion Brown said. "They are on the other side of the court, but the fact that they are in here that makes you work even harder because you see what those guys are doing down there so that's great."

Former Hurricanes Jack McClinton (a 2009 second-round pick) and Lance Hurdle (D-League performer) have also been working out at UM.

For Brown, it only adds to his motivation of becoming a reliable scorer in the 2011-12 season.

"I really am looking to be that," Brown said. "I was kind of disappointed in myself last year because I could have helped a lot more with the scoring issues. Sometimes Malcolm (Grant) and A.T. (Adrian Thomas) would be off and I would just kind of be out there. I just always felt like I needed to step up and for some reason I just couldn't, but I'm just hoping I can do that this year and making sure I'm working on my game to have the confidence to do it."

Brown, a 6-foot-6 shooting guard out of Hinesville, Ga., has been busy during the summer working on his ability to get to the basket as opposed to relying on his three-point shot, which accounted for 64 percent of his shot attempts.

Rion Brown averaged 22.8 points a game as a senior at Liberty County HS.

"I got too trigger happy just shooting all of the time (last season)," Brown said. "In high school I was a slasher then I got here and then all I wanted to do was shoot. I just wanted to get back to how I used to play in high school, get to the rim and mix it up. I think that would help my game a lot more and help the team a lot more."

Brown averaged 4.4 points as a freshman playing in 35 games and starting the final four contests of the season, which included starts against North Carolina in the ACC tournament and three starts in the NIT earning valuable experience.

"I feel I accomplished something after that year, but now I'm just looking to maybe keep that spot," Brown said. "It's a free game now, everybody's out to get a spot. I've just got to keep working on my game to keep getting better."

The Coaching Change

Brown admits he considered transferring after former UM head coach Frank Haith left after the season for the Missouri job following a 21-14 season.

"Of course I thought about transferring," Brown said. "I said I would wait to see who the new coach was and soon as I saw it was (Jim Larranaga), knowing his track record, and meeting him, I already knew I was going to stay."

Larranaga relieved the anxiety Brown had after he met with him and his family and Brown decided to stay in Coral Gables.

"I knew enough about him before I met him so that eased me a little bit," Brown said. "All I had to do was talk to him. First time I talked to him, he met my family, after that I knew I was good."

And Brown has taken the change of coaches in stride.

"Of course I didn't expect that, but everything happens for a reason and maybe this is the guy that I was supposed to come here for and coach Haith was just a vessel to get me here to play for him, that's how I looked at it," Brown said.

Larranaga brings a wealth of experience and a successful track record to South Florida after 13 consecutive winning seasons at George Mason including a 2006 Final Four appearance.

"Obviously with the new coach everyone is excited," Brown said. "Everyone wants to see how the season is going to go, all of the changes. It's almost like my freshman year again, I don't know how he works. It's like the excitement of coming to college again. When I came to college I was just excited to get to work and it's the same thing now."

Larranaga is well-known for his personality, which is something Brown thinks will draw more of a buzz around a program that averaged 4,763 in attendance last season, a number that included many open seats.

"He's a great guy," Brown said. "He's real personable with everybody. When he first meets you, he shakes your hand, looks you dead in your eye. When you get qualities like that in a coach you can already tell how a season is going to go. Of course fans interact with him better, he gets with parents, everyone loves him so hopefully that will make for a better atmosphere during games and everybody wants to come out and see how we're doing, and that's great."

The 2011-12 season schedule will be announced in late August and the season won't begin until November, but Brown is already excited.

"I'm very excited because even with what we went through last year we felt we were a great team, the ball just didn't bounce our ways the last few minutes of some of those games, it could have been a totally different season," Brown said. "Now we're just hoping we can finish those games and be smarter, just get out of there with W's and it would be a completely different season. We are only losing Adrian and that is just one person. Yeah he was great for us, but now we have a freshman Bishop Daniels and he's great. He's going to give us more firepower at the guard spot so we should be great this year."

The goal for the 2011-12 season is to make an NCAA tournament appearance, something the Canes have not done since 2008.

"We've got to get there this year," Brown said. "If we don't get there this year, it's a disappointment. Honestly it is. I feel we can get there and get pretty deep there. If we keep building year after year and hopefully we can get to the Final Four one of these years."

Rebuilding The Hurricanes

ESPN.com
July 28, 2011
Andy Katz

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski and North Carolina coach Roy Williams were in attendance, as were Florida State's Leonard Hamilton, Ohio State's Thad Matta and Pitt's Jamie Dixon. Alabama and NC State were represented as well.

Sitting among the headline names at the HP Field House on the campus of the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex was Jim Larranaga, adorning a freshly acquired bright orange golf shirt with a "U" embroidered on the left chest, the traditional moniker for the University of Miami.

For 14 years as the coach of upstart George Mason, Larranaga relished his role as the underdog, most notably when the Patriots embarked on a historic run to the 2006 Final Four. He cashed in on that achievement by becoming a successful motivational speaker with a Washington, D.C.-based speakers group.

Larranaga had carved out his niche. George Mason was a Colonial Athletic Association power and a regular contender for an NCAA tournament berth. The Patriots are expected to be a preseason Top 25 team this season, and one that could possibly go on another magical March run.

He was 61. Yet he wasn't satisfied.

"I loved my 14 years at George Mason, and I know a lot of coaches say this: 'Don't mess with happiness,' and I was very, very happy at George Mason," Larranaga said. "I'm very goal-oriented and I wanted to take a shot at a league that gives you a chance to win a national championship."

Larranaga had an opportunity to return to his alma mater, Providence, three years ago when the Friars fired Tim Welsh. He turned them down.

"I've always been driven by the opportunity to succeed in your own league, so when I was being courted by my alma mater, Providence, in the Big East I knew the money was substantially better, but the opportunity to win the Big East for Providence would have been a stretch. To compete with teams like Connecticut, Syracuse, Georgetown and Louisville?" Larranaga said.

So Larranaga stayed on at Mason in the CAA. The league put another team in the Final Four in April when Virginia Commonwealth made an improbable run from the inaugural First Four to the Final Four. That means the CAA has put two teams in the Final Four in a five-year period; Miami has four NCAA tournament wins in its history.

And let's be honest: Miami isn't beating North Carolina or Duke for the ACC regular-season title any time soon. But getting access to an NCAA tournament berth should be easier out of what is currently a rather pedestrian ACC once you get past the Blue Devils and Tar Heels.

After former coach Frank Haith was scooped up by Missouri, Miami initially flirted with Harvard's Tommy Amaker, but to no avail. Then Miami president Donna Shalala and her top administrators got word of some

interest from Larranaga and, suddenly, there was a match few would have predicted.

"Every individual is on their own journey," said Larranaga, who consistently speaks as though he were giving a motivational speech. "I've never been driven by money, and when other schools came courting everyone thought I would move for the money.

"Right now, the ACC is going through a tremendous transition with eight new coaches [over the past three seasons], and any one of those eight could jump up into the upper echelon and make themselves a national contender," Larranaga said.

The theory that a coach has to move to a power-six job to compete for a national title seems to have less clout. Larranaga, in large part, helped start the trend that has since been followed by Butler's Brad Stevens and VCU's Shaka Smart.

But one thing that hasn't changed is access to players. Recruiting at a high level remains difficult, and in most cases out of reach for schools outside the power six.

"The quality of the player that receives our phone calls and shows genuine interest is different," Larranaga said. "We're now in the battle to get the really good players. Our football team has won five national championships. Our baseball team has won titles. In my mind, and the coaches here feel the same way, there's no reason why we can't compete with the best teams in the country to win a national championship. That's our goal."

Larranaga is no stranger to the ACC. He was an assistant to Terry Holland at Virginia in the 1980s when Ralph Sampson starred for the Cavaliers. But Duke wasn't Duke then. Now, North Carolina and Duke aren't going anywhere but the top of the ACC. The rest of the league is trying to catch them, with each taking a rotating turn in the chase. Maryland is going through a transition with the departure of Gary Williams and the arrival of Mark Turgeon; Hamilton has made Florida State consistently good; Virginia Tech has been a thorn in the side of all the above teams under Seth Greenberg but hasn't been able to get through to the NCAA tournament; Clemson made a smooth transition from Oliver Purnell to Brad Brownell and should be a regular in the postseason discussion; Virginia appears to be on the verge of a breakthrough under Tony Bennett.

It's too early to judge Steve Donahue at Boston College, but he is facing an overhaul of his roster. Mark Gottfried and Brian Gregory just arrived at their respective schools, NC State and Georgia Tech. Wake Forest is facing a major rebuild under Jeff Bzdelik.

"I love the challenge of now recruiting against the best teams in the country," Larranaga said.

Larranaga's current team took a major hit when one of the best big men in the ACC, Reggie Johnson, went down with a knee injury (torn meniscus) that will sideline him until January at the earliest. Johnson, a 6-foot-10, 305-pound center, averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds for the Canes as a sophomore.

"Reggie was going to be an impact force for us in the low post and could have been the leading rebounder in

the league," Larranaga said. "Because of the sensitivity of the knee and the decision to repair the cartilage they need four to five months for it to heal properly. He weighs 300 pounds and that can pound on his knee. So it will take three to four weeks to get him in playing shape.

"The earliest is Jan. 1 for a return, but it's more realistic to think mid-January," Larranaga said. "There will be a transition when Reggie comes back. He'll have to shed the cobwebs from being out for six months. Then we'll have him hopefully for the close of the ACC season in February, the ACC tournament and hopefully the postseason."

Larranaga will be counting on Florida transfer Kenny Kadji -- who never realized his potential with the Gators -- senior Julian Gamble and sophomore Raphael Akpejori to fill in for Johnson. All are about 6-10 to 6-11, but none have proved themselves at this level.

Getting shooting guard Bishop Daniels to keep his commitment was one of Larranaga's most significant coups after he got the job. Daniels will join an experienced roster in the backcourt with Malcolm Grant, Durand Scott and DeQuan Jones, and there's an expectation that UMKC transfer Trey McKinney Jones will have an impact, too.

Miami had the talent a year ago to be an NCAA tournament team, but the guard play wasn't strong in late-game possessions, notably early in the season at Memphis. That contributed to a bizarre season in which the Hurricanes finished ninth in the ACC at 6-10 overall, yet finished 21-15, enough to earn a bid to the NIT, where they lost to Alabama in the quarterfinals.

"Miami did win 21 games last season, but they did finish [ninth] in the ACC, and that concerns me," Larranaga said. "I think everyone thinks we'll be better this season, but it's a new system and a new philosophy and there will be an adjustment. They played a lot of 2-3 zone, and we'll only play zone in an extreme situation."

Larranaga said the Hurricanes will have multiple seasons within one -- the nonconference, the early ACC without Johnson, the latter part of the ACC with him and the ACC tournament before possibly the postseason. To reach that postseason goal, the Hurricanes will have to make some noise in the nonconference schedule. The ACC ranked 16th in nonconference scheduling last season. The Big East was No. 1. That was a major issue at the annual spring meetings. The ACC had four NCAA tournament teams. The Big East had 11.

Larranaga knows about scheduling into the NCAA tournament. He had multiple at-large berths at Mason, including in its 2006 Final Four run.

This season, the Canes will play Purdue, Memphis, West Virginia, Rutgers, Ole Miss and UMass in nonconference play.

"If we can succeed without Reggie in the nonconference then we should be able to set ourselves up to compete for postseason play out of the ACC," Larranaga said. "I've never had the ambition to retire. I love coaching. I have the passion to keep doing it and see players develop and mature."

Opinion: You can feel the passion in new hirings

CaneSport.com
April 23, 2011
by Jim Martz

What's next? Is Jim Morris going to announce he's retiring as the Miami Hurricanes' baseball coach?

No, I'm not starting a rumor. Let's hope he's coaching at UM for many more seasons.

But look at what has happened at the top of the athletics program in just three months. And three days.

A new football coach, a new director of athletics earlier this week and Friday a new men's basketball coach. That's unprecedented over the last three decades or so.

When there was a revolving door of coaches and AD's in the 1970s, there couldn't be a change in basketball coaches because there was no program for 15 years.

Football coach Al Golden, new AD Shawn Eichorst and new basketball coach Jim Larranaga share one thing that stands out: Passion.

That was obvious in the first few seconds of Larranaga's opening remarks Friday evening at his first press conference. If you were just listening and not watching, you'd swear Dick Vitale was speaking.

"I can tell you right away, I am very excited to be here!" Larranaga said, pounding his fist on the podium and speaking with Vitale's enthusiasm, mannerisms and New York/New Jersey accent. "I have no question about that."

And there's no question that the people at the top of UM athletics in this period of transition exude enthusiasm. And they all are great communicators.

"It's extremely exciting," Eichorst said of this period. "It's the reason I took the opportunity."

Asked for his expectations for the next five to 10 years, he replied with a message to fans and the community, "Get on board because you have lot to be proud of. We have great young people in this program, dynamic coaches who want to do it the right way. And so if you want to be associated with the U, with a program that's going to do it the right way, we're ready to take you on."

UM invariably is knocked for its bandwagon fan base in football and basketball. That may be changing soon.

Golden, Larranaga, and Eichorst exude enthusiasm. So does women's basketball coach Katie Meier, whose team just finished as co-regular-season ACC champions and reached the NCAA Tournament. Her passion is so contagious I considered writing a column suggesting she be considered to be the men's basketball coach.

Turns out that Larranaga is just as enthusiastic. And Meier even coaches defense like he does.

"It's funny," she said, "because I do a staff retreat every year and we give each other homework. The homework I gave myself was his scramble defense two years ago. I watched all of his tapes. I didn't actually call him but I studied his teams, his defenses, certainly took a lot of it because I knew we had this athletic team that could scramble.

"So I was really excited when I heard who the hire was. I was thrilled. I think he's awesome. I know I'll be watching a lot of his practices and sitting in his office and sharing a lot of information. We met for a half hour this morning, had a lot of high energy exchange. He's got a ton of energy, he's world class."

Meier added, "The thing I loved when I studied him, he knew his part. He knew what to do with what he had. And then he adapts. Miami should be really thrilled."

Some people I talked to Friday raised eyebrows when they heard that Larranaga is 61.

"Hah," said Meier when I mentioned his age. "I had no concern about his age when we talked this morning. He's very young, very young, got a ton of energy. And I do, too."

So he's 61. That's not old nowadays. At first glance he's 61 going on 41. UConn's Jim Calhoun just won the NCAA championship at age 68.

"For me, age is a number," said Eichorst. "Some people think I'm too young, some think he's too old. That's not a factor to me. He wanted to be here and we wanted him to be here."

Larranaga said his new job is "kind of the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be all about."

No, he doesn't have one foot in retirement. I see more fire in him than in any of the coaches hired since the program was resurrected in 1985.

Here's something else to like about Larranaga: He's the first basketball coach in UM history to have taken a team to the Final Four as a head coach.

Frank Martin of Kansas State, who reportedly lobbied for the job, has been a head coach for just five years and hasn't gone past the Elite 8.

I think Larranaga is a better hire, and not just because he took an unheralded program to the Final Four but because he's a veteran coach with a solid record. Martin could have lit a fire in the fan base. Larranaga will do that, too, and more, I believe.

"Our challenge is to build a program that can sustain success so that everybody in this community is going to be dying to get a ticket and get a seat to watch us play," he said. "You may say `that ain't happening here.' I heard it before at Bowling Green and George Mason. Now George Mason is an

impossible place to play because of the home court advantage. We're going to create that atmosphere so they want to be associated with our team."

Ever since Frank Haith left UM a few weeks ago for Missouri, I've thought it was important for UM to hire a coach who not only has been a successful head coach but is someone who can excite the fan base and put bodies in seats at the BankUnited Center. Larranaga appears to be that person. He commands the room when he speaks.

"He'll be a first-class ambassador for the University of Miami," said Eichorst. "He's a gifted speaker, communicator."

Some may say "he only got to the NCAA Tournament five times in 14 years" at George Mason. But that's better than any of the candidates considered for the job or any who showed interest. And it's far better than any UM coach has done.

When Golden was hired, you had to think if he can take Temple to a bowl game for the first time in three decades, he can win at Miami. The same could be said for Larranaga: If you can win and win consistently at George Mason, you can win and win consistently at Miami, even in the ACC, which Larranaga calls "the best basketball league in the country."

He inherits a team that loses only one senior, Adrian Thomas, and he presumably will be able to talk center Reggie Johnson into staying rather than opting for the NBA draft.

Before Haith departed, there was a feeling among many observers and fans that if he didn't get next season's team into the NCAA Tournament he'd be fired. Larranaga is convinced there's enough talent to reach the tournament and be ranked in the top 25.

"I'm leaving behind a team that in the ridiculously early top 25 polls was picked to be in the top 25," he said. "I would not have left that caliber of team if we did not already that caliber talent already here at the U, to challenge not only the ACC but the entire country ... I think we can have a special season next year."

Interestingly, Larranaga not only sounds a little like Vitale, the "awesome, baby!" ESPN analyst, but he and his wife own a home on Florida's west coast they bought from Vitale's daughter Sherri.

"I stopped by to visit Dick and his wife (a few years ago) and told him we're looking for a second home in Florida," Larranaga said. "Dick said it wasn't on the market but his daughter might want to sell. We put a bid on it and we have a home in Sarasota."

Soon they'll have one in the Miami area. Can he ignite the fan base and put teams in the NCAA Tournament on a regular basis?

Been there, done that at a program you probably hadn't heard of until 2006. Why not here?

Players react to new hire

CaneSport.com
April 22, 2011

Malcolm Grant didn't waste any time welcoming new coach Jim Larranaga to the Hurricane program.

When the new coach entered his first meeting with players this afternoon, Grant stood up and welcomed him ... by intentionally mispronouncing his last name with a soft `a.'

"I just like to be funny to get off to a good start, break the ice a little bit because it's awkward - he doesn't know us, we don't know him," Grant said, adding "He seems like a real people person."

Grant knows levity will only go so far with Larranaga. The coach has already promised a scramble style of defense that will require a high level of effort and endurance level.

"Some of the guys that have tried to get to that level are going to have to step it up," Grant said. "You can tell the intensity he's bringing. Guys want to be successful so we have to buy in, do whatever he says. He's going to create a lot of turnovers, and defense does win championships. He's going to make sure we're playing up-tempo, the way I like to play, getting guys dunks. I think it's going to be real exciting for us."

The time spent without a coach weighed on Grant and his teammates. So much so that some considered transferring.

One of those was Rion Brown, who said today that he "was thinking about" playing elsewhere after coach Frank Haith left. But now that he's met Larranaga he says he's sticking with UM.

"The way I see it now is this is great. I'm good," Brown said. "He walked in with a big smile, shook everyone's hand. It felt good. It's hard not to like him. You can tell he's a real

fundamental guy. The little things in basketball he knows can win games, and that's how I was brought up my whole life."

Brown said he knew about Larranaga's track record before he was hired.

"I heard a lot of great things about him from other people; he's a great guy, I can't wait to play for him," Brown said.

Julian Gamble, who is coming off post-season arthroscopic ankle surgery, added of Larranaga that "We're really excited. It was a time we didn't know who the coaches would be, the direction of our team. Through all the time we kept our goal the same, that we want to make the NCAA Tournament, and I feel we have coach L here now and he'll get us there."

While Larranaga mentioned he wants to play a scramble style of defense, it's unclear if UM's current personnel will support that.

Brown, asked if he thinks UM has the depth and athleticism to successfully use the scramble (which Brown's high school team used), he said, "At the guard spot we do, maybe not at the big so much. But as long as we get in shape we should be good. It's really about getting in shape."

What can Miami fans who aren't acquainted with the scramble expect?

"Everywhere yelling and screaming - we have to do a lot of talking, communicating with each other," Brown said. "It's going to make the game real, real fun to watch because we'll be getting up and down the court and next thing you know we're at the other end dunking. It's going to be great."

* Larranaga's first words when he met the team before the press conference today?

"He told us that he wanted us to think about the dreams, all the accomplishments that we

want to get done this year," Grant said. "He said it's his job as well as his coaching staff's to help us get to it. That was really great to start off with."

* Gamble said he's staying in touch with Reggie Johnson, who declared for the NBA Draft but could still opt to return to UM since he hasn't hired an agent.

"He'll be a huge part of our team (if he comes back)," Gamble said. "He's chasing the NBA dream right now, but if he decides to come back - big Reg is a huge part of our team."

Johnson is home in North Carolina, so what will Gamble tell him about the new coach?

"I'm just going to tell him he's a great guy, made a great first impression," Gamble said. "I think he fits the mold of what type of team we have. We're really family oriented and I know I'm going to grow to love this coaching staff. We'll be a tight-knit group and we'll win a lot of games."

Gamble, who graduates in May, says he had options to transfer without having to sit out a year but decided to return to UM.

"I'm excited to start something new with it being my last year," he said.

Larranaga ready to put UM on national map

CaneSport.com
April 22, 2011

Jim Larranaga was introduced today as the Miami Hurricanes' new men's basketball coach. And he has lofty goals for UM's program.

"I am very excited to be here, there ain't no question about that," Larranaga said. "(This) offers a tremendous opportunity to compete at the highest level of college basketball. The ACC since the day I arrived at Virginia in 1979 is the best basketball league in the country. And it is our opportunity now as coaches, players and a community to get behind the program and do something very, very special. It's going to take a lot of work, but the reason I came here is because of the people.

"We have a lot of hard work in front of us, but I'm excited to get started."

Larranaga pointed out how his George Mason team was being ranked in the early top 25 for next year and said, "I would not have left that caliber of team if we didn't feel we had that caliber of talent already here at the U, if we had the capability of challenging the very best teams not only in the ACC but also the entire country. Our challenge is to build a program that can (be successful) over an extended period of time so everyone in this community will be dying to get a ticket, get a seat to watch us play. You may say `that ain't going to happen here.' I heard it at Bowling Green and George Mason (and fans packed the stands there). We want to create that atmosphere here."

Larranaga also joked that "It didn't take me long to feel part of the program when Malcolm Grant greeted me as I walked into the office and tried to pronounce my name correctly."

Larranaga addressed trying to get more students show up for games by saying "My staff and I will be in the dormitories recruiting students. We will work with the faculty.

"We need to reach out to the community of Coral Gables, the people who make up the community. My wife is the social director - I guarantee she will know more people in the community in the next year than some people who have lived here their whole lives.

At 61 years old, Larranaga was asked why he wants to take this job at this point of his career.

"I'm crazy," he said to laughs, adding, "I love a challenge. I thought about my own career, what goals I wasn't able to accomplish in my 40 years. And one was I'd love to coach in the ACC, take a team to Cameron Indoor Stadium or the Dean Dome. At this time in my life I felt once I talked to Shawn Eichorst and could hear the energy in his voice, to find out things about the other basketball program here, the job that Katie Meier has already done - it showed if the women can do it the men should be able to do it. It's a challenge for me, but something that excites me very much. It's like the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be all about. When I first arrived at George Mason I said we wanted to do something very special, and our run to the Final Four was

that moment. But we didn't win the national championship, and quite frankly that irks me. I think being a member of the ACC, with the opportunities to recruit nationally but with a focus locally and regionally, with the talent already on hand, we can be headed in the right direction to challenge the best programs in the conference and the country."

* Larranaga said that when the UM job opened up he inquired about it through friends that were tied to a Michael Jordan camp "as coaches do - who is going to get the job?" Larranaga said. "They shared a name with me (who was being looked at), it wasn't me. And then they called me back and said `Hey, would you be interested.' So I made contact with the University to let them know of my interest."

* Larranaga addressed the team, which met with him before the press conference and then attended it as he spoke: "The members of the team become our family," Larranaga said. "We will have the players to my house. My wife will cook for them - you will love her chocolate chip cookies. "

- Reggie Johnson wasn't at the press conference - Larranaga said he remained home in North Carolina.

* Two of Larranaga's players at George Mason were from Florida, and he made it clear that recruiting Florida is his No. 1 priority.

"We will actively recruit in-state players to try and build our program with a very strong foundation of local recruits," Larranaga said. "We want to develop the relationship with youth league coaches, high school coaches, AAU coaches."

* Larranaga addressed leaving George Mason, saying, "The players that I leave behind at George Mason are an incredible group of young men. They just finished the best season in school history in terms of record. I thank those players who made my job so much fun every day. I told those players today that when we met in Fairfax in our locker room that I was going to become the head coach of the U basketball program. Every one of them hugged me and wished me well, and I did the same to them. But this opportunity is very, very special to me. ... I love coaching, helping players be the best that they can be."

* Larranaga's grandfather on his father's side was from Cuba, and Larranaga said "I'm very proud of my heritage, of having grown up spending time in Kissimmee and Key West and in the State of Florida, because that's where my father vacationed every year. And now I feel I'm back home at the University of Miami. We're going to put together a fantastic Hurricane team."

* First-year athletic director Shawn Eichorst said of his decision to hire Larranaga that "I was asked what we were looking for in our next men's basketball coach - we are delighted to say we have found it, and it's Jim Larranaga. (He) is a fundamentally sound teacher of the game and will positively lead our student-athletes with a tremendous amount of passion, integrity and dedication. Jim is a man of great character who will be a first-class ambassador for the University of Mi-

ami and our basketball program. He has successfully transitioned two other programs at George Mason and Bowling Green. And he is no stranger to the ACC having served as an assistant coach at Virginia - they won three ACC championships and finished in the top five of the AP rankings. Jim is a tremendously gifted speaker and communicator. His players follow his philosophy and play fundamentally sound basketball, take care of the basketball, play fierce defense and are very efficient on the offensive end of the court.

"This is an exciting day for the University of Miami."

* Football coach Al Golden attended today's press conference, giving Larranaga a hug before it began.

* Of his basketball philosophy, Larranaga said, "I have two boys - when my wife and I were raising our sons the two things we stressed (were) we wanted them to grow up to be happy and successful. But to accomplish both those goals they had to be great students and use those smarts to advance themselves, enjoy their life. That's the same approach we take as a coaching staff with this team. Basketball is a game, it should be fun. We emphasize attitude, commitment and class. Attitude, we ask our players to have a positive attitude, talk about life being 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it. Second we talk about making a total and unconditional commitment to being the best at everything you do, every aspect of your life. The third is class - we want our players to always behave in a first-class manner.

"As far as basketball is concerned, I'm a big believer that defense wins championships. And we are coming here to compete and win. That means we have to be fundamentally sound on the defensive end of the floor. We have to be able to guard the basketball but also help the guy who guards the basketball. Players will hear me and my coaching staff say `one man guards the basketball and four men help him guard the basketball.' Our choice is to be an up-tempo team. The defense will create the offense. One part of our offensive opportunity is to create fast-break layups and open threes in transitions. That will not change.

"The scramble defense - I'm hoping to implement that to a degree so it can become a weapon and something the opponent has to prepare for. But it will depend on the work ethic of the team, because it forces the players to play at a high level of intensity for a (long) time. It requires a deep bench. My Bowling Green teams scrambled 70, 80 percent of the time. My George Mason teams of recent years have scrambled less because we were so strong in the half court."

* Larranaga said he's still in the process of putting together his coaching staff.

* Larranaga has a home in Sarasota that he purchased from Dick Vitale's daughter (Vitale is a friend of his).

Hurricanes hire Larranaga

CaneSport.com
April 22, 2011

George Mason Basketball Coach Jim Larranaga, who reached the 2006 Final Four, has accepted an offer to be the next basketball coach at Miami. A press conference is scheduled for late Friday to announce the hiring.

“Coach Larranaga is the real deal,” said University of Miami President Donna Shalala. “He’s a winner, an inspirational leader, and he cares deeply about his players and staff. We’re delighted to welcome him and his wife as the newest members of the Miami Hurricane family.”

Larranaga was a bit of a surprise candidate because of his age (61) and modest credentials, but is universally considered a very good coach.

Over 14 seasons with George Mason, Larranaga built the Patriots’ program into a perennial contender in the highly-regarded Colonial Athletic Association, winning more games than any other coach in program and conference history (273) en route to three conference titles (2008, 2001, 1999).

A two-time CAA Coach of the Year honoree, Larranaga earned the accolade in 2011, after leading the Patriots to a 27-7 overall record and 16-2 conference mark en route to the CAA regular-season title and their fifth NCAA Tournament appearance under his leadership. Seeded a program-best eighth in the NCAA Tournament, George Mason rallied from a double-digit deficit to defeat ninth-seeded Villanova, 61-57, before falling to overall No. 1 seed Ohio State in the third round.

Last season, Larranaga’s Patriots - who were ranked 24th in the final RPI - finished the season 11th in the nation in three-point field goal percentage (39.5), 18th in scoring margin (10.3), 22nd in turnovers (11.1), 26th in assist-to-turnover ratio (1.28) and 37th in scoring

defense (62.5). During its 16-game win streak - which catapulted Mason to No. 25 in the ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll on Feb. 28 - all but four victories came by a double-digit margin. That streak included the 71-51 win at VCU on Feb. 15, with Mason holding the Rams to a season-low offensive output.

Larranaga earned his first conference accolades in 1999 after guiding the Patriots to a 19-11 overall record and a 13-3 CAA mark - making a 10-game improvement over the previous season and leading the program to its first-ever conference regular season championship, its second CAA Tournament title and first NCAA Tournament appearance since 1989.

With 27 years of head coaching experience, the native of Bronx, N.Y., previously served as the head coach at Bowling Green for 11 seasons (1986-1997) and at Division II American International (Springfield, Mass.) for two seasons (1977-79).

In addition, he has had assistant coaching stints at Davidson (1971-76) and Virginia (1979-86) - where he helped the Cavaliers reach the NCAA Final Four on two occasions (1981 and 1984), finish in the top five of the AP and UPI polls, win three regular season ACC championships and make four NCAA Tournament appearances. Larranaga was on the staff during the careers of three-time National Player of the Year Ralph Sampson and NBA first-round draft choice Oden Polynice.

A 1971 graduate of Providence College with a degree in economics, Larranaga was a four-year letterman for the Friars. As the team captain in his senior season, he led Providence to a 20-8 record and an NIT appearance. He graduated as the school’s fifth all-time leading scorer with 1,258 points and was selected in the sixth round of the draft by the Detroit Pistons of the National Basketball Association. He was inducted into the Providence College Hall of Fame in 1991.

Larranaga and his wife, Liz, have two sons - Jay, who played for his father at Bowling Green and is the head coach of the NBDL’s Erie Bayhawks, and Jon, who was a member of his father’s George Mason teams from 1999-2003 - and three grandchildren.

Larranaga takes over a program that loses just one player in Adrian Thomas and returns four starters and the team’s top-three scorers from last season. The Hurricanes went 21-15 in 2011, advancing to the quarterfinals of the National Invitation Tournament.

UM embraces new men’s basketball coach Jim Larranaga

Palm Beach Post
April 22, 2011
By Jorge Milian

CORAL GABLES — So why would a 61-year-old guy leave a cushy job at a top mid-major college basketball program to coach a team whose history is mostly forgettable?

“I’m crazy,” Jim Larranaga said a couple of questions into a news conference introducing him on Friday night as the University of Miami’s men’s basketball coach.

Anything but, although Larranaga certainly has plenty of personality.

During his question-and-answer session with reporters, Larranga quoted Confucius, emphasized words by unexpectedly shouting them out and broke out into a little Spanish.

“You can tell he’s going to be a lot of fun,” said senior guard Malcolm Grant, who was in attendance Friday with most of his teammates.

Judging by his history at George Mason, Larranaga will do far more than act colorfully. In 14 seasons, Larranaga coached the Patriots to five NCAA tournaments and famously led his 2006 team to the Final Four before it lost to eventual national champion Florida.

After passing up other intriguing offers during his tenure at George Mason, most expected Larranga to remain at the Fairfax, Va., school until he retired.

“I started thinking about my own career, where I am and what goals have I not been able to accomplish during the course of my 40-year career in coaching,” said Larranaga, who also coached at Bowling Green and Division II American International. “One thing kept coming back in my mind, that I’d love to coach in the ACC.

“It’s kind of the last piece of a coaching career”

Larranaga inherits a team that is expected to return virtually its entire roster, including Grant, an All-ACC third-team selection last season. But, like his predecessors, Larranaga will also be tasked with selling a program whose existence has been marked by apathy.

The Hurricanes shut down the program from 1971 to 1985 and have ranked last in ACC attendance since joining the league in 2004. UM rarely attracts more than a few hundred students to games even though they are admitted for free and are further enticed by offers like free pizza.

“It’s going to be hard,” said Sammy Hernandez, a member of George Mason’s Final Four team who attended Friday’s news conference. “But when I was at George Mason in 2005-06, I was a freshman and our stadium is the way you guys have it now – empty seats. By 2007, there were huge crowds. And not because of the Final Four, but because of him.”

Larranaga, whose father is from Key West and grandfather was from Cuba, promised to build a team in which “everyone in this community is going to be dying to get a ticket and a seat to watch us play.”

Larranaga’s signature style is what he calls “scramble defense,” a high-intensity, full-court press that demands extreme fitness and a deep bench.

“I’m a tremendous believer that defense wins championships,” Larranaga said.

Larranaga’s deal is for five seasons and will pay him \$1.3 million per season, according to The Washington Post. Last season, Larranaga earned \$700,000, including incentives, on a contract that ran through the 2015-16 season.

Larranaga said he made it known through a search firm used by UM that he was interested in replacing Frank Haith as the Hurricanes’ coach. Haith resigned earlier this month to become Missouri’s coach.

UM athletic director Shawn Eichorst and Larranaga spoke on Wednesday and a deal was in place by Thursday evening.

Eichorst said he didn’t allow Larranaga’s age to concern him.

“For me, age is a number,” said Eichorst, named UM’s athletic director 10 days ago. “That’s not a factor for me. He wanted to be here and we wanted him to be here.”

The hiring drew rave reviews around the college basketball world.

ESPN analyst Dick Vitale referred to the move as a “grand slam for Miami.”

“Jim is going to bring a certain spark,” Vitale said. “He’s got a personality. You’ll see them playing exciting basketball and, more importantly, with Jim, they’ll play winning basketball. You have to get people excited about basketball and, in Miami, they have not been excited about college basketball.”

Larranaga’s hiring completes a major overhaul among UM’s most prominent positions in the athletic department. Al Golden was hired in December as the school’s football coach. Eichorst replaced Kirby Hocutt, who quit in February to become athletic director at Texas Tech.

Miami has right answer to age-old old-age question

The Sporting News
April 22, 2011
Mike DeCourcy

The coach who won it before Krzyzewski, Roy Williams of the North Carolina Tar Heels, was a mere teenager by comparison. He was 59 years old on that chilly Detroit evening in April 2009.

All of which points up how ridiculously silly it was for Twitter to ignite Friday afternoon with questions about how Miami could consider hiring Jim Larranaga to coach the Hurricanes. Larranaga is 61. In the current climate, that should have been the first item on his resume, ahead of leading George Mason to the most improbable Final Four of the past three decades.

Larranaga is taking his talents to Coral Gables because he'll be able to position himself, by doubling his salary to the \$1 million range, for a more comfortable retirement. There's no question that's his motivation for moving.

What drives him to coach every day will be the same, however: the challenge of the game. And it'll probably be a boost to his energy level to know he can measure himself each season against two confirmed Hall of Famers (Krzyzewski and Williams) and one who should be there (Gary Williams of Maryland).

Of course Larranaga will need to put together a staff to help him recruit successfully, whether the emphasis is to be on regional talent or mining the East Coast for overlooked or restless prospects—or both, which is pretty much how Frank Haith built the roster that's in place. But every coach needs the right staff to achieve success, so that's not specific to this instance.

It is true that Larranaga's age will be used against him in recruiting, but that would seem to be a tougher tactic to employ when the three most attractive situations for players

predisposed to compete in the ACC are all run by men in his age bracket.

Some of the concerns expressed involve whether Larranaga would be up for a massive rebuilding job. Well, he might or might not, but he doesn't face one in Miami.

If sophomore center Reggie Johnson withdraws from the draft, as he should, he'll learn a ton from Larranaga about low-post play and be better positioned for a serious shot at the NBA in the next couple years.

And if he does, the Hurricanes will have back seven of the eight rotation players who finished the season, reached the quarterfinals of the NIT and went 21-15—losing nine times by two possessions or less.

Typically when hiring a coach, a university might like to consider that if the right person is selected the process might not need to be revisited for another decade.

MORE: NHL player flips off fans | Beckham to royal wedding | Packer gets probation on drug charge

A program such as Miami, though—paying less than its peers, supported by fewer people and located in a community where basketball is not a high priority—is wise to acknowledge a young coach will pursue other jobs if he's successful. Haith got out, and he reached only one NCAA Tournament.

If the Hurricanes are to lose their coach again in the next six or seven years, what's the difference if he leaves to climb the coaching ladder—or to play golf and go fishing?

Larranaga will be good for Miami

FoxSports South
April 22, 2011
Andrew Jones

George Mason coach Jim Larranaga will be 62 years old when he coaches his first game at the University of Miami in November. He'll be among the oldest first-year coaches in ACC history, and he's also 17 years older than Frank Haith, who jumped ship at Miami for Missouri before his seat got too hot.

Haith took the Hurricanes to just one NCAA Tournament in seven seasons, and while the team was talented enough to get there the past two seasons, he failed both times.

Heck, the 2010 Canes finished last in the ACC, although they won 20 games overall. That win total is a positive at Miami, but the program had seriously stagnated and was going in the wrong direction. That was part of the problem; the school didn't quite know what to do with Haith.

Haith's teams lacked offensive rhythm and cohesion, and the plays they ran late in close games often defied logic; too many possessions ended with the ball never touching the rim. He just isn't a very good offensive coach.

Defensively, however, and on the glass, the 'Canes have always been strong under Haith, who learned much of his craft from Texas' Rick Barnes.

In Larranaga, however, Miami gets a coach who has won wherever he's been; a tough but fair coach who will get a lot out of his talent.

Unlike Haith — a soft-spoken, comfortable coach whom the players love — Larranaga is a bit more of a drill sergeant. The players won't always like Larranaga, but they will learn to love playing for him when they realize how much he's getting out of them.

Larranaga grew up in the Bronx, he has six

kids, and he's built a program nestled in the shadows of bigger, more enticing things. Located in Washington, D.C.'s, Virginia suburbs, George Mason is still a commuter school to a significant percentage of its student body. It rarely drew well in its 9,600-seat Patriot Center into the 2000s.

But after a few seasons with Larranaga at the helm, notably the Final Four run in 2006, the Patriots have drawn huge crowds and this past season averaged 700 fans per game more than Miami did, a figure that would have been greater if not for wintry weather affecting a few turnouts.

In 14 seasons at Mason, Larranaga went 273-164. He led five clubs to the NCAA Tournament and three others to the NIT at a school that had previously been to one of each before his arrival. His last 13 GMU teams finished with winning records. Larranaga also coached two years at American International and 11 seasons at Bowling Green before going to Mason.

The chatter circuit already is flooded with questions and criticisms of Miami's search for Haith's replacement, which clearly wasn't a smooth operation. And many are also wondering why the school opted for a man nearing the national retirement age who's never coached in a power conference.

That's a legitimate concern, but when it comes down to it there are two things Miami basketball desperately needs: quality and success. Larranaga can provide both starting today.

The quality part comes in how the 'Canes play: what they do coming out of timeouts, the frequency with which they switch defenses depending on situations, and their use of players. People close to the program still can't figure out Haith's rotation philosophies.

There will be no such confusion under Larranaga. The man prides himself on discipline and order. He goes to painstaking lengths to

make sure players understand their roles and the role of the team as a whole, which is what should excite Miami fans.

After seven years of dribble city on the perimeter by guards trying to create their own shots, the Hurricanes will run sets and incorporate intelligent freelance, and will actually run the ball through the post. Are you paying attention, Reggie Johnson? This change at the top will be good for you, so you might want to consider returning to school.

Larranaga loves strong forwards with post moves, and the prospect of coaching Johnson must have the coach salivating.

Look for the 'Canes to press some, and maybe at times a lot. Look for them to play with passion and to win on the road. Larranaga's teams loved being hated, which means they won a lot in other people's buildings. Essentially, they took on the personality of their coach, whose razor's edge served his teams well most of the time.

Larranaga isn't going to take South Beach by storm — he's much more suited for rough, cold neighborhoods where there's little grass — but his teams might. They play fun basketball and win, and that's exactly what Miami has been lacking.

Larranaga leaves GMU, accepts coaching job at Miami

USA Today

April 22, 2011

By Mark Duncan, AP

George Mason coach Jim Larranaga has accepted an offer from the University of Miami (Fla.) to become its new head basketball coach, the school announced Friday.

“Coach Larranaga is the real deal,” University of Miami President Donna E. Shalala said in a statement from the school. “He’s a winner, an inspirational leader, and he cares deeply about his players and staff. We’re delighted to welcome him and his wife as the newest members of the Miami Hurricane family.”

At a press conference Friday, Larranaga said he took the Miami job because of the chance to coach in the Atlantic Coast Conference, which he considers the best basketball league in the country.

“I am very excited to be here,” he shouted with a grin. “It’s kind of like the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be about.”

Another lure was that three of Larranaga’s siblings live in Florida, and their father grew up in Key West. Larranaga spent summers in Florida growing up and has a second home in Sarasota.

“I feel like I’m back home at the University of Miami,” he said.

Larranaga replaces Frank Haith, who went 43-69 in the ACC in his seven seasons at Miami. With such mediocre teams, small crowds persisted for the Hurricanes, who are perennially overshadowed in a market that includes all four major professional sports.

“Our challenge is going to be to build a program that can sustain success over an extended period of time, so that everyone in this community is going to be dying to get a ticket to watch us play. You may say, ‘That ain’t happening here.’ But I’ve heard all that stuff before.”

According to The Washington Post, George Mason athletics director Tom O’Connor said the Patriots will move “as quickly as possible, but as thoroughly as possible” in their search for a new coach.

Ultimately, George Mason just couldn’t compete financially with what Miami was offering Larranaga.

“In all honesty, the university can only go so far with finances,” O’Connor said, according to the AP. “We think we put together a very, very attractive financial compensation package. We couldn’t compete with an ACC school, a big football school with its budget.”

Larranaga, 61, heads to the ACC after 14 seasons with the Patriots, where he became the school and the Colonial Athletic Association’s all-time wins leader.

He led the Patriots to five NCAA tournament appearances, including a suprising run to the Final Four in 2006.

Last season, Larranaga led Mason to the CAA regular-season title and an at-large berth in the Big Dance. After beating Villanova, the Patriots lost to overall No. 1 seed Ohio State.

Before coaching at George Mason, Larranaga spent 11 seasons as the coach at Bowling Green.

At George Mason, Larranaga was slated to make just over \$500,000 next season with the possibility -- thanks to bonuses -- of raising that number to around \$700,000.

At Miami, reports say that Larranaga’s deal will be worth more than \$1 million.

What college basketball experts are saying on Twitter

What college basketball experts are saying on Twitter about Jim Larranaga

ESPN’s Seth Davis

@SethDavisHoops: Jim is nearing end of his career. Why not take a shot? What does he have to lose? He’ll need top assts to get players but he can win there.

@SethDavisHoops: Larranaga to Miami is a win win. He gets a better job for more money. UM gets a great coach. Let’s not overthink this.

@SethDavisHoops: Sorry if this comes as a shock but if you asked every Division I coach to choose between Miami and George Mason, 90 pct would take UM.

ESPN’s Dick Vitale

@DickieV I realize Miami got a great guy, but I’m not sure Jim got even a good job. It may pay a lot more than George Mason, but re-sources?

@DickieV Miami hit a grand slam in getting Jim Larranaga from George Mason- He is a fierce competitor & has loads of contacts. Great hire!

CBSSports.com’s Gary Parrish

@GaryParrishCBS: I’m told it got “nasty” between Jim Larranaga and athletic director Tom O’Connor at the end. Both egos played a role in this happening.

@GaryParrisCBS: Wonder how much of Larranaga’s initial interest in Miami has to do with Larranaga looking up and seeing Shaka making way more \$\$\$ than him?

Fox Sports’ Jason Whitlock

@WhitlockJason: Jim Larranaga is an odd fit for Miami hoops, no?

Is Larranaga really the right fit for Miami?

Sun Sentinel
April 22, 2011
By Dave Hyde

The first thing, the very first thing, anyone hiring coaches in South Florida should fear is an older man from the North who receives a big pay raise in what could be the final contract of his career.

That's a general recipe for trouble.

Hopefully, new Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga is the exception. Maybe he's not Perry Clark. Maybe he's not Mike Keenan. Maybe he's not one of several guys who just put in the time, left with a fat wallet and didn't leave with any success.

Larranaga did a fantastic job at George Mason. Absolutely fantastic. Everyone knows that. He was beloved in Washington, DC area. Everyone knows that, too. He had to take great pride in that program he built and seemed a nice fit at the school forever.

So the question becomes why, at 61, he wants to undertake what is a challenging job at Miami?

Is it because he's infuriated at George Mason officials? Is it for the money that would double his salary? Is it to come to a prime basketball conference in the ACC? Is it to move to the land of retirement a few years early?

Don't overlook the idea that Shaka Smart got a hefty pay raise for taking Virginia Commonwealth to the Final Four. Larranaga did the same for George Mason a few years back. He took it back to the NCAA Tournament this year. But George Mason didn't pony up the money for him like VCU did for Smart.

By any estimation, this would seem a young man's gig. Sam Jankovich, way back when, always considered the best guy for the Miami football job to be a young, hungry guy who

wanted to build something. His hires reflected that. Jimmy Johnson. Dennis Erickson.

The most success Miami's basketball program had was under that kind of coach in Leonard Hamilton. Frank Haith fit the model, but didn't have the success.

I'm one of the few who thinks this is a good job. The money is decent. Expectations are low. The state has some good talent (more players in the Sweet 16 this year were from Florida than any other state).

Is Larranaga coming for national success on a bigger platform than George Mason?

That's if you believe Miami is a bigger platform in the college basketball world than George Mason. In today's world of Butler and VCU and, yes, George Mason, they can reach the same success that a program like Miami can.

This has been a curious coaching search for Miami. Kansas State coach Frank Martin evidently had too much baggage from his Miami High days. It leaked that Harvard's Tommy Amaker met with Miami officials - which is how the game's played by a coach to build up his name.

Then there was Miami contacting the coach at Wisconsin-Milwaukee coach, Rob Jeter, whom new athletic director Shawn Eichorst worked with. So either Jeter is potentially the next great coach or this was Eichorst's way of getting his name on the national map.

Ultimately, it fell completely the other way from a young guy to Larranaga. He comes here with impeccable credentials. He's really overqualified for the job when it comes down to it.

But that doesn't stop from asking the strange question: What's his motivation for taking the job?

Former Miami & Heat player Tim James honored before Nuggets game

Sun Sentinel
March 19, 2011
By Shandel Richardson

University of Miami alum traded in high-tops for combat boots after playing career turned out less spectacular than expected

MIAMI — When Tim James first joined the military, he was greeted by a few raised eyebrows when he told fellow soldiers he was a former NBA player.

They always thought he was lying. One drill sergeant went far as resorting to the Internet to confirm James' credentials.

The result was another shocked face. James told the story before the Heat's first-round draft pick in 1999 was honored at Saturday's game at AmericanAirlines Arena.

"He went back and Googled it and he was like holy you know what," James said.

"It's a fascination that [the soldiers] have. It's a good thing because they need things to take their minds off all the stress and struggles and the burden that they have going on across the worlds."

James, a South Florida native and University of Miami alum, traded in his high-tops for combat boots after his playing career turned out less spectacular than expected.

He appeared in just four games with the Heat.

His NBA career ended after 43 games, having stints with Charlotte and Philadelphia. After playing a couple years overseas in Japan, Turkey and Israel, he left basketball for good in 2007.

It was time to pursue one of his greatest passions.

James said he always had a fascination with the military. He showed an interest in the technology while also keeping up with the current events.

"It was time for me to move on from the sport of basketball," James said.

"I always had a fascination with military. People in my house would get mad at me because I'd watch the military channel from hours on end."

The 6-foot-8 James joined the Army on Sept. 12, 2008. He served time in Iraq, but now is stationed in Killeen, Texas.

James carries the rank of Corporal. He participated in Saturday's pre-game ceremonies as part of the Heat's "Home Strong" program, which has honored soldiers since 2006.

James was introduced to the crowd by Alonzo Mourning, and presented a commemorative framed No. 40 Heat Jersey by forwards Udodnis Haslem and James Jones.

James last met with the team when the Heat played in San Antonio March 4.

"We were proud of him because he still continues to show a lot more courage I think than 99 percent of the guys in this league," Jones said.

"We understand what he's doing is real. We're playing games and he's over there protecting our lives."

James said he still remains a basketball fan, keeping tabs on the Heat. When they signed LeBron James and Chris Bosh last summer,

the troops were critical of the move.

Tim James defended the decision of his former team by saying, "Hey guys, I was with the Heat."

"You just never leave the game," James said. "You're not physically there, but it's always an internal thing with you when you've been around it and played the game."

James also used his time in South Florida to visit his alma mater.

On Saturday morning, he met with UM basketball coach Frank Haith and offered encouragement entering Monday's game against Missouri State in the National Invitational Tournament.

James was one of the top players in school history, winning Big East Player of the Year his senior season.

"It's a long way from the Hecht days," James said, referring to UM's new practice facility. "I wish those guys well against Missouri State coming up. I just want to see the program continue to move up."