



University of Miami
Men's Basketball Clips
2016-17

2011-16 highlights on last 35 pages

Hometown Hurricane: Dewan Huell

Miami Athletics
Camron Ghorbi
Dec. 2, 2016

Let it be known – from Tobacco Road to the pastures of Kentucky, upstate New York all the way to Lawrence, Kan., – that on Dec. 3, 2016, under lights brighter than the south Florida sun, the Magic City will showcase its own rising power in the college basketball landscape.

It's not the University of Miami's first game of the season – it's actually the eighth (ninth, counting the exhibition against nearby Division II power Barry).

No, Miami isn't (yet) ranked in the top 25 of either the Associated Press or Coaches Poll.

And, to answer the last question, none of the aforementioned “traditional powerhouses” or “blue blood programs” is rolling into town.

Fresh off their third straight win in the ACC / Big Ten Challenge, the Hurricanes will battle NCAA Tournament regular Wofford in the back end of a doubleheader at the American Airlines Arena as part of the HoopHall Miami Invitational, organized by the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

In last year's inaugural event, Kentucky, Ohio State and Memphis all took part.

This year? A program whose maturation under Jim Larrañaga from impressive infancy – including two Sweet 16 appearances, a NIT Championship runner-up finish and ACC Regular Season and Tournament Championships – to likely year-in-contender is best embodied by one player alone: 6-foot-11 freshman Dewan Huell.

Who?

duh-WAN. HUE-uhl. If you don't know the name yet, you might want to start practicing.

Huell is a five-star basketball player from Dade County, offers in hand from every “major” program in the country, who chose the hometown Hurricanes over any other. His mother and father attended local football powerhouse Miami Central, but he opted for the hardwood at Miami Norland, where he guided the Vikings to three state championships.

Huell (No. 28) is one of six ESPN Top 100 players to sign with Miami since 2007, including classmate Bruce Brown, who was ranked No. 26. Three more are in next year's signing class, who will join sophomores Huell and Brown in 2017, when Miami will put together one of its most talented groups, albeit on paper, in program history.

Put simply, a five-star recruit like Huell's decision to attend Miami is becoming the norm.

Welcome to the new college basketball scene, where Larrañaga – or “Coach L,” as fans, players and staff call him – has planted his flag in Coral Gables.

“Back in the day, UM wasn't, I guess, a great basketball school,” Huell said. “A lot of kids have their dream schools. For me, I've been in Miami my whole life. I'm a hometown guy – I'm a fan of the Dolphins, the Heat and the Marlins.

“I thought I would stay here too and build my legacy.”

Huell made his first collegiate start in Wednesday's game against Rutgers at the Watsco Center and sparked Miami to a 73-61 win. He poured in 14 points – one shy of his career high – and added seven rebounds, showcasing the athleticism that earned him a five-star ranking from every scouting service.

“If he can discipline himself to shoot his jump-hook all the time, he could really be a heck of a scorer,” Larrañaga said. “He shot it tonight beautifully. I was very impressed with Dewan's athletic, acrobatic ability to score near the rim.”

Twelve of those 14 points came in a second half that helped Miami pull away and snap a two-game losing skid.

“Those dunks [in the second half], they're not easy plays,” Larrañaga said. “The post feed we did to him, where he didn't take a dribble, he just turned and kind of squeezed it in – his first basket of the second half – that helped him get going.”

Huell credits Larrañaga for his development as a student and athlete.

“He's one of the greatest coach I've had. Coach L helps me on and off the court. If I have any problems, he'll make sure I solve them,” Huell said. “If I'm going through any situation, he helps me throughout it.”

While many Miami-born hoopsters and “blue chip” recruits before him have spent their college careers elsewhere, Huell will be wearing the orange and green proudly Saturday, playing in front of the city whose famous “305” area code is permanently emblazoned on his right tricep.

He got the tattoo early on in his freshman year at Miami, and said that he knows the city's basketball talent is overshadowed by the local high school football scene.

That might change Saturday, if the Rutgers game is to be taken as a harbinger, when Huell takes the floor on his hometown court wearing his hometown university's famous colors and playing in front of his hometown crowd.

“It's pretty exciting. It's amazing playing on the Heat's court,” said Huell, who took part in the high school version of the HoopHall Invitational last season at Norland. “Now, having a bigger supporting staff, fans...it should be pretty amazing to walk out of the tunnel. It's special.”

He even predicts how he thinks the PA announcer's voice will sound when his name is called.

“The freshman...From Miami, Florida...Number 20...Dew-aannnn HUUU-ell!” he says softly, and with a smile. He usually lets his play do the talking.

More than anything, he says, he loves playing in front of his family and friends who will be in attendance at the American Airlines Arena, and who are at every home game at the Watsco Center.

“Being from here, that's what really makes it great,” Huell said.

“Everyone in the crowd says, ‘Yeah, that's my boy,’ or, ‘Yeah, that's my son,’ or, ‘Yeah, that's my cousin.’

Playing here in Miami, it really is a special thing.”

Coach Jamal Brunt High on Signee PG Lykes

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Dec. 5, 2016

Jamal Brunt was new to the Miami coaching staff and to the ACC when he approached head coach Jim Larranaga about Gonzaga (D.C.) College High School 5-foot-7 point guard Chris Lykes.

Brunt wanted to make sure Lykes was an ACC-caliber recruit.

“Coach, I really like this kid, but I’m not sure,” Brunt said to Larranaga. “What do you think? Do you think Chris’s size will inhibit him from being effective at this level?”

Larranaga had already known about Lykes through his recruiting connections in the D.C. area from his time at George Mason and Lykes reminded him of a former NBA player he coached against in his MAC days at Bowling Green in Eastern Michigan’s Earl Boykins.

“You know what, Chris is probably about the same size he is,” Larranaga said. “Jamal, I’ll tell you there wasn’t one thing he couldn’t do out on the court. There be a little bit of a learning curve to adjust to the length and the size, but he’s probably had to deal with that every step of the way. He’s too good of a player and too tough of a kid for that to stop him from being effective in the ACC.”

The affirmation from Larranaga gave Brunt confidence to pursue Lykes, who signed with Miami last month after being named the Washington Catholic Athletic Conference (WCAC) player of the year as a junior averaging 22.0 points, 4.3 assists, 3.7 rebounds and 2.7 steals per game as he helped lead the Eagles to a 24-10 season advancing to the semifinals of the WCAC and District of Columbia

State Athletic Association. He knocked down 47.3 percent of his shots from three and hit 74.9 percent at the line.

“It’s like watching Mighty Mouse with a ball of energy,” Brunt said. “His demeanor on the court is unflappable. He’s very poised and under control, but he’s an ultimate competitor. Obviously to be as good of a player as he is with his size you have to compete, but you also have to be supremely talented.

“He’s gifted athletically. He’s fast. He can stop on a dime. He can handle the ball. He can really shoot. He’s an exciting player, but he’s also a guy that fans will love how hard he plays, how hard he competes. He’s one of those guys that really gets his teammates involved and guys love to play with. We’re excited about the addition of Chris.”

Lykes is a four-star recruit, who is ranked as the 15th-best point guard in the country by 247Sports.

Miami’s 2017 class is ranked 10th nationally by the 247Composite.

Ewing's Davon Reed continues to lead Miami

Trentonian

George O'Gorman

Dec. 1, 2016

Ewing's Davon Reed couldn't have picked a better night to have his best game of the season,

The former two-time N.J. Prep Player of the Year from Princeton Day School, is now the senior captain of the Miami University basketball team.

Miami hosted Rutgers on Wednesday in an ACC/Big 10 Challenge Game, giving Reed a chance to face his home state team, which went to Florida with a 6-0 record. Miami was 4-2, losing its last two,

Reed had struggled in those games, shooting only 27 percent with no double figure games. He ended that slump Wednesday by scoring a seasons-high 18 as Miami pulled away in the second half for a 73-61 win to hand the Knights their first loss.

Reed's best game this season saw him shoot 6 for 18, grab five boards and had out three assists. He is now averaging 12.3 points.

Rutgers went nine minutes without scoring in the second half, but did rally back within 11 in the last eight minutes.

Advocare Invitational serves as learning experience for young 'Canes

State of the U

David Perez

Nov. 27, 2016

Miami's weekend started with so much hope on Thursday after a 67-53 victory over Stanford, but ended in despair after a second consecutive loss at the hands of in-state rival Florida.

After the commitment of 5 star forward Lonnie Walker on November 16th, and a quick 4-0 start to the year, 'Canes fans were as enthusiastic as ever about the future of Miami's basketball program.

Following a 1-2 record in Orlando; however, several problems have risen for Miami that simply point back to youth.

Miami's most consistent contributor throughout the tournament was junior Ja'Quan Newton, who was one of the premier sixth men in the country last season. Newton scored 20+ points in Miami's first two games of the invitational, and scored 15 points in the third place game on Sunday.

Other than Newton; however, consistent performances were hard to come by for Miami, and the offense struggled as a result.

The 'Canes never reached 70 points in their three games, and could not score more than 56 points in their final two. The defense showed up for Miami, but inexperience showed on the offensive end.

After scoring 18 in the opener, sophomore Anthony Lawrence combined for 8 points in the final two games, and senior Davon Reed never found the rhythm during the tournament Miami fans are used to seeing from him.

Inconsistency was simply the trend throughout the invitational, and will force Miami to soul search moving forward.

The heart of Miami's season has yet to start, and this invitational does not even begin to close the door on Miami's NCAA tournament hopes. Instead, this weekend is simply a reality check and a learning experience for the future.

The 'Canes have the talent of a team that can make a run in the ACC, but in order to do so, they must improve on those areas in which they struggled mightily. Miami must get more consistent scoring performances from the wings, and need more from inside forces such as Dewan Huell and Kamari Murphy.

Miami has many three point shooters that fit Larrañaga's offense to a tee, but in order to get knock-down shooters such as Dejan Vasiljevic involved, their expected systematic approach must come into effect.

Larrañaga is used to having a high scoring offense, and he has now recruited players to the program which fit his scheme. He once took George Mason to the final four on the heels of that offense, and has led Miami to two sweet 16's under it in Miami. The 'Canes have lived off of high percentage three pointers in the past, but Miami could not find that rhythm over the weekend.

Despite the inconsistency, this tournament was by no means a call to panic for the young 'Canes, but instead, a reality check which will help Miami's young players develop for the heart of their schedule.

It should just be a matter of time before Miami fits their pieces together, and the Hurricanes Big 10 ACC matchup versus

Rutgers should be a large indicator as to where the team will be moving forward.

Three questions for Miami Hurricanes after 73-56 loss to No. 21 Iowa State

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 29, 2016

Miami lost in the second round of the AdvoCare Invitational to a fast-paced, offensively gifted Iowa State squad. A few things we're wondering about the Hurricanes (4-1):

1. What team will we see on Sunday?

Miami won't be playing for the tournament championship, but will have its best chance at a meaningful non-conference win against either No. 11 Gonzaga or in-state rival Florida, both of whom appear to be NCAA tournament-quality teams. The Hurricanes reminded everyone of their youth and inexperience Friday, seeming to lose focus on defense — a strong suit coming in — and committing a season-high 19 turnovers. Can UM bounce back against another quality team?

2. Can Miami run a half-court offense?

Ja'Quan Newton can score. He excels getting into the lane for contested layups, floaters, and taking the occasional jumper. But the junior, in his first year as Miami's full-time point guard, has had more than three assists once this season (seven against North Florida) and has had more than three in 10 of his 70 career games. Worse, he has had as many or more turnovers than assists in three of Miami's first five games. It seems he is still learning to facilitate and find open shots for others. Miami entered Friday ranked 198th nationally in assist-to-turnover ratio (0.98), and that number is going down; it had just six assists to 19 turnovers against the Cyclones. Those woes are more glaring when Miami is shooting as poorly as it did Friday (36 percent from the field, 2-of-16 from

three) and usually dependable senior Davon Reed (2-of-9, 1-of-7 from deep) is cold.

3. How lacking is this team in inside presence and depth?

None of Miami's three primary big men — junior Ebuka Izundu, who sprained his ankle last week, freshman Dewan Huell or senior Kamari Murphy — has scored more than six points in a game in this tournament against more physically comparable players, after each produced a double-digit game against weaker opponents. Izundu and Huell were exploited at times on defense, and Murphy isn't at his best against larger opponents; none of those three weigh more than 230 pounds. Then there's the question of depth. Miami has a rotation of eight after dismissing Rashad Muhammad and given freshman Rodney Miller's need to improve his conditioning (he hasn't played this tournament). How will the Hurricanes look Sunday after playing three games in four days? Will it be a preview of struggles they may face in March?

PF Murphy Enjoys a Defensive Challenge

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Nov. 23, 2016

Kamari Murphy has always enjoyed challenges of defending good players.

When Murphy was a freshman at Brooklyn (N.Y.) Bishop Ford he went up against standout and future NBA first-round draft pick Tobias Harris, who was a year older.

"I kind of won the first half and then I don't know what got in him in the second half, but he was good," Murphy said. "He was a big guy like he is now and he had all of the moves. I was just way lighter than I am now, but I was active and he probably wasn't used to that or probably wasn't expecting that. They still won the game, but I did a pretty good job on him."

Murphy also had a memorable battle with future lottery pick Michael Kidd-Gilchrist after Murphy transferred to nearby Lincoln.

"That was a great game," Murphy said. "Me and him went at each other. He probably had 30 and I probably had 20, but it was a good game and we respected each other after the game. I don't know if he remembers, he probably doesn't."

Murphy has also had his fair share of battles with big men in college while at Oklahoma State facing standouts Joel Embiid, Perry Ellis, C.J. Leslie, and Cory Jefferson. and at Miami going against top ACC competition.

"Ever since high school, the best big man, I'm guarding him," Murphy said. "I've always liked challenges and guarding the best guy. If I do my job it's more spotlight for me and I can accept it if I don't do my job."

Murphy particularly remembers facing Leslie in Puerto Rico during his freshman season as Leslie had two points and four rebounds while fouling out in 17 minutes.

"He had a bad game and I'm going to take credit for it," Murphy said. "He was athletic, but he wasn't strong so it was a little easier for me because he didn't have the will power. He had the moves, but I had a good night defensively."

Murphy is a key defensive player for the Miami Hurricanes (3-0) during his senior season and will look for a strong showing at the AdvoCare Invitational beginning on Thursday (2:30 p.m., ESPN2) against Stanford, which is led by junior forward Reid Travis who is averaging 19.0 points and 10.5 rebounds.

"Personally I don't like guarding somebody easy to guard," Murphy said. "It makes my night boring. If I can do things to be more active and get more involved in the game, I'll do it."

Although Murphy is a key for the Hurricanes on the defensive end, he has been working to be more productive on the offensive end of the court. He is currently averaging a career-best 9.0 points on 50-percent shooting from the floor and his 83.3-percent shooting from the free-throw line is much higher than his career mark of 55 percent coming into the season.

"I just want to be an option if the guys throw it down there that they're going to feel confident I'm going to do something with it," Murphy said. "(Shooting) is something I've worked on this summer. Just working on some different spots on the floor where I normally catch the ball and not shooting shots that I don't shoot (in games) and also working on my low-post moves."

"I worked all summer on those moves and I'm confident in those moves now."

Addition of Walker Moves Hurricanes Recruiting Class to Ninth

Fansided

Alan Rubenstein

Nov. 23, 2016

Miami's addition of the nation's 19th overall player and fourth best shooting guard Lonnie Walker has pushed the Hurricanes 2017 recruiting class to ninth in 247Sports' composite rankings.

Walker joins other early signees point guard Chris Lykes and Center Deng Gak as part of the 2017 class.

Walker's choice to attend Miami was surprising. 247 had Walker as an 80 something percent chance to choose Arizona. Walker's hometown paper, the Reading Eagle tapped into how the seemingly underdog Hurricanes landed one of the nation's best players.

Miami assistant coach Adam Fisher a Pennsylvania native, laid the groundwork in Walker's recruitment. Villanova was one of the other finalists for Walker along with Kentucky. Fisher's high school coach was ironically Jay Wright's brother Derek.

According to the Eagle, Miami Head Coach Jim Larrañaga and Walker have already developed a close bond over common interests and an infinity for Animal Planet. It was Larrañaga's belief in Walker, the lessons he taught him and Walker's sense that Larrañaga wanted him as part of his "family" that closed the deal.

Walker said: "One of the things he drilled into my mind is, basketball's temporary," Walker said. "What are you gonna do after basketball? He kind of sounded like my father. It hit me: This guy wants me to be part of his family."

Miami loses Forward Kamari Murphy and Wing Davon Reed after this season.

Freshman Forward/Center Dewan Huell has also indicated he has an eye on the NBA Draft after this season.

Walker's biggest competition for playing time next season will come from freshmen combo guard Bruce Brown and wing DJ Vasiljevic. Brown is averaging 9.7 Points Per game and is one of Miami's most versatile players. Vasiljevic averages 11.7 PPG and is shooting 50 percent on threes.

Brown was the 30th ranked player in the class of 2016 and the fourth-ranked combo guard in 247's composite rankings. Huell was one spot above him and the ninth-ranked Power Forward.

Larrañaga's demeanor lends to being a players coach. The trust he puts in his players was a key element in landing Walker. "I've got a lot of trust in that guy," he said of Larrañaga. "That coach sees something special in me that I feel like no one else saw."

Well-traveled shooter finds a home with Hurricanes

Associated Press

Steven Wine

Nov. 22, 2016

Dejan Vasiljevic is a native of Canada with Serbian roots who grew up in Australia and has now found a home as a shooting guard for the Miami Hurricanes.

Vasiljevic is the most well-traveled member of a talented freshman class already playing a significant role for the Hurricanes, who compete in an eight-team tournament in Orlando beginning Thursday.

In Miami's first three games, all wins, Vasiljevic has averaged 11.7 points while going 9 for 18 from 3-point range.

"He can really, really shoot," coach Jim Larrañaga said. "I told him he reminds me of me — a really good offensive player who doesn't play much D. He really tries, but you're guarding a different kind of player, an athlete who is very skilled, and he hasn't faced that kind of athlete on a regular basis. So he's learning."

Vasiljevic's background suggests he's quick to adapt.

"My parents are from the former Yugoslavia," he said. "Because of the war, they decided to move here and there."

He was born in Calgary and moved to Melbourne when he was 6. He has Canadian and Australian citizenship, and plans to apply eventually for citizenship in Serbia, where he still has family. His parents and sister live in Australia.

His unusual accent — mostly Aussie, a bit Serbian — made him somewhat difficult for teammates to understand at first.

"I'm trying to get rid of the Australian slang in my speech," said Vasiljevic, who pronounces his name DAY-on Vass-EEL-uh-vitch and goes by DJ. "At first they didn't know what I was trying to say, but I've gotten into their vocabulary and how they speak."

Teammate Ja'Quan Newton said Vasiljevic was shy and quiet when he first arrived.

"But now he's talking the language we talk," Newton said. "He's picking up our lingo. He's very playful."

And he can play. His parents both played semi-professional handball, but he took up basketball at 12 and quickly became hooked, modeling his game after Croatian NBA star Drazen Petrovic, who died in a car crash four years before Vasiljevic was born.

Vasiljevic has given the young Hurricanes a perimeter threat as the offense retools after the departure of last season's leading scorers, Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez.

His shooting ability caught the eye of college recruiters in the summer of 2015 playing for a U-19 team in Europe. He made visits to Miami and Stanford and chose the Hurricanes because he liked Larrañaga and the weather.

"I thought it was the perfect fit for me," he said. "It's a new family to me, a new home."

Vasiljevic's parents probably won't make it to the United States this season to see him play in person. He said he misses mom's cooking, and notes there are no longer kangaroos in his backyard.

But the biggest adjustment has been dealing with cars driving on the right-hand side of the road, opposite from Australia. He's in no rush to obtain a U.S. driver's license and gets where he's going mostly by walking, which isn't much of a problem because he lives on campus.

Vasiljevic wants to get a degree and plans on a four-year stay rather than an early exit for the NBA. He likes Miami so well he helped land two prospects in next year's recruiting class and would be happy to give other prep players his sales pitch.

"I'm 2 for 2," he said. "Let's see if I can keep it going."

How did Miami land Reading High's Walker?

Reading Eagle

Mike Drago

Nov. 20, 2016

Jim Larrañaga was expecting a phone call from Reading, but wasn't sure whether or not the news would be good.

Earlier in the day, the Miami Hurricanes men's basketball coach had told an assistant that if a call came from Lonnie Walker IV's dad, Lonnie III, that would not be a good sign.

If it came directly from the Reading High star, thumb's up.

"As soon as the phone rang, I saw it was IV," Larrañaga said, "I was feeling good at that moment."

He was on the 'Canes' bus, headed to a shoot-around, and decided to put the caller on speaker phone.

"The (guys on the) bus just erupted," Larrañaga said of the moment Walker officially committed to Miami. "They were all so excited."

As was Larrañaga.

The signing of Walker, which took place the following morning on the final day of the NCAA's early signing period, was a landmark for the veteran coach and his emerging program.

It was a coup for Larrañaga, who was competing for last season's Pennsylvania's Gatorade Player of the Year with the likes of Kentucky, Arizona, Syracuse and reigning NCAA champ Villanova.

Blue bloods all.

So, how did Miami - which most still see as a football school - end up with one of the most-prized recruits in the nation?

Many thought Walker was destined for 'Nova. Coach Jay Wright was the first to offer, more than two years ago, and made

a big impression with Walker. Wright was a frequent visitor at the Geigle and the Wildcats seemed to have home court advantage.

Most of the so-called recruiting experts pegged Arizona as a heavy favorite. Coach Sean Miller is building a big-time program in the desert and likewise struck a chord with Walker.

"I was surfing the internet and saw that one of those (recruiting) sites gave us a 6 percent chance of signing Lonnie," Larrañaga told the Reading Eagle last week. "But we never thought we're not getting him."

Larrañaga credits assistant coach Adam Fisher for his dogged pursuit of the Red Knights star. Fisher kept telling his head coach that the 'Canes had a chance to win the lottery.

"Lonnie was the first name Adam brought to me when he became a full-time assistant," Larrañaga said. "He said Lonnie Walker is the best player in Pennsylvania and one of the five or 10 best in the country, and we need to get on him right away."

Fisher, who played at Central Bucks East (for Jay Wright's brother, Derek) and was on staff at Villanova and Penn State, made the inroads. He met with Lonnie III, Red Knights coach Rick Perez and other Walker family members.

When Larrañaga finally got a chance to see Walker play, the summer after his sophomore season, he was blown away.

"I thought I was watching Usain Bolt," he said. "He was so fast out of the blocks and racing to the basket and flying to the rim. That was it for me. I'm sold. This is the kid we want."

Fisher laid the recruiting groundwork but the personable, 67-year-old Larrañaga closed the deal.

He developed a bond with Walker that grew over the months through long telephone

conversations and text messages.

Sometimes they talked basketball, but more often they talked about television shows - they both happen to like Animal Planet - movies, school work and life after basketball.

Larrañaga got to understand Walker, and he grew to feel like more than a coach to Walker. Lonnie came to view him as a mentor and father figure.

"One of the things he drilled into my mind is, basketball's temporary," Walker said. "What are you gonna do after basketball? He kind of sounded like my father. It hit me: This guy wants me to be part of his family."

Despite his many accolades and attributes on a basketball court, Walker still considers himself an underdog - a kid from small town nobody knows about. Larrañaga was able to tap into that.

Walker always said his recruitment was about more than the program, it's place in basketball history or it's spot in the most recent polls.

It was about building a relationship and he feels he did that.

"I've got a lot of trust in that guy," he said of Larrañaga. "That coach sees something special in me that I feel like no one else saw."

Reading High's Walker ends suspense, picks Miami

Reading Eagle

Mike Drago

Nov. 17, 2016

Lonnie Walker IV crisscrossed the country over the past two months as he made official college visits, but he never strayed far from his core beliefs.

He said all along he would select a college based on his relationship with its head coach and that's what he did Wednesday when he signed an NCAA letter of intent to play for Jim Larrañaga at the University of Miami.

"Coach L, he's a cool dude," the Reading High basketball star told the Reading Eagle in late August, after announcing his five finalists. "I like him personally."

Arizona, Villanova, Kentucky and Syracuse each made big pitches to one of the nation's premier shooting guards, but Miami put on a fullcourt press in recent weeks and it seemed to sway Walker.

Earlier this month Larrañaga and his entire staff flew to Reading on a private jet, supplied by boosters.

"We went four-deep, to show him how interested we were," Larrañaga told the Miami Herald.

The move worked, with Walker signing on the final day of the NCAA's early signing period.

Walker professed all along that there were no front-runners and said Wednesday that he didn't make a final decision until last week.

"I was thinking about how I would look at certain schools and how it would end up," Walker said of his final decision, which came down to Arizona or the Hurricanes.

"Miami caught my attention a lot.

"Basketball is a temporary thing, but Coach L, he'll not only take me to the next level (as a player) but help me with school and after that. It's a winning situation for me."

And for Miami, which lands its biggest recruit in years and improves what had already been rated as a top 20 recruiting class.

Larrañaga, who guided the 'Canes to the Sweet 16 last season, has put together back-to-back strong recruiting classes, which bodes well for Walker's future.

Larrañaga, in his sixth season at Miami after 14 seasons with George Mason and 11 at Bowling Green, called Walker the best recruit he has ever landed.

He is ranked No. 19 in his class nationally by ESPN, 21st by 247sports.com and No. 23 by Scout.com.

"He is such a versatile player," Larrañaga said in a statement. "He is a lights-out 3-point shooter and has amazing speed in the open floor. He can dunk in the lane in traffic and is an elite defender. We can't wait for him to arrive."

Once there, he'll join two other ESPN Top 100 prospects in the Class of 2017: No. 52 Chris Lykes, a point guard from Maryland, and No. 93 Deng Gak, a 6-10 forward from New Jersey.

He'll also get to play one season with AAU teammate Ja'Quan Newton of Neumann-Goretti.

Miami is no doubt a program on the rise, but in Walker's mind it all came back to the man in charge.

"The way he approached me and talked to me, I can tell he trusts me," he said of Larrañaga. "He's determined to make me a better player and a better individual on and off the court."

Walker completed his five official visits earlier this month with a stop at Kentucky, then took time to sort things out. He waited until Tuesday to inform the 67-year-old Larrañaga, as well as Sean Miller, the Arizona coach.

His father, Lonnie Walker III, notified the other finalists.

The Red Knights star called it the toughest decision of his life.

"At first it was even," Walker said of his final five, "but then I noticed how much effort Miami was putting into me, showing I'm a special kid. That kind of changed me."

Walker said Larrañaga took his call on the team bus Tuesday as they were heading to practice. He said the 'Canes coach was thrilled and shared the news with his assistants and players.

"They were excited (to hear)," Walker said.

The decision was met with surprise around the country. Many recruiting pundits had him pegged for Arizona, where Miller has put together an impressive recruiting class.

Villanova, the first to offer, before Walker's sophomore season, was thought to be an early front-runner because of Walker's close connection with Wildcats coach Jay Wright, who has made frequent trips to Reading.

Shooting guard Lonnie Walker commits to Miami

ESPN
Jeff Borzello
Nov. 17, 2016

Five-star wing Lonnie Walker has committed to Miami.

Walker chose the Hurricanes over Arizona, Kentucky, Villanova and Syracuse. He's the program's highest-ranked commitment since ESPN's recruiting database started in 2007.

Walker, a 6-foot-4 shooting guard from Reading High School (Pennsylvania), is ranked No. 19 in the ESPN 100. He has already signed his letter of intent.

Miami received Walker's first official visit in late September, but this was presumed to be an Arizona vs. Villanova battle for much of the fall. Villanova had been recruiting him the longest and had the in-state pull, while Arizona made its move in September and October. However, after Walker took his official visit to Tucson in mid-October and didn't commit, Miami became more of a threat. He also took an official visit to Kentucky in early September.

"It was beautiful," Walker told ESPN in October when asked about Miami. "The environment, the people, I meshed with the players really well. Ja'Quan Newton, Dewan [Huell]. The coaches and assistant coaches, I mesh with really well. I thought it would take a little bit longer to talk to the players and hang out and everything, but it sort of just snapped right away."

Miami has had success with players from the Philadelphia area the last few years. Newton and Davon Reed -- who both played in the same AAU program as Walker -- are on the roster now, and assistant coach Adam Fisher is from the

suburbs of Philly. Fisher was the lead recruiter on Walker.

Walker should make an immediate impact for Miami as a scorer on the wing. He's a good athlete that can score in a variety of ways. Walker is aggressive going to the rim, but is also excellent in the mid-range and make shots from the perimeter. He averaged 16.7 points and 4.1 rebounds for Team Final on the Nike EYBL circuit last spring and summer, shooting 39.1 percent from 3-point range.

Walker is the third five-star recruit to commit to Miami in the last two classes, after Bruce Bowen and Huell pledged in the 2016 class. He is the third ESPN 100 prospect in Jim Larrañaga's 2017 class, joining Chris Lykes (No. 52) and Deng Gak (No. 93).

DISRUPTIVE MIAMI DEFENSE AMONG THE NATION'S BEST AT TURNING TEAMS OVER

ACCSports.com
Brian Geisinger
Nov. 17, 2016

Steals are by no measure the best metric to use to evaluate the defense of a player. They're like toppings on a pizza: it's great if you have them, but they're also nonessential. It's early in the 2016-17 season, but so far, the Miami Hurricanes are proving that you can have your pizza with toppings, and eat it, too. Or something like that.

After defeating North Florida 94-56 Wednesday night, the Hurricanes improved to 2-0; their defense has been powerful in both victories. According to Ken Pomeroy, Miami's allowing less than 93 points per 100 possessions, which ranks 23rd in the nation. We have a ways to go, but if they can keep this up, they'll become the best defense Jim Larrañaga's had at Miami since his 2012-13 ACC champion squad. When unadjusted for pace, Miami's giving up just 49.5 points per game (No. 8 nationally). North Florida and Western Carolina will never be confused with the 2005 North Carolina Tar Heels, but it's impressive to hold opponents to just 33.8 percent shooting on two-point field goals — No. 17 in the nation.

The Hurricanes are turning teams over at a high rate, too. They have a steal rate of 12.7 percent thus far, which is No. 35 in the nation, according to KenPom. This has translated into points on the other end. Miami scored 186 points in their first two games, and defeated their opponents by a combined margin of plus-87; they've also scored a combined 35 points off of turnovers. Veterans Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed and Anthony Lawrence Jr. are all averaging more than one steal per game. The freshmen have contributed as well: Dejan Vasiljevic and blue chipper

Bruce Brown are both averaging one steal per game.

Miami has struck up a nice balance between thievery and not fouling too much, though. Their defense is allowing a free throw rate of just 12.5 percent; this means that the Hurricanes are allowing fewer than 13 free throws for every 100 shots their opponents take. Miami has taken 52 free throws in two games — 36 more than their opponents. Miami's plus-28 points from the charity stripe to start the season.

For a young Hurricanes club, this is a really nice way to launch a new campaign. The schedule looks fairly easy for the Canes for a while, too. As of right now, they have just two teams inside the KenPom 100 — No. 64 Stanford and No. 94 George Washington — on their schedule before conference play. That, however, could change depending on what happens at the AdvoCare Invitational next week, where the competition level could jump, seriously. Miami could potentially play some combination of Iowa State, Gonzaga, Seton Hall or Florida — all of which are inside the top 40 of Pomeroy's rankings.

Until then, though, continue to enjoy the defensive prowess, and make sure to splurge on some toppings — pepperonis, perhaps — the next time you buy a pizza.

A private jet and a team effort: how Miami landed top-20 recruit Lonnie Walker

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 16, 2016

A few forces collaborated in Miami's successful recruitment of top-20 wing Lonnie Walker, one of the most heralded recruits in program history.

Second-year assistant coach Adam Fisher, who like Walker hails from the suburbs northeast of Philadelphia, discovered him early, identified him as a must-get for Miami, and kept in daily contact. On Walker's official visit last month, Hurricanes players made him feel at home. Liz Larrañaga, Jim's wife, bonded with Walker's mother.

One of the unsung heroes: a group of UM boosters who let the team use their private jet. That allowed Miami to send four coaches to Reading, Pa. multiple times — without taxing their recruiting budget, or causing schedule conflicts during a hectic period where recruiting collides with the start of the season. Instead of one or two coaches showing up, Jim Larrañaga and all three assistants — Fisher, Chris Caputo and Jamal Brunt — were a large and regular presence.

"We rolled four-deep," Larrañaga said by phone Wednesday, hours after Walker signed his letter of intent. "I think that made an impression on Lonnie and his family."

Speaking of impressions: the Hurricanes turned heads nationally by signing a top-10 recruiting class last year for the first time, and they might do it again. After signing Walker, ESPN's No. 19 overall player and the fourth-best shooting guard, Miami moved to No. 9 in 247Sports' rankings, and No. 11 in Scout's. Rivals rated UM's class No. 17 before Walker's commitment. ESPN had

it No. 22.

Late Tuesday, Walker called the Hurricanes to say he chose them over Arizona, Kentucky, Syracuse and hometown Villanova, the defending national champions. Is there a measure of satisfaction in beating those blue-bloods for blue-chippers?

"All coaches are such competitors, and we all battle so hard in the recruiting arena to find the right guys for our programs," Larrañaga said. "He would have fit in anywhere. But I think he felt most comfortable with us, our players, coaches, the university. That's what's very satisfying, knowing we have a player who really did his research and felt like we were the right place for him."

What type of player is Walker? Recruiting analysts tab him as an attacking wing, who uses his 6-foot-4, 205-pound frame to score in great numbers.

"The first thing I noticed about Lonnie was his speed in the open court," Larrañaga said. "I kidded him one time on the phone, I was watching the Olympics and I was watching Usain Bolt win the 100-meter dash. I told him he reminds me of Usain Bolt when he gets in the open court. He doesn't run — he glides. He can finish with a dunk in traffic because of his speed and acceleration and elevation. But he's also a very good three-point shooter and he shoots a good percentage from three.

"To add a player of Lonnie's caliber continues to elevate our program and our ability to compete with the best teams in the country. If you watched that Kansas-Duke game last night, they've got a lot of great players. We want to be able to compete with them and the first thing you have to do is compete in recruiting."

On his official visit, Walker was quickly at ease with fellow Philly-area recruits Davon Reed and Ja'Quan Newton, fellow alumni of Team Final AAU. He got on board with 2016 five-star recruits Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell, who told him he could be a part of something special. He liked the potential Miami's other signees, like top-100 recruits Chris Lykes and Deng Gak. His family — including an uncle that paid his own way, to satisfy NCAA rules — had coaches answer their questions about academics and basketball.

"It was a great team effort," Larrañaga said. "Sometimes things just click. That weekend went according to script. We wanted to make sure we touched every base. ... There were so many things we had to show them to make sure it was a good fit for him."

It appears Miami will have a balanced roster returning next year, with two elite-level recruiting classes backing up veterans like point guard Newton, junior forward Anthony Lawrence Jr. and center Ebuka Izundu. Even if the forces that afflict rosters across the country — transfers and early NBA draft declarations — surface at UM, the Hurricanes should be well-positioned.

"Very, very pleased with my coaching staff and the direction we're going in," Larrañaga said. "But recruiting is like breathing. You've got to do it every day, and you've got to do it a lot."

Miami shocks recruiting world, beating out Kentucky and Villanova

CBS Sports

Matt Norlander

Nov. 16, 2016

Lonnie Walker will head south next season to compete for what should be a loaded Hurricanes team

The Miami Hurricanes just landed one of the most talented recruits in program history.

Five-star shooting guard Lonnie Walker announced on Twitter Wednesday morning his commitment to The U, and in doing so, picked Jim Larrañaga's program over the likes of Villanova, Kentucky, Arizona and Syracuse. Villanova was considered the favorite, as Walker plays in nearby Reading, Pa. He's ranked 21st overall in 247 Sports' composite database for 2017 recruits.

Walker to Miami was at 6 percent in 247's Crystal Ball. This will almost certainly be the most surprising commitment by any five-star player in the 2017 class.

Check out his commitment on Twitter. Shocking the world, using a Muhammad Ali photo -- and there's Larrañaga, Photoshopped in behind him.

Via Scout.com:

"He's a coach like no other I feel like he will put me in the position as a great player and as a great person academically," Walker said about Miami and Jim Larrañaga. "I feel like he will drive me to that next level. The way he approached me and showed love, showed that I was a priority and that he believes that I'm a special kid."

Miami assistant Adam Fisher led the recruiting efforts on Walker, and in landing him, Walker joins his former fellow AAU teammates Davon Reed and

Ja'Quan Newton at The U. Miami has won 119 games since Larrañaga took over the program in 2011. Walker is the third five-star player Larrañaga has pulled in just over a year, joining Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell.

If Brown and Huell are on the roster next season, in addition to Newton and others, Miami will be a surefire preseason top 15 team. Walker, a tremendous scorer and joins four-star point guard Chris Lykes and four-star center Deng Gak in Miami's 2017 class.

Miami now has the No. 9-ranked class in America.

Five-Star Shooting Guard Lonnie Walker Commits To Miami

Campus Insiders

Sam Falcone

Nov. 16, 2016

Five-star shooting guard Lonnie Walker took to Twitter on Wednesday morning and announced his commitment to the Miami Hurricanes.

“First off I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me through this long journey, but it’s time for me to take this next step and move on and commit to the University of Miami. I feel like it’s the best for me, on and off the court and will make greater individual on the court. Thanks to all the schools that recruited me but I’m officially a Cane #GoCanes”

Walker, the No. 3 shooting guard and No. 23 overall recruit in the class of 2017, took an official visit to Miami in early October. However, Jim Larrañaga and the Hurricanes have been recruiting the 5-star wing for over two years.

In an interview with Scout, Walker explained how the Miami coaching staff built a strong relationship over the years.

“It’s very strong,” he said of his relationship with Miami’s staff. “I have a lot of trust with this coach and built a strong bond with both Fish (assistant coach Adam Fisher) and coach L.

“He’s a coach like no other I feel like he will put me in the position as a great player and as a great person academically. I feel like he will drive me to that next level. The way he approached me and showed love, showed that I was a priority and that he believes that I’m a special kid.”

Hailing from Reading Senior High School in Reading, Pennsylvania, Walker is an extremely athletic and aggressive

scorer. He’s got an ideal frame with bulky shoulders and long arms and has impressive lateral movement. Not only does this make him a hard player to contain, but it also allows him to be an effective defender on the perimeter.

Few prospects in the country can attack the rim with the same ferocity as Walker. He uses a quick first step to explode to the hoop and finishes strong around the rim.

Along with the Hurricanes, Walker was also considering and held offers from Arizona, Kentucky, Syracuse, and Villanova. He is the fourth recruit to join Miami’s 2017 class, along with 4-star point guard Chris Lykes, and 3-star power forward Deng Gak. Walker’s commitment now bumps the ‘Canes to the No. 11 2017 recruiting class in the country.

Miami lands 5-star recruit Lonnie Walker

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 16, 2016

The University of Miami basketball team landed one of its most highly-touted recruits in recent history on Wednesday when shooting guard Lonnie Walker announced he had chosen the Hurricanes over Arizona, Villanova, Syracuse and Kentucky.

Walker, 6-5, is from Reading, Pa., and is rated a Top 20 prospect in the Class of 2017 by most recruiting websites. He is rated No. 19 by ESPN, making him the highest-ranked UM signee since ESPN's recruiting database began in 2007.

"First off, I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me through this long journey, but it's time for me to take this next step and move on and commit to University of Miami," he wrote on Twitter. "I feel like it's the best for me, on and off the court and will make me a greater individual on the court. Thanks to all the schools that recruited me, but I'm officially a Cane #GoCanes"

"Lonnie is not just a recruit, he is a great role model to kids in his hometown, a local celebrity because he is a great student, good person, and a smiley young man the little kids look up to," said UM coach Jim Larrañaga. "He walks down the street there and kids ask for his autograph. He is the highest-ranked recruit I have ever signed as a head coach, and it's a big day for Miami."

Larrañaga praised assistant coach Adam Fisher for "his sensational daily efforts to keep Miami's name out there when he was also being recruited by places like Kentucky and Arizona that you read about every day on the internet."

Walker played in the same AAU program as Ja'Quan Newton and Davon Reed, and felt at home during his visit to Miami. Walker's mother connected with Larrañaga's wife, Liz, which the coach said also played into his decision. Two weeks ago, Larrañaga and his staff flew up to Reading in a private jet to make a last pitch. "We went four-deep, to show him how interested we were," Larrañaga said.

He led the Reading High Red Knights to a 29-4 record and the state 4A state semifinals as a junior, averaging 16.9 points, 5.3 rebounds and 3.6 assists per game.

On the Nike circuit last summer, Walker averaged 16.6 points and 40 percent shooting from three-point range, five rebounds and three assists. He is the fourth commitment in the 2017 Canes class, along with Denk Gak of New Jersey (rated 93rd) and Chris Lykes of Washington, D.C. (rated 52nd).

"He is a lights-out 3-point shooter, really fast and elevates well," said Larrañaga. "He can dunk and also defend. He could play three positions with his versatility."

Wednesday was the final day of the Fall early signing period.

Australian freshman guard settles in to Hurricanes family

The Miami Hurricane

Josh White

Nov. 16, 2016

For many high school graduates, making the transition to college can be a challenge. Between living on your own, developing new relationships and spending hours on schoolwork, the adjustment is often difficult.

International freshman guard Dejan “DJ” Vasiljevic took his talents to the U to embrace these hurdles.

Vasiljevic, who was born in Canada, moved to Melbourne, Australia, at the age of six and picked up basketball at 12.

“Basketball wasn’t a thing growing up,” said Vasiljevic, whose parents both played semi-pro handball. “My sister is the one that got me started. She was playing around with her friends, and I was just going to school playing here and there, but I started taking it serious.”

As Vasiljevic grew as an athlete, he started competing internationally for Australia. In 2013, Vasiljevic led the country to a silver medal at the FIBA Oceania U16 Championships, averaging 19.3 points per game. He played in the 2014 FIBA U18 Oceania Championships and the 2015 FIBA U19 World Championships in Greece, among other international appearances.

For the sharpshooter, the decision to attend Miami over schools like LSU, Louisville and Stanford came down to a few key factors.

“When I was on my visit, they mentioned that they have people from all different parts of the world, at the school and in different parts of the community as well,” Vasiljevic said. “I felt Miami was the best

for me both for academics and athletics. Coach L definitely played a big part; it is a new family to me here.”

The relationships were not built right away. There was a cultural disconnect when Vasiljevic first arrived on campus; peers had a hard time understanding his Australian slang. Since then, he has quickly broken the barrier, adopting the dialect of his teammates.

“He’s a really great kid, a great student and fun to be around,” Head Coach Jim Larrañaga said. “What I’m more impressed with than anything is there are so many diverse personalities on our team, and he fits so well with everybody.”

Vasiljevic, who models his game after Croatian scoring legend Drazen Petrovic, has fit well with the team on the court as well, specifically as one of the main scoring options off the bench. Even with his natural offensive talent, Vasiljevic is not one to settle.

“I’m still trying to improve my game, but they call me shooter,” Vasiljevic said. “I’m a guy that wants to work hard and get better every day and make my teammates better.”

While his smooth shooting touch amounted for 11 points in his debut against Western Carolina, Vasiljevic acknowledged that he has to improve on the defensive end.

“I knew coming to America that I had to step up defensively because you’re playing against longer and quicker athletes,” Vasiljevic said. “In Australia, they aren’t as quick.”

Vasiljevic has received high praise from both his coaches and teammates alike for his work ethic and ability to adapt to

others around him.

“Obviously it’s a cultural difference from two polar opposites in the world, but I think he’s adjusted great,” senior guard Davon Reed said. “We joke around asking him stuff about kangaroos, but I think he loves being here and he’s picked up the lingo really quickly, and he’s been working hard. He’s a worker and he is constantly getting better.”

Ja'Quan Newton embraces role as floor general

The Miami Hurricane
Isaiah Kim-Martinez
Nov. 16, 2016

Last season, junior guard Ja'Quan Newton made himself known as one of the best sixth men in the country, averaging over 10 points per game off the bench for the Miami Hurricanes. This season, Newton has been taking on a bigger role in more ways than one.

Newton has replaced former Hurricane Ángel Rodríguez as the starting point guard; Rodríguez led the team in assists and was second in scoring last season. Miami has high expectations for Newton, who is transitioning from being a combo, score-first guard to a more traditional point guard.

"They are two very different kinds of players," Head Coach Jim Larrañaga said. "Ángel was a guy who could penetrate and pitch, but was also a very good three-point shooter. Ja'Quan is really an attack guy, he really like to get into the paint, which is going to be helpful for the team's performance."

The 6-foot-2 guard from Philadelphia is known for his aggressive style on offense. Newton gets to the rim with relentless drive and is able to finish strong at the basket. Even when he doesn't convert on the shot, he is often able to draw fouls to get to the free-throw line.

"I don't force anything," Newton said. "I have the mindset that no one can guard me, so I'll take what the defense gives me."

Even with his clear scoring ability, Newton has a new approach to the game this year: getting his teammates involved.

"Ja'Quan will continue to penetrate the defense, but he has done a great job creating shots for others," senior guard and captain Davon Reed said. "Over the summer, the biggest thing for him was about taking on that leadership role as the third captain of the team and not having any off days from a leading perspective."

Knowing that the team features four freshmen, Newton has been using his experience to set the path for the younger players and now embraces being a leader on the team behind Reed and redshirt senior forward and co-captain Kamari Murphy.

"I wasn't the person to be vocal last season," Newton said. "This year, I've really been working on that. Especially with the new guys, if they do something wrong, I tell them that they can correct it. If they need help, I'm here."

Newton has shown improvements in both his shooting and his physical strength, much of which he credits to his training over the summer. He came into this season weighing 191 pounds, six pounds heavier than his starting weight the previous year. Newton plans to continue to use this to his advantage as he fights through the game-to-game contact that comes with being a starting guard in the NCAA.

"The transition is a little different because teams are more focused on you now," Newton said. "Teams are going to focus their scouting reports on you."

His individual statistics are expected to rise this season, and he will receive more attention from the media and fans, but there is only one thing that matters to Newton.

"I just want to win," Newton said. "The more my team wins, the recognition will come with it."

Vitale and Fraschilla Weigh in on Canes

Miami Herald
Barry Jackson
Nov. 15, 2016

With UM basketball 1-0 after opening its season with a 92-43 win against Western Carolina last Friday, what's realistic to expect from a team that lost three key players off a Sweet 16 appearance?

"They will be an NCAA team if their backcourt is good," ESPN's Dick Vitale said by phone. "I like their talent. Anytime you lose your starting backcourt, that's a tough thing. How consistent will Ja'Quan Newton be, with his minutes increasing? That is going to be a big question. Talking to people, I've heard some rave reviews on this recruiting class, and they should be instant contributors – they're all highly rated. This is deepest class they have had."

ESPN's Fran Fraschilla said: "Based on who's coming back and their recruiting class, they will be sneaky good. I still put my faith in coach [Jim] Larrañaga. He's like a master chef, can take ingredients and whip up something good."

Fraschilla loves UM's incoming class. "We had [forward] Dewan Huell at the All American camp; he's a terrific prospect, a long, lanky, athletic kid, a high major ACC level talent. I thought his motor ran really high. He's got to pack a few more pounds. It's good to see them get a local five-star player to stay home, and Dewan could be a poster boy for that."

"[Guard] Bruce Bruce was a major get. He could pretty much play anywhere in the country. [Guard] Dejan Vasiljevic is a tough, hard-nosed two guard, a terrific catch-and-shoot guy. He had some big games against college teams that went on Australian tours."

Fraschilla likes Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy and believes Newton fits the mold "of today's NBA point guard."

Can this program be a consistent top 40 program, year in and year out, or is that too much to expect?

"Jimmy has done a tremendous job of adding to the success they had, but the only problem you deal with is the toughness of the conference," Vitale said. "This year it will be overwhelmingly the top conference in the country. As good as you may be, and FSU will be pretty good too, there are no automatics."

"But I believe they will be a consistent winner [now]. If you can finish in the top 7 in the ACC, you get into the national tournament."

UM plays at North Florida on Wednesday.

Vitale, by the way, is trying to get a research grant in the name of former ESPN colleague John Saunders, who died this summer, with money directed to children with cancer. Go to dickvitale.com for more information.

- UM hoops is reportedly receiving very strong consideration from five-star recruit Lonnie Walker, a 6-4 shooting guard from Reading, Penn. Rivals ranks him the 20th best player in the 2017 class.

C Izundu Looking to Excel in Second Season

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Nov. 15, 2016

Ebuka Izundu played sparingly as a freshman, but has added 30 pounds in the past year and is ready for a large role as a sophomore.

The 6-foot-10 native of Nigeria scored a team-high 14 points making all five shots from the field and all four from the free-throw line while grabbing five rebounds and blocking a shot in Miami's season-opening 92-43 win over Western Carolina on Friday.

"The coaches told me right as the game was ending that Ebuka was our leading scorer and I said, 'What? He didn't play,'" head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He played 13 minutes and had 14 points, but what it does say is that he needs to learn what I've been telling him and believing in his ability to just make a shot. Any of the shots he made tonight he can make against anybody. He had a great second half."

The block helped ignite Izundu.

"The block really made me go off crazy because it was a good block," Izundu said.

Izundu played only 79 minutes in 15 games on last year's 27-8 Sweet 16 team, but with the graduation of three-year starter Tonye Jekiri, Izundu has received the early nod over Dewan Huell and Rodney Miller for a starter's role.

"The most improvement I have made is my defense and I am lot stronger than I was last year," Izundu said. "I'm just trying to defend without fouling. That's my major goal right now—to be good on defense."

Jekiri averaged 8.6 rebounds a game in his final season in Coral Gables and is the only Hurricane to average over 10 boards a game during ACC competition when he averaged 10.9 as a junior.

Izundu has lofty goals of surpassing what Jekiri did last season, which could put him on the top 10 of Miami's single-season list.

"I'm trying to get 10 rebounds a game," Izundu said. "Rebounding is my goal this year. I'm trying to be one of the best rebounders in this league and that's what I'm shooting for this year."

Izundu says the key will be, "Just getting my position right, being in the right place at the right time, and just boxing out."

He feels comfortable playing at 230 pounds instead of 200.

"I feel light on my feet and the weight is not bothering me at all," Izundu said. "I still have got my speed and I still rebound the ball very well."

In addition to being an important piece for the Hurricanes on the defensive end of the court, Izundu is also looking to be an efficient offensive player.

Playing with point guard Ja'Quan Newton, a solid passer who gets in the lane, should give Izundu opportunities for shots in the paint.

"He's a really good player," Izundu said. "Any time I am open he is going to give me the ball. I just keep my hands ready to catch the ball because he's so fancy and crafty. I never know when the ball is coming so I have to be ready every time."

Izundu showed flashes on both ends of the court during Miami's exhibition game

against Barry making 3 of 4 shots from the floor for eight points and grabbing six rebounds in 18 minutes.

"I did what I could do," he said. "I just tried to get rebounds, tried to score when the ball was in my hands, and tried to do the little things that I could do to help my team win."

Izundu and the Hurricanes (1-0) return to action on Wednesday (7 p.m., ESPN3) at North Florida.

"I'm just trying to do my best, play my hardest, and see how things go," Izundu said.

WIZARDS ROOKIE SHELDON McCLELLAN STANDING OUT ON AND OFF COURT

CSN MidAtlantic
Chase Hughes
Nov. 15, 2016

Wizards rookie Sheldon McClellan played his first full game as an NBA player on Saturday, 35 minutes of action in Washington's loss to the Chicago Bulls. He dropped 15 points on an efficient 5-for-9 shooting to provide a positive on a night the Wizards fell to 2-7 on the season, and on a night star guards John Wall and Bradley Beal were not available.

McClellan's performance was an encouraging sign for the Wizards, who have been looking for a spark from their bench through nine games this season.

"He asked us a lot of questions before the game because he was so nervous," Wall said. "For him to go out there and have his first shot go in the basket, I think that calmed him down a little bit. He's a guy that believes in his talent. He's got a lot of confidence to be a rookie who wasn't drafted."

Wall is one of several teammates who have mentioned McClellan's personality this season. Forward Markieff Morris called him "one of the funniest rookies" he's been around.

Wall alluded to that after practice on Tuesday.

"He kept saying 'I'm not going to go for the [Dwyane Wade] pump fake.' If you keep talking about it, you're going to go for it," Wall joked. "He has fun and jokes around, but once you step on the basketball court he's trying to compete against everybody."

Head coach Scott Brooks has also noticed that side of McClellan and believes it can

be good to have that element in a locker room.

"I like guys that have a sense of humor. I like guys that check their ego at the door and are selfless. He does that. He's a fun guy to be around, but he's competitive on the court when it counts," Brooks explained.

Wall echoed that idea, that McClellan finds a different gear in practice and in games. He may be funny, but not when it's time to get serious.

"Coach has a drill where sometimes he will have rookies to call out a guy they want to play against. He's always calling out either me or Brad. He takes the challenge. That's something you can respect from a young guy coming in."

ACC Basketball Preview: Miami

ACC Sports War

Mike McDaniel

Nov. 14, 2016

The Miami Hurricanes enter the 2016-17 season with momentum continuing to build around the program behind the leadership of legendary head coach Jim Larrañaga. As he enters his sixth season in Coral Gables (time flies, right?), Larrañaga will be tasked with replacing the two top scorers off of last year's team in guards Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez. McClellan led last season's Sweet 16 squad in points per game with 16.3, while Rodriguez was no slouch in his own right, finishing second on the team in scoring with 12.6 points per game for the Hurricanes.

It is no secret that two players in particular for Miami will be relied upon more than the others in this year of transition for Miami, as Jim Larrañaga will look no further than junior guard Ja'Quan Newton and senior guard Davon Reed. While both players took on important roles throughout last season's Sweet 16 run, the duo will be tasked with a much-heavier workload now that Rodriguez and McClellan have moved on due to graduation.

"Yeah Ja'Quan and Davon are going to be our leading scorers," Larrañaga quipped at ACC Media Day. "They are in practice everyday. They're very, very different, but they work very well together. They're a tremendous complement. They're roommates. They're best friends. They get along very well together on and off the court, and they are both stepping up into new roles. Ja'Quan Newton was our sixth man, and Dick Vitale called him the best sixth man in basketball last year. He moves into the starting role and leadership role as our point guard.

Davon Reed was our — I think third leading scorer. He is now responsible for taking over that job by Sheldon McClellan, and between Ja'Quan Newton and Davon Reed, we need to get 30 or more points. If those guys are able to do that on a consistent basis, it takes pressure off some of our younger guys, yet we're going to be counting on some of our younger guys to be double-digit scorers."

There will be plenty of talented youngsters on the Miami team who will likely be thrust into the fire with some early playing time in the nation's toughest conference. Among the newcomers are freshman shooting guards DJ Vasiljevic and Bruce Brown.

"DJ Vasiljevic is a shooting guard, and he can really shoot the three. We're hoping he'll be able to provide some points. Bruce Brown is an outstanding athlete, and we're hoping he'll be able to score for us in transition — in the open court," Larrañaga said.

As for some of the other holdovers from last year's squad, it sounds like there will be a sizable workload for sophomores Anthony Lawrence and Ebuka Izundu, who combined for only a shade over 17 minutes per game last season.

"The two sophomores are going to be huge keys for us. Anthony Lawrence and Ebuka Izundu...we need both of them to score a bunch at the offensive end. If they can each get to double figures, that would really make us tough."

This overall could be a pretty big ask of Jim Larrañaga for his relatively young team, but if there is anything we have learned from him as a coach both at George Mason and at the University of Miami thus far, it is that resilience and

competitiveness drive him and his team to great successes.

"Well, one of the things we said years ago when I took the job at George Mason and then again repeated it when we arrived at Miami, that we did not want to build a good team, we wanted to build a great program. And the difference is I think anybody can get hot in a given season and things just click for you...but to have a great program, you've got to do it on an annual basis, year in and year out."

The task will be no different for the Hurricanes and Jim Larrañaga this season; fight like heck to get to the tournament and make noise in March. They have the young talent, but development will be the tell-tale sign from here on out to decide the final verdict on the 2016-17 Miami Hurricanes.

Canes freshmen play large role in season-opening win

Miami Herald
Steve Gorten
Nov. 11, 2016

For a talented, but untested, University of Miami men's basketball team, Friday night's walloping of Western Carolina was the ideal season opener.

Not only did the Hurricanes cruise to a 92-43 home win against the Catamounts, but they did so while getting their four freshmen — Dewan Huell, Bruce Brown, Dejan "DJ" Vasiljevic and Rodney Miller — plenty of valuable playing time off the bench.

Huell was the first to get in, replacing starting center Ebuka Izundu just 39 seconds into the game when Izundu was issued his second offensive foul. After sitting the rest of the first half, Izundu piled up 14 points in 13 minutes to finish as the game's leading scorer.

Huell, Ja'Quan Newton and Kamari Murphy tallied 13 points apiece, and Vasiljevic recorded 11, including three three-pointers. Anthony Lawrence and Davon Reed added eight points each to help lead Miami, which opened the second half with a 14-0 spurt and pushed its lead to as many as 57 while shooting 59 percent.

"It wasn't a very good game and I apologize for that," said Western Carolina coach Larry Hunter. "We didn't give them much of a test tonight, to be honest with you."

While the Hurricanes finished 50 percent (31-for-62) from the field, their defense was more impressive. They held the Catamounts to 25.4 percent shooting (17 for 67), forced 16 turnovers, blocked eight shots and stacked up nine steals.

"I told the team immediately after the game, I was really pleased with our defense," Coach Jim Larrañaga said. "Right from the start, we showed a lot of focus, good intensity, good teamwork helping each other defensively."

"This was a game we've been waiting for," Murphy said. "We dug in. Defensively, we were great today. And we shared the ball."

The 6-10 Izundu was perfect from the field (5 for 5) and the foul line (4 for 4), and drew a loud cheer from the announced crowd of 7,142 at Watsco Center with a big block early in the second half.

"The block made me go off crazy," said Izundu, who made his first career start after averaging 2.1 points and 1.3 rebounds in 5.3 minutes per game as a freshman last season. "That really set me off."

Huell had his own monster highlight — a one-handed dunk on a fast-break for his first points as a Cane.

"Wow!" Larrañaga said of the slam by the McDonald's All-American from Miami Norland. "There was a turnover, he got a bounce pass and he threw it down."

Huell grabbed seven rebounds as well in 25 minutes. Brown also played 25 minutes and had a game-high five assists and game-high tying eight rebounds.

The Hurricanes looked as impressive as last year's Sweet 16 team that lost to eventual national champ Villanova, despite losing three starters — Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri — from that squad. For a team needing seasoning, Friday was "huge," Larrañaga said, because it allowed seven players to log at least 23 minutes.

"We were just very out-manned," Hunter said. "The speed of the game was very different from what we've gone up against. Our execution was not very good and they took advantage of that."

Miami will next play Wednesday at North Florida.

Larrañaga Thanks Staff for Support of Hoops

HurricaneSports.com

University of Miami coach Jim Larrañaga held a luncheon on the Coral Gables campus to thank staff, donors and community members for their support of the men's basketball program on Thursday at the Watsco Center.

After the meal, Rudy Fernandez, the chief of staff to Miami president Julio Frenk, gave opening remarks and thanked the basketball staff for the change they have made on the UM campus and in the Coral Gables area.

Miami Commissioner Francis Suarez then talked about meeting Coach L for the first time, and spoke high praises for the basketball team in Larrañaga's first five years at The U.

"Coach L, with your energy and passion, you've made all of us in this community believe in the program," said Suarez.

Larrañaga then took to the mic, thanking the Miami tickets staff for their relentless pursuit of selling out the Watsco Center for the second straight season. He also was gracious for the donors and season ticket holders who have helped build the program to what it is today. Then he thanked the hard work of his coaching staff and their families.

"I want to recognize the work that all those have done to help us sell out these past two years," Larrañaga said. "The support we have been given from the community, from the city of Miami and from Coral Gables has been absolutely awesome. The culture has changed, including the support for our program."

Larrañaga then presented Frank Quesada, the vice mayor of Coral Gables, and the Coral Gables Community

Foundation with a pair of tickets to each Miami basketball game, which will be given to underprivileged children in the community.

The event was closed with a highlight film from the 2015-16 Sweet 16 basketball team, as well as an urge to attend Miami's season opener on Friday at 7 p.m. when the Canes face Western Carolina.

UM Enters Season Confident Despite Loss of Top Players from Sweet 16 Team

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Nov. 10, 2016

Twice during his five-year tenure at Miami, Jim Larrañaga has taken the Hurricanes to the Sweet 16, mostly recently earlier this year.

Miami charged through the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament before seeing its season end with a loss to Villanova, the eventual national champion.

And after both of those tournament runs, Larrañaga watched the veteran leaders of those teams leave the program, either through graduation or quitting school to pursue NBA dreams.

Larrañaga's quasi-rebuilding project should be easier this time than it was three years ago, though. This time around, the cabinet is bit more stocked, with veterans such as Davon Reed, Kamari Murphy and Ja'Quan Newton back to help the Hurricanes. UM will be young at other spots on the court, but not nearly as inexperienced as that 2013-14 team was.

"We have an uphill battle because we have a very young team. We only have 10 scholarship players on the roster that are available to us. We only have five players returning, but they're five very good players and I like them very much," Larrañaga said. "Ja'Quan Newton our point guard, Davon Reed, our shooting guard and Kamari Murphy, one of our forwards, I think those guys have plenty of experience."

This season, that trio will be called on to fill the roles left by the graduations of seniors Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez and Tonye Jekiri. McClellan and Rodriguez

were Miami's leading scorers averaging 16.3 and 12.6 points, respectively. Jekiri, meanwhile, was a defensive force for the Hurricanes, earning recognition from the Atlantic Coast Conference for his team-high average of 8.6 rebounds per game.

Reed and Newton will provide guidance for the Hurricanes in the backcourt, with both Larrañaga said, emerging as leaders during the offseason. They're also Miami's two leading returning scorers, each averaging double figures last season. Murphy, meanwhile, will be part of a frontcourt that needs to grow stronger and mature quickly to contend with the big bodies they'll face throughout the ACC.

The positive, the Hurricanes say, is that with the returning talent and the work they're willing to put in, they expect Miami can once again surprise outside observers. UM has been picked to finish ninth in the ACC this season.

"Guys have been in the gym since the summertime. That's always been part of our culture, especially for guys like myself, Sheldon and Angel in years past," Reed said. "You've got guys in the gym that have been living in the gym now. Kamari, Ja'Quan and Anthony Lawrence and all of our freshmen have been living in the gym. So I think that's something that will add a little bit of confidence and edge to our team and it will carry over through the season. ... What I see right now is not a lack of effort, which is the best part. It's just a little bit of a lack of experience, but the guys will pick things up along the way."

Among the young players expected to play a role this season are freshmen Bruce Brown, DJ Vasiljevic and former McDonald's All-American Dewan Huell. While Rashad Muhammad will miss the

first three games of the season after he was suspended for violating team rules, the transfer should also provide some scoring and experience after averaging 13.9 points as a sophomore at San Jose State in 2015.

Sophomore Anthony Lawrence and Ebuka Izundu will help too.

The pieces are there for the Hurricanes to do better than they did last time they found themselves in this situation, but there will be challenges, like having to play in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Still, Miami's players say they're ready for the tests they'll face and they feel they'll be ready.

"We've got guys that have experience, some [that] don't have experience, some transfers. We've got a little bit of everything," Reed said. "But these guys are willing to work, and we've got Coach L on our side, so that's always a great thing as well."

Basketball: 10 questions for the 2016-17 Miami Hurricanes

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 10, 2016

Some years are easier than others for coaches. Last year, Jim Larrañaga had three reliable, battle-tested seniors at key positions, and enough experience around them to make a Sweet 16 run.

This year, he has a roster with potential but few sure things. He is a coach who always seems to figure it out, but it could take him a while to do so this season, which begins Friday against Western Carolina (7 p.m., ESPN3.com).

“It’s a young team that’s practicing very hard,” Larrañaga said. “Their effort has been very good. They just have so much to learn about themselves and each other and what we expect out of them.”

Put another way:

“We’re a little raw,” Larrañaga said. “We need to cook a little longer. We’re too tough. We don’t have smoothness in anything we do, offensively or defensively.”

We’re wondering about the ingredients of this recipe, too. A few questions for the Hurricanes, in no particular order:

Can they play defense? Starting two-guard Davon Reed and four-man Kamari Murphy have shown they can defend, both on the ball and in a system. Three-man Anthony Lawrence is versatile and long. Beyond that, it’s a mixed bag. Center Ebuka Izundu, like Lawrence, has potential but hasn’t played enough minutes for anyone to say he’s capable defensively. Point guard Ja’Quan Newton isn’t known for his defense, or his commitment to playing it. None of the freshmen or transfer wing Rashad Muhammad have seen action for UM yet (and Muhammad and guard DJ Vasiljevic are likely to be offensive, not defensive weapons).

Can Davon Reed be the man? He’ll probably lead Miami in scoring, as he assumes Sheldon McClellan’s spot as the starting two-guard. Last year’s third-leading scorer (11.1) is clearly the Hurricanes’ leader in the locker room, by virtue of his experience — he is the only player on the team entering his fourth year at UM — and his maturity. But can he take over games in crunch time? Will he get those big buckets, as did McClellan and Angel Rodriguez?

Is Ja’Quan Newton ready to run the show? He was a complimentary scorer and backup point last year, and performed admirably in that role — until a three-game suspension sidetracked his season. Newton (10.5 points, 2.5 assists) was in the running for the ACC’s sixth man of the year award until he fell off, thanks in part to a knee injury Feb. 20 and a team-issued suspension a week later. In his final nine games, he averaged 6.7 points on 17-of-50 shooting. Newton can score and handle the ball, but Larrañaga said his adjustment to

the role of full-time point has been “more challenging than I anticipated.” Reed, Lawrence, highly touted freshman guard Bruce Brown, and Vasiljevic can put the ball on the floor (Brown is currently the backup point). Miami was seventh in the ACC in turnovers, and it could be worse this year as the Hurricanes find their post-Rodriguez, post-McClellan offensive identity.

How much will a lack of frontcourt bulk hurt? Freshman center Rodney Miller, by far the biggest player on the roster at 7-feet and 258 pounds, has to reshape his body before he’s ready for major minutes. If Miami had more than 10 scholarship players, he would be a redshirt candidate. The heaviest player after Miller is the 6-10 Izundu, who is trying to reach 230. Certain teams might be able to push around Miami in the paint and on the glass. Who could be the toughest matchups? Duke has a ridiculous collection of size and athleticism, Virginia will protect the rim and rebound, North Carolina State is always big, and Louisville, with several NBA prospects in its frontcourt, might become the best defensive team in the country.

Will they struggle on the boards? Reed (6-6, 220) and Brown (6-5, 190) have the strength, size and athleticism to be very good rebounding guards, and Lawrence (a strong 6-7, 210) can get his at the 3 or 4. Five-star freshman Dewan Huell (6-11, 220) is long and springy, but he’s new to this; the savvy, stronger ACC big men might push him around. It can’t be all Murphy (6-8, 220), who grabbed 6.0 boards per game last year, and Izundu, who averaged 5.3 minutes per game last year as a freshman. Miami was 115th in rebound margin with the now-graduated Tonye Jekiri (8.6) handling a lot of the load.

Can Kamari Murphy raise his game? As in, can he be more than a defense-and-dunks guy? Does he have an offensive game beyond the paint? Murphy fires up the crowd with his loud finishes, but if he can make short-range jumpers consistently, that would take some of the pressure off Lawrence, who will be relied on to score, and Miami’s backcourt. Murphy isn’t likely to start knocking down 16-footers, but a few 12-to-14-footers here and there would help. He should improve on last year’s season highs in points (11), makes (5) and attempts (9).

How much will they get out of Ebuka Izundu? He’s not Jekiri, in the sense that he’s not a 7-foot, 250-pound man who can muscle opponents and grab every rebound he sees. He runs the floor better, has more range and more hops. That might help him be a better shot-blocker than Jekiri, but he must rebound more and develop the confidence in his offensive game, which features a consistent lefty jump-hook. That took Jekiri a while to figure out, too. Izundu and Lawrence must become reliable contributors for Miami to compete in the ACC.

Who among the second unit will play the most? The bet here is Brown, who admits he has to learn how to defend better but brings a hard-edged, physical

style and has great athleticism (40-inch vertical leap, 300-pound bench press). He also has plenty of confidence, as a 19-year-old freshman who played in the elite prep ball in New England. Huell should steadily come on as he learns how to use his body against college players. Like Brown, he will produce highlight-reel plays, but his coaches will hope for consistency. Vasiljevic (6-3, 195) and Muhammad (6-6, 185) will play as much as their defense allows. Both can score, though Muhammad is a gunner and Vasiljevic can make plays. Miller has more skill than UM’s other big men, but his conditioning and strength will limit him.

How will they use their last scholarship? After signing two top-100 players — point guard Chris Lykes and four-man Deng Gak, UM has one scholarship to give for 2017. The top target is five-star wing Lonnie Walker, ranked No. 4 among shooting guards and No. 19 overall by ESPN. Arizona, Kentucky, Syracuse and Villanova are also on his list. If Walker doesn’t pan out, UM will take the best available player, or explore the transfer market. But they’re confident. “Last year it was kind of an upset that we got Dewan Huell and Bruce Brown,” Larrañaga said. “Right now, we have momentum. ... We feel we can recruit the McDonald’s All-America-type player, the one-and-done-type player.”

How full will the building be? Miami sold out season tickets for the second year in a row, a testament to how far Larrañaga has taken a once-dormant program which counted precious few highlights until he arrived six years ago. His list of accomplishments is long. He has the best winning percentage (.674, 118-57) of any UM coach since the program’s infancy in the early 1930s. He has two of Miami’s three Sweet 16 appearances and its only ACC title. He has won his share against ACC powers Duke (4-2) and North Carolina (4-4), recruited the program’s first top-10 class, and twice won the ACC’s coach of the year award. But filling the building remains a nightly challenge, with a small student body and a home schedule that really doesn’t start cooking until the ACC teams come to town. His young team needs to learn how to play with passion, even if the barn isn’t jumping. If they can find their game during the non-conference slate, they could be a tough customer in ACC play. That might convince most of the people who snapped up those season tickets to use them.

Freshmen will be key as UM rebuilds after Sweet 16 run

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 10, 2016

University of Miami coach Jim Larrañaga admittedly isn't much of a chef. When his wife goes out of town, he orders prepared food to be delivered to their house. But after 30 years coaching college basketball, he does know a half-baked team when he sees one.

He warns that the 2016-17 Hurricanes could use more seasoning before playing their home opener Friday night against Western Carolina. Miami is rebuilding after losing three key players – Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri – from last season's Sweet 16 team.

“Right now we're a little raw; we need to cook a little bit more,” Larrañaga said. “We don't have smoothness in anything we do, offensively or defensively. I'd like to think our veterans are much smoother, but because of the transition of Ja'Quan Newton from combo guard to full time point guard, that's really challenging for him, a little more challenging than I anticipated.”

The coach is “very, very pleased” with the play of seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy, and sophomore Anthony “Amp” Lawrence; but says the younger players still have much work to do. The roster includes four freshmen. The Canes were picked to finish ninth in the ACC.

“The five guys coming in off the bench all show glimpses of being able to contribute at a high level, but they're just glimpses,” Larrañaga said. “They're not consistent.”

Sophomore center Ebuka Izundu is being asked to play a much bigger role, as the other options in the post are

7-0 freshman Rodney Miller and 6-11 freshman Dewan Huell, who is more of a forward. Miller and Huell have been working hard in the weight room. Miller is trying to get more fit, and Huell is trying to bulk up. He weighs 228 lbs. and wants to reach 240.

Huell is a much-hyped recruit from Miami Norland High, and eager to prove himself. He has been loading up on shakes and pasta. The shrimp pasta alfredo at the Big Cheese is one of his go-to dishes, and he also likes Greenstreet Café in Coconut Grove.

“I've been eating five, six, seven meals a day, lots of shakes,” said Huell. “There were a lot of short guys in high school. But in college, everyone is big and strong.”

Huell is also maturing off the court. He was arrested Sept. 14 on the FIU campus after scuffling with a man he found in his ex-girlfriend's dorm room. Larrañaga decided not to suspend him, but has been meeting with him regularly and advising him on how to conduct himself.

“Coach L is real cool, like the granddad you want to have,” Huell said. “He's teaching me about becoming a man off the court, making the right decisions. After my incident, I thought I would get suspended or kicked off the team, but Coach L just met with me, made me tell him the truth, and he explained that I'm held to higher standings and have to behave a certain way.”

Meanwhile, charismatic Australian guard Dejan “DJ” Vasiljevic has blended in well, and fielded teammates' questions about kangaroos and sharks they see on the National Geographic channel.

“Absolutely great kid, can really, really shot,” Larrañaga said. “I told him he reminds me of me. Really good offensive player, doesn't play much D. He really tries, but now he's guarding a very different kind of player, very quick, jumps very high, very skilled. He hasn't faced that kind of athlete on a regular basis.”

Bruce Brown, a 6-5 guard from Boston, is “the most physically ready” of the freshmen to make an immediate impact, Larrañaga said. He will be counted on to play multiple positions. “He weighs 200, benches 300, has some very good ball skills. He has a chance to be very, very good right away, but there are parts of his game that need attention, too. We have a lot of wrinkles to iron out.”

Hurricanes 2016-17 Basketball Team Preview and Prediction

Athlon Sports

Nov. 9, 2016

Davon Reed leads new cast of characters in Coral Gables

Not that Jim Larrañaga isn't smart enough to figure all this out, but he enters the 2016-17 season facing questions he's never had before.

The Hurricanes coach, coming off his second Sweet 16 appearance in four seasons, has a brand new roster once again. Unlike his rebuild of 2013's ACC championship and Sweet 16 squad, he also has talent — namely, the first top-10 recruiting class in program history.

He may not know what to do with it until December.

"I think there's a lot of question marks right now," Larrañaga said as the Hurricanes began summer workouts with six players who were brand new to the program. "I don't think there's any way to know who's in our starting lineup [right now]."

Last year, the roles seemed well defined. He had a bulldog point guard (Angel Rodriguez), a go-to scorer (Sheldon McClellan) and an athletic 7-footer (Tonye Jekiri) holding down the middle. He had valuable complementary players in 3-man Davon Reed and 4-man Kamari Murphy.

Now he's counting on his sixth man, junior combo guard Ja'Quan Newton, to take over the point. He needs Reed and Murphy to provide senior leadership. He'll need a host of untested players to grow up in a hurry. The faster they do, the faster Miami will compete for another league title.

At a Glance

HEAD COACH: Jim Larrañaga

2015-16 RECORD (ACC): 27-8 (13-5)

2015-16 POSTSEASON: NCAA: Lost to Villanova 92-69 in the Sweet 16

2016-17 PREDICTION: Eighth in ACC

KEY LOSSES:

F Ivan Cruz Uceda (5.4 ppg, 2.6 rpg)

C Tonye Jekiri (7.5 ppg, 8.6 rpg, 1.0 bpg)

G Sheldon McClellan (16.3 ppg, 3.2 rpg)

G James Palmer (3.4 ppg, 1.1 rpg)

G Angel Rodriguez (12.6 ppg, 4.5 apg)

Frontcourt

No one on the roster has the build or defensive presence of Jekiri, the 7'0", 250-pounder who made the ACC's All-Defensive Team twice. In fact, the largest regular is sophomore Ebuka Izundu, who stands 6'10" and 210 pounds. Izundu, who like Jekiri came from Nigeria to play high school ball in the U.S., has greater hops and much more offensive game than his predecessor at the 5. "I'll be very disappointed if he doesn't play at a high level," Larrañaga says. However, Izundu needs to prove he won't be pushed around by ACC big men — after playing last season at around 210 pounds — and defend without fouling.

The most veteran frontcourt player is Murphy, who proved to be an active defender and rebounder (6.0 rpg) in his Miami debut last year. The Brooklyn native, formerly of Oklahoma State, is the type of get-in-your-face leader Reed and Newton aren't.

Miami won't be able to keep top-25 recruit Dewan Huell on the bench for long, and the Canes may team the five-star freshman with Murphy to create a pair of springy big men. Freshman center Rodney Miller has bulk and comes from heralded Virginia prep program Oak Hill, but he may be too raw to play in the heat of the ACC schedule. VCU transfer Michael Gilmore, a stretch-4, will sit out a year.

Backcourt

Newton is an aggressive layup-maker, but he needs to improve his outside shooting (34.6 percent from 3) and, most important, his assist-to-turnover ratio (2.5-to-2.1). He'll play major minutes, as will the versatile Reed, who averaged 11.1 points per game last season. If Newton falters at the point, 6'7" swingman Anthony Lawrence Jr. might get a crack at handling the ball instead of

playing one of the forward spots. He had a 2-to-1 assist-to-turnover ratio in limited minutes last year, and like Reed he can guard 1-through-4.

Though he's new, the Hurricanes believe five-star freshman Bruce Brown could be an impact player in Year 1. "He's a tremendous competitor," Larrañaga says.

Rashad Muhammad, the brother of NBA swingman Shabazz, is eligible after transferring from San Jose State. He's an excellent deep shooter but with his thin frame won't be banging around much. Australian freshman Dejan Vasiljevic, a veteran of his country's international tournaments, will compete for time as Newton's backup.

Newcomers

This may be the most talented recruiting class in program history. Five-star prospects Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell will play major minutes at guard and forward, respectively. Australian Dejan Vasiljevic is a heady point guard who will come off the bench. Four-star center Rodney Miller could redshirt as he adjusts to the pace of ACC play. There's also Rashad Muhammad, who sat out after transferring from San Jose State. He'll battle Brown for the starting 2-guard spot.

Final Analysis

Larrañaga has recruited well enough that it's hard to see the Hurricanes sliding to the bottom third of the league any time soon, but this roster is so green and undefined that it seems tough to put the Canes among the league's legitimate title contenders. The best-case scenario: The talented freshmen find their sea legs quickly, suddenly making Miami one of the deeper, more balanced teams in the league.

If Newton becomes an All-ACC-caliber distributor and scorer, and the Hurricanes can find a way to defend against bigger opponents, they will be a tough out in March. If Larrañaga still doesn't know whom he can count on by January, they will be out of the NCAA Tournament.

Vasiljevic won't let Miami lifestyle distract him

FOX Sports Australia
Olgun Uluc
Nov. 8, 2016

FOR the most part, Dejan Vasiljevic has avoided the distractions that the city of Miami has to offer.

That doesn't mean he hasn't been able to appreciate 'The Magic City', or the diverse and colourful culture it encompasses; but, what it does mean, is that he understands what he's there to do.

"They call it the party city, but I'm here to play college basketball," Vasiljevic told foxsports.com.au.

The 19-year-old will call the University of Miami home for the foreseeable future, adding a talented perimeter threat to a program looking to return to the NCAA Tournament.

Every now and again, Vasiljevic's teammates will take him to South Beach or Coral Gables, and the Melbourne-native is hoping to become accustomed enough so he can take freshmen to the Miami hot-spots when he becomes the team's 'veteran' in a few years.

"In the summertime, over the weekends, I got to go down, a few of my teammates took me down to see the beach a little bit, and just hang out," Vasiljevic said. "But, during the season, it's real busy. I've only been to South Beach four or five times."

There's a reason why Vasiljevic wants to focus almost exclusively on basketball: the intense learning curve for a guard coming out of Australia.

When the 6'3 guard first began practising with his team, he was confronted with the increased 'quickness and toughness' of the group.

"It's the little things you can and can't do," Vasiljevic said.

"Me being able to get stronger and quicker, because you're playing against more athletic, bigger bodies — especially in the ACC conference — was important."

That's when Vasiljevic started working on his body.

From the 5:45am wake-up, leading to the 6:30am lifting session, squeezing in classes later in the morning, before four hours of film and practice in the afternoon, Vasiljevic is as committed as ever; and it's paying off.

Setting foot on campus at around 212 lbs (96kg), he's managed to cut down to 198 lbs (89.9kg) — thanks to Director of Olympic Sports Performance, Steve Felde — in a bid to prepare himself for the tough, quick guards in the ACC.

"This is probably the best shape I've been in for a while," Vasiljevic said.

"I'm just trying to do that so I can play a whole game if I need to. I mean, I'm just trying to play my role.

"Trimming down my body just made me quicker. Being able to guard those little, quick point guards like Ja'quan Newton, he's real quick and good off the ball, so just keeping him in front of me.

"I'm also getting stronger, to go against the bigger guys, like the senior, Davon Reed, or Anthony Lawrence, and even playing against a guy like Kamari Murphy in the post. I just want to be able to guard multiple positions."

Vasiljevic's off the court transformation has, naturally, yielded results on the court.

Already known as a potent scorer, the guard has improved his ability to beat his man off the dribble, playing defence against quicker guards, and, surprisingly, his already-elite shooting has seen improvement.

"Shooting has gotten better," Vasiljevic said. "My shooting is at a new level. My shooting has just exploded over the last couple of

months. Just getting lots of shots up, trying to be the last one to leave practice every day."

Vasiljevic's shooting has been on display in multiple settings, but, most notably while he's worn the green and gold for several Australian junior teams.

Among the top players at the 2014 FIBA under-17 World Championship, Vasiljevic's resumé is longer than most 19-year-old athletes', so his teammates were quick to welcome him with open arms.

"I'm just enjoying the people I'm around, man," Vasiljevic said.

"My teammates made me feel welcome. Being from a different country, and being so far away from home, they welcomed me straight into their arms.

"They respect me as a player. We have a terrific bond on the court, but off the court is just unbelievable. We're always together, hanging out. My teammates definitely made this transition the best for me."

As for his new team's chances, Vasiljevic understands how difficult it is for a team with just two seniors to legitimately compete in the ACC, but he trusts his young team is up to the task.

Last season's Miami Hurricanes reached the Sweet Sixteen of the NCAA Tournament, and the hope is that the 2017 post-season provides even better fortunes for them.

"We're a really young team, and we're talented," Vasiljevic said.

"Coach Larrañaga always emphasises that, yes we're young and talented, but we always have to work hard. He believes we can have a really good run, this year."

Football-dominated colleges get creative to move the needle on hoops

Sports Business Journal
Michael Smith
Nov. 7, 2016

While Alabama and Clemson, a pair of college football bluebloods, chase a return to the championship game, their basketball brethren could spend the next two months toiling in relative obscurity, hoping anyone will notice that their season has started.

That's life at schools where football reigns supreme. College basketball's regular season starts this week, but the real basketball season for many fans doesn't start until January, after the bowl games and the College Football Playoff have crowned their champions.

The basketball calendar isn't going to change any time soon. In the NCAA's recent extension with broadcast partners Turner Sports and CBS through 2032, they quietly agreed that the season would continue to finish in late March or early April so that March Madness would remain a viable marketing platform.

All that talk about moving the season back — starting in January and finishing in May — won't happen for at least the next 16 years.

So, what's a savvy sports marketer at Alabama, Clemson or other football powers supposed to do? And if you're a school like Washington that's enjoying a football resurgence with eight straight wins to open the season, going into last weekend's games, is there a chance Husky Nation realizes that the basketball team opens this Sunday against Yale?

Actually, yes.

Washington, which is in the midst of a five-year NCAA tournament drought, managed to renew its season tickets at a 91 percent clip, and top-10 recruit Markelle Fultz has created a buzz around Lorenzo Romar's program for the first time in years.

Alabama is coming off a basketball season in which it set an attendance record by averaging more than 13,000 fans in Coleman Coliseum, thanks largely to the energy provided by coach Avery Johnson.

Clemson, meanwhile, opens its season in like-new Littlejohn Coliseum, which was renovated for \$63.5 million and features new courtside seats, a mid-level club and exotic curved video boards, making it one of the most progressive and modernized arenas in the ACC and across the country.

"It just says that we're serious about basketball," said Clemson's Davis Babb, chief executive of IPTAY, the fundraising arm of the university. "If you want a national program in basketball in an incredibly tough league, you've got to do some things to give yourself a chance to be successful. Now we've got to deliver."

Consensus says there are three surefire ways to inject life into a college basketball program at a football school.

First, fire the coach and hire a new guy. It's a guaranteed method to instill hope and energy into a moribund program, at least until the first game.

Second, build a new arena. After donors spend all that money on the new Taj MaHoop, they'll feel obligated to show up for most of the games in the first season.

Third, just win, baby. It's tougher than it sounds. Just think: How many schools are truly elite in both football and basketball? In a given year, Michigan State. Oklahoma. Florida. Maybe Louisville right now. They've all had their moments, but it's typically fleeting in one sport or the other. Most football powers are, at best, up and down in basketball.

Those three approaches hardly qualify as marketing strategies, though.

Miami is that unique case where the school is steeped in football tradition, but basketball has outperformed football for the last five years. While the Hurricanes aren't about to call themselves a basketball school, their fans have taken notice. The wins got them there and the in-game experience, which has been completely transformed over the last few seasons with new lighting, an emcee and basketball-specific promotions designed to keep the energy flowing during timeouts, keeps them coming back.

For two straight seasons now, Miami has sold out of its 5,800 season tickets in the 7,972-seat Watsco Center, which has surprisingly become one of the best homecourt advantages in the ACC.

Here's a look at some of the components of the engine that makes basketball go at a football school:

The coach

At the recent Tide Tip-Off event, Johnson grabbed the mic and told the crowd to repeat this date: "Nov. 11," he said, urging the crowd to respond.

Johnson, who's entering his second season as the Crimson Tide's basketball coach, kept saying the date of the season opener louder and louder until thousands in Coleman Coliseum were saying it too.

"Avery sells the program," said Brad Ledford, Alabama's associate athletic director for strategic marketing. "Our job is to get him in front of students, the university, the community, donors. He just does the rest."

At a recent media tour of facility upgrades, Johnson conducted the tour himself, joking along the way that he'd hand out Crimson Tide schedule cards with candy on Halloween. It's why AL.com refers to the former NBA coach as the chief marketing officer for Alabama basketball.

"He's tireless in getting his message out," Ledford said.

With Johnson's help, Alabama is again trending toward 8,000 season tickets, which has the Tide on pace with last season's record numbers.

The arena

Clemson's Littlejohn Coliseum has played host to some of the ACC's most legendary figures. Unfortunately,

they've mostly played for the other team. Being a football school in a basketball league makes for some long winters, but Littlejohn's renovation marks what the school hopes will be a revitalization of the program. The new interior has sparked significant interest among the fan base, even the football die-hards, and created corresponding revenue opportunities. All 36 of the courtside seats are sold. They required a \$250,000 donation payable over five years for the right to purchase two. And about 85 percent of the 400 club seats are sold. A \$25,000 pledge is required for two seats there.

What's interesting, Babb said, is that IPTAY was able to cultivate new basketball-specific donors through the fundraising process for Littlejohn. Babb put Aaron Dunham, an IPTAY fundraiser, in charge of basketball gifts. Dunham tag-teamed with Clemson coach Brad Brownell to find fans who have more of an affection for basketball.

"Some were parents of students at Clemson that are just big basketball fans," Babb said. "We also discovered some old

friends of Brad's from when he coached at UNC-Wilmington. Even in a football environment, Aaron's personal passion was to fight for basketball."

The marketing

Students are such an integral part of the atmosphere at basketball games that schools are doing more grassroots marketing aimed at them, in addition to the rewards programs, social media and email outreach that's fairly common now.

As Texas A&M thought about ways to market its improving basketball team, all the Aggies had to do was check out some of the on-campus activation from its corporate sponsors. It's fairly common for businesses to hire student ambassadors and street teams to work campus. Who better to talk to students than students, right?

Jason Cook, A&M's senior associate AD for external affairs, huddled with his marketing team and wondered aloud why the school couldn't do the same thing. So they created an A&M basketball street team that literally carries a basketball and goal around campus to high-traffic areas and invites fellow students to shooting contests. All the while, they show banners and hand out flyers with information about the upcoming game.

"We took a page out of what the big brands are doing," Cook said.

Washington is trying something new this week. Instead of staging the typical midnight madness or sparsely attended tipoff event, the Huskies are combining a fan event with the opener against Yale this Sunday, giving fans a chance to interact with players and meet the coaches, much of what they'd normally do at a fan event while hopefully drawing a full house for the game.

"A lot of people don't pay attention to basketball until the conference season," said Roy Shick, Washington's senior associate AD for external affairs. "So we've got to make the most of the opportunities we have to engage the fan base."

Often, outreach to students and fans at the grassroots level comes from the coaches and athletes.

Oklahoma State is one program besieged by shrinking attendance. The Cowboys averaged 5,857 fans at 13,611-seat Gallagher-Iba Arena last season because of the team's poor play, which led to coach Travis Ford's firing.

But Erika Vickers, OSU's director of ticket sales, expects to bounce back this season and credits the players for being visible and even going to visit fraternities and sororities to get students back on board. New coach Brad Underwood, who came from Stephen F. Austin, has helped deliver a surge of energy as well, and season-ticket sales already have surpassed 4,500 for this season, well above the 4,000 season tickets sold all of last season.

Developing those relationships on campus, whether through personal visits or tactics that are more common now — digital marketing, personalized email or social media content — might give fans a reason to head over to the basketball arena in the middle of football season.

"We're very mindful of what's going on with football, so we look across the calendar for those windows, like an open date, to aggressively talk about basketball," A&M's Cook said. "We just look for the ebbs and flows of the year when the basketball message can be louder. We don't want to compete with the big sport on campus, but you can find opportunities to engage."

Erik Swoope: From project to player

Indianapolis Star

Zak Keefer

Nov. 5, 2016

At first all he could do was laugh. Football? Come on. Get serious. Erik Swoope hadn't played a down in his life. Not Pop Warner. Not flag football. Not junior high football. Not high school football. Certainly not college football. He'd never even slipped on a helmet.

He hadn't sat down to watch a game in 11 years. The few he took in at the University of Miami, casually checking out the Hurricanes, he'd spend most of the afternoon trying to figure out where exactly the ball was.

But suddenly there was this question, this opportunity, this unknown. The Miami basketball team was on its way home from the ACC tournament. It was March 2014. Swoope was set to graduate a month later, head overseas and play pro ball as long as he could. Then came that question, the detour he never saw coming. Adam Fisher, Miami's director of basketball operations, told him the Denver Broncos had reached out. They wanted to know whether he had ever considered playing pro football.

Swoope laughed in his face.

Then he mulled it over for a week. He found himself in the weight room seven days later, coasting through a basketball workout, his heart never really in it, his mind somewhere else. Then he asked himself a question.

What if I have something better out there waiting for me?

Swoope met with his basketball coach the next day. "Let's give it a shot," he told Jim Larrañaga.

Then it started. Then Swoope was running through a makeshift pro day at Miami, catching passes for the first time ever, declaring he was a basketball player who wanted to become a football player. "He didn't even know how to get into a stance," recalls the quarterback who threw to him that day, Stephen Morris. But Swoope was fast. Smooth. A natural. He didn't drop a pass the entire workout.

Nineteen NFL teams called Fisher after the workout.

Then Swoope was doing this, really doing this, texting Jimmy Graham for advice. "I don't know if you remember me..." he nervously typed, "but I'm thinking about giving football a shot ... I'd love your two cents." He reached out to Graham because Graham had done it. He'd gone from power forward at Miami to tight end at Miami to Pro Bowler for the New Orleans Saints.

"If you really want to do this," Graham shot back, "I work out at 8 a.m. every day. See you tomorrow."

So versatile in college, Swoope played as many as four.

So versatile in college, Swoope played as many as four positions for the Miami Hurricanes.

Swoope was there at 7. Trying to hold his own next to Graham and Saints linebacker Jonathan Vilma. "Trying not to pass out," he remembers with a laugh. Then he was playing Madden, schooling himself on defensive schemes, his version of "Football for Dummies." Then he was in Anderson, Ind., slipping on shoulder pads and a football helmet for the first time in his life, a rookie tight end with the Indianapolis Colts, a deer in headlights, a lump of clay, a project, a hope.

Two years passed. The project became a player.

What if I have something better out there waiting for me?

Last Sunday, Erik Swoope heard his name announced as an NFL starter. He sprinted out of the tunnel and onto the field at Lucas Oil Stadium in front of 65,417 fans and asked himself a different question.

How the hell did I get here?

His football career sprouts from days of dunks and rebounds, untapped potential pouring through the thicket that is ACC basketball. In 2014, T.J. McCreight, the Colts' director of college scouting, was scouring the country for a basketball player he envisioned could transform his body and, eventually, play on Sundays. The next Jimmy Graham.

A Miami wing named Erik Swoope caught his eye. This kid did it all: He played four positions on offense. He dunked. Defended. Covered the court with ease.

"Wanna see how athletic he was?" says Colts tight end Dwayne Allen. "YouTube him. I have."

"We had him guarding four different positions on defense," recalls Larrañaga. "I coached him for three seasons. I don't think he ever had a bad day of practice."

In those dunks and rebounds, McCreight saw leaping catches, a mismatch waiting to happen. It would take time. It would take patience. He emailed his boss some highlights. Right away, Ryan Grigson liked what he saw.

Yet what made Swoope among Grigson's most ambitious projects as the Colts' general manager wasn't that he was a basketball player in college — it's that he'd never played football in his life. Most hoops-to-football converts who survive and flourish the NFL — Graham, Antonio Gates, Tony Gonzalez, even Colts right tackle Joe Reitz, who played only college basketball at Western Michigan — have some semblance of background in the game. High school. Pop Warner. Flag. Something. Anything.

Swoope was a blank canvas. "Raw," Allen remembers. "Just all over the place early on."

By his own admission, Swoope had no idea what was goingBuy Photo By his own admission, Swoope had no idea what was going on when he first suited up for the Colts in 2014. (Photo: Matt Kryger / The Star)

He wasn't even much of a football fan growing up. A Southern California boy, the last football game Swoope remembers watching before college was Super Bowl XXXVII, a game that took place in 2003. The Bucs trounced his Raiders by 27 points. He was so immersed in basketball at Miami, he rarely watched the Hurricanes, and when he did, he didn't have much of a clue what actually was going on.

By his senior year his reality was staring him in the face: The NBA wasn't happening. He stood 6-5, "a tweener, as the scouts like to call them," Swoope admits. But he wasn't done with basketball. He'd keep playing overseas. He'd travel the world.

"He was pretty set on that," Larrañaga remembers.

"I was so motivated to get dual citizenship and have an awesome life and be a professional athlete," Swoope says. "I still get to do what I want to do, just not in the place I want to. I've wanted to be a pro athlete since I was 4 or 5 years old."

He never made it to Spain, or France, or Germany, or anywhere overseas. It was a week after the basketball season ended, and a week after Fisher told him about the Broncos' interest, when Swoope found himself going through the motions of a basketball workout. His heart wasn't in it. His mind raced. What if I could do it? He met with Larrañaga and told him he wanted to try.

If it works out, it works out. If it doesn't, it doesn't. Let's give it a shot.

Teams called, testing Swoope's conviction. "Is this true?" they'd probe. "Are you actually trying to play football?" Swoope was honest. "I've been hungry for something in basketball I haven't been able to find," he told them. "I think this is the direction that's going to help me find it."

Graham drilled him, too. "Why are you doing this?" he asked him. "Is it the money? Because it's not going to be easy."

Swoope proved his sincerity with those early-morning workouts, holding his own next to Graham and Vilma and other pros in the University of Miami weight room. Graham took Swoope under his wing. The Pro Bowler tutored The Project.

Grigson remained intrigued. The Colts worked out Swoope that spring. Draft day came and went. They signed him three days later.

The Project had his shot.

In a larger role this season, Erik Swoope has made In a larger role this season, Erik Swoope has made six

catches for 123 yards. Not bad for a kid who never played organized football before he got to the NFL. (Photo: Mykal_McEldowney/Indy_Star)

"Shake it off," Andrew Luck told him. "Coming right back your way."

Swoope nodded. He'd just dropped a too-easy catch in the first quarter of the Colts' Week 7 game in Tennessee. Allen, the team's starting tight end, was down with an ankle. Jack Doyle had moved up on the depth chart. So had Swoope. Shake it off. Next play.

Four plays later, Swoope lumbered down the left seam. Luck fired his way. No. 86 fell backward, toward the sideline, and hauled in the pass. Gain of 17. He exhaled. His two-year crash course in football was starting to see some results.

He'd spent those two years digesting every facet of the game. He lived in his playbook. Played Madden to learn defenses. Watched NFL Network. Had the Colts' video team send him cut-ups of every target Jimmy Graham saw all season. Then Antonio Gates. Then Jason Witten. Then Greg Olsen.

He packed on pounds, stayed late and asked questions after practice and kept his notebook with him everywhere in the building.

"It was start from square one of whether it's stance or talking about a stance, or this is what we call the guys on defense," says Colts offensive coordinator Rob Chudzinski, who as an assistant head coach in 2014 spent time working with Swoope one-on-one. "It was like going all the way back to square one like I would probably do with my 10-year-old son."

Swoope listened. Watched. Screwed up. Improved. Studied cadences, stances, positions, audibles, coverages, blitzes, protections. He forgot about basketball. He moved on. Slowly, and steadily, he became a football player.

"It was like learning a new language and trying to speak it immediately," he says, shaking his head.

How many NFL players learn the game of football after they enter the league? Count Erik Swoope among them.

Progress came in baby steps. "I had no idea what was going on at first, no clue," he says. Relegated to the practice squad for most of his first two seasons, Swoope began to grasp game plans by the end of his rookie year. Last season, he played in the regular season finale. This summer, for the first time in his life, he looked and felt like a football player.

He entered a critical training camp mindful of the investment the Colts had made in him, and the patience the team had displayed. Time was running out. Swoope had to produce. Period.

"To be here, you gotta show something," he says. "You can't just be ... potential. I understand that. This was the first year where I was bigger than everyone else. I can tell. I'm intimidating people at the grocery store. It never used to be like that."

Allen went down Week 6 against the Texans. Swoope stepped in. Since then he's caught six passes for 123 yards, a healthy average of 20.5 yards per catch. The transition is complete. The Project is now a football player.

"You hear stories of defensive guys getting asked, 'Why do you play defense?' " Allen explains. "They'll say, 'Because I don't like getting hit. It's similar to guys transitioning to the sport of football. Either you're going to learn how to suck it up and put your face on someone, or you're not. Guys that do turn into Erik Swoope.'"

His success validates not just McCreight's vision or Grigson's faith, but Swoope's deep-rooted ambition. One does not survive the rigors of the NFL, and certainly not without any sort of football acumen to lean on, without a heavy dose of resolve. His has been tested, time and again, over the course of the past two years.

There was something better out there, waiting for him, staring him in the face as one chapter in his life closed. Football? No. Come on. Get serious.

Erik Swoope isn't laughing anymore.

"I'm gonna do this until someone tells me, 'Thank you for your services,'" he says, looking back on the past three years. "Because you know what? I'm still here."

Hurricanes basketball sells out season tickets for second year in a row

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 4, 2016

Jim Larrañaga used to do a lot more of what Mark Richt is doing now.

While Larrañaga still occasionally reminds fans to show up and support his team — and not every home game is packed — he can say something no other Miami coach can.

For the second year in a row, the Hurricanes' men's basketball team sold out season tickets.

Last year, Larrañaga's group became the first UM sports team to achieve that feat.

The Hurricanes play in the 7,972-seat Watsco Center, formerly known as the BankUnited Center. UM said Wednesday it sold a program-record 5,750 season tickets. Last year, it sold 5,500 season tickets.

That's about double the number of season tickets UM sold in 2011-12, Larrañaga's first season in Coral Gables. UM's ticket base rose from 2,251 his first year to 3,674 in 2013-14, after the Hurricanes won the ACC and reached the Sweet 16. UM sold out the building for the first time last year, and rewarded fans with another Sweet 16 run.

Ten of UM's 11 sellouts at its current home have come under Larrañaga. According to UM, it averaged 7,146 fans last year, or about 90 percent capacity. That's second only to the 2012-13, when they drew 7,294 per game.

Miami ranked 37th among Division I teams in average percentage of capacity last year, according to NCAA data beginning in 2009-10. That is the highest

ranking in program history. UM was 106th in 2014-15, 71st in 2013-14 and 54th in the Sweet 16 year of 2012-13.

It should be noted that the attendance figures in UM's media guide are slightly different than the NCAA's records. That discrepancy aside, UM basketball is without a doubt enjoying its best stretch ever.

Larrañaga — who this week was tapped into the Iron Arrow Society, UM's highest honor — returns five players from last year's team and signed the highest-ranked recruiting class in program history, including top-30 players Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell.

UM opens the season at 7 p.m. next Friday against Western Carolina.

Larrañaga Tapped into Iron Arrow

HurricaneSports.com

University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga was tapped into the Iron Arrow Honor Society Wednesday following the shootaround prior to the evening's exhibition game.

Larrañaga's wife, Liz, watched as women's head coach Katie Meier and Golden Cane Sandy Nusbaum tapped Larrañaga with the highest honor one can attain at UM. Deputy AD Tony Hernandez presented Coach L with his Iron Arrow jacket.

In his five seasons at The U, Coach L has led the Hurricanes to a pair of NCAA Sweet 16 appearances and won the 2013 ACC regular season and ACC Tournament titles. He has been named the AP, Naismith, USBWA and Henry Iba National Coach of the Year, twice was both the ACC and USBWA District Coach of the Year and was the 2013 NABC District Coach of the Year.

Iron Arrow was founded in 1926 with the University's opening. It recognizes individuals of the University of Miami who passionately exemplify five qualities based on the Seminole Indian tradition: love of alma mater, character, leadership, scholarship and humility.

As a member of the society, Larrañaga will take part in exclusive Iron Arrow events and be recognized at different Miami home games throughout the year. He now has the ability to secretly nominate a person who he believes exemplifies the qualities of the Iron Arrow Honor Society.

It's CanesHoops Season! A Quick Update Before Tip-Off

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Nov. 2, 2016

With the season officially tipping off on November 11th, here is an update heading into tonight's 7pm exhibition game vs. Barry University at the newly named Watsco Center (formerly know as the BankUnited Center or BUC).

Prior to today's exhibition, the Canes took part in what become part of college basketball pre-season regiment, a "secret" scrimmage vs. UCF. This is where teams get together to play each other in private, without publicity. NCAA rules allow teams to hold secret scrimmages against others schools, so long as they don't promote the game or allow the media or outsiders to watch. Coaches are however allowed to mention them after the fact.

We had a chance to speak to CanesHoops assistant coach, Adam Fisher, for his takeaways on how the team is doing. While there has been plenty of discussion on rookies Bruce Brown, Dejan Vasiljevic and Miami Norland HS product, Dewan Huell, we also asked him to give us an update on some of the less known players on the team, Ebuka Izundu and Rodney Miller.

SOTU: Coach, please give us a sense of where are we at this point.

We've got some great leaders, everyone did an incredible job getting themselves ready, all the training we did in the weight room, the work guys did on their own this year was great and that's going to start to show. This is a team that really prides itself on doing the required and the unrequired. Everyone is held accountable, the older guys getting on the younger guys telling them what it

takes to be a Miami Hurricane basketball player and play in the ACC. Kamari (Murphy), Davon (Reed) and Ja'Quan (Newton) have been there to lead us.

SOTU: Beyond the leaders on the team, how are Rodney Miller and Ebuka Izundu progressing?

Ebuka (Izundu), he's been great, progressing, we're excited to see him (play), he's added weight and strength. He knows after battling Tonye everyday, how strong he needs to be so he really put a big emphasis on the weight room and you really have to give (S&C coach) Steve Felde credit for getting the whole team strong. Ebuka's going to be an inside guy, we want him to rebound and defend, we want him to be in Tonye's (former) role though we'd like him to score a little more and we're working on that with him, he's got a great left handed jump hook.

Rodney (Miller) has been great, he's a big body who's played at the highest level in high school at Oak Hill and he comes here and all he wants to do is get better which is what is really great about him. Everyday he'll ask someone "hey am I doing this correctly?" We just want him to get better and he's been great in practice, battling the other bigs. He's just gotta keep doing more in the weight room, keep making progress.

SOTU: Given the new personnel, are we implementing different offenses/defenses? How are we looking stylistically vs. past teams?

I think it will be very similar to what you've seen in the past. On defense, man-to-man is our go to but we may mix in some other things. Coach L has been doing this a long time and he sticks to his core. The way we recruit is that we try to find guys that fit his system but he's the best at making changes and adapting to

what the team needs. I think you're going to see some more athletes this year. I think you're going to see a difference (in the frontcourt) with a guy like Dewan Huell who has the best "quick twitch" I've ever seen, the way he can jump twice to get a rebound. Overall I think you're going to see a very similar style of play (on offense) where hopefully we'll get a lot of quick layups out of transition, some wide open threes. We'll be back with more insights on as we get closer to the season opener.

Larrañaga at ACC Operation Basketball

FanSided

Alan Rubenstein

Nov. 1, 2016

The Miami Hurricanes participated in the ACC's annual Operation Basketball Season Tip-Off conference last week in Charlotte, NC. Miami Head Coach Jim Larrañaga and Senior Leaders Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy met with the media and discussed the 2016-17 season.

Larrañaga opened his session first discussing the 2015-16 season. He talked about last year's Senior leaders, Guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan and Center Tonye Jekiri.

He also discussed the 'Canes run in the ACC and being tied for first with North Carolina going into the last game of the regular season. Miami lost the final game of the regular season at Virginia Tech before settling for a second-place tie with Virginia.

Larrañaga touched on the different make-up of this year's team versus the Senior led team of 2015-16. He said:

"Now we have an uphill battle because we have a very young team. We only have 10 scholarship players on the roster that are available to us. We only have five players returning. But they're five very good players."

The 2016-17 team should be led by Reed, Murphy and Junior Point Guard Ja'Quan Newton. Of that trio Larrañaga said:

"Ja'Quan Newton, our point guard, Davon Reed, our shooting guard, and Kamari Murphy, one of our forwards. I think those guys have plenty of experience and know-how."

He then discussed his other two returning players Anthony Lawrence Jr. and Ebuka Izundu. He likes their diversity and pointed out that each of the five returnees plays a different position. Newton the point, Reed at off-guard, Lawrence at Small Forward, Murphy at Power Forward and Izundu at Center.

Miami's bench will offer versatility. The four incoming Freshmen and Rashad Muhammad a transfer from San Jose State will give the Hurricanes quality backups at all five positions. The challenge for this season as stated by Larrañaga is to blend the returnees with the "young kids".

The Hurricanes need to get stronger on the front line. Freshman Center Rodney Miller is the only player on the Hurricanes roster over 250 pounds. Larrañaga discussed the need for his freshmen to get stronger.

"Our front court in particular is very weak physically. Kamari Murphy and Anthony Lawrence are strong, but Rodney Miller and Dewan Huell are just beginning to lift weights and become stronger, and it's going to take them a while to adjust to the physicality of college basketball, especially at the ACC level"

Larrañaga has proven that the U is not just a football school. In his five seasons in South Florida, the Basketball program has had far more success than the football program. Larrañaga has a 175-118 record at Miami for a .674 winning percentage.

Larrañaga and Al Golden were both hired for the 2011-12 school years. Golden was 32-25 in his four and half seasons for a .561 winning percentage. His replacement for the final six games of last season, Larry Scott was 4-2 and new Miami Head Football Coach Mark Richt is 4-4 in his

first season. Those three combined have a .563 winning percentage.

Asked about the challenge of selling basketball to the Miami Community Larrañaga said:

"Everybody told me you'll never draw a good crowd, and my staff and I and the players were bound and determined to draw consistently on a game-by-game basis a good crowd...We are totally sold out for every game last year, we're going to be sold out again this season."

The keys to the season according to Larrañaga are Sophomores Lawrence and Izundu. He is confident that if they can reach double figures "that will make us really tough". In limited playing time last season, Lawrence averaged 4.1 points per game and Izundu 2.3 PPG.

The Hurricanes open the season with an exhibition November 2nd against Division Two Barry University. Their first game against D1 competition is November 11 when they host Western Carolina.

The only challenge for the Hurricanes in non-conference will be playing in the Advocate Invitational Tournament in Orlando over Thanksgiving Weekend. The 'Canes open the tournament against Stanford on Thanksgiving night. They will face Iowa State or Indiana State in the next round. The other side of the bracket has Gonzaga Quinnipiac, Seton Hall, and Florida.

Reed and Murphy Meet the Press at Operation Basketball

FanSided

Alan Rubenstein

Nov. 1, 2016

The Miami Hurricanes sent Senior Captains Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy to the ACC's Operation Basketball to discuss the upcoming season.

Reed and Murphy are the Hurricanes leading returning players statistically and as the players, the rest of the team will look up to this season. Junior Point Guard Ja'Quan Newton joins Murphy and Reed as captains.

They will be the players counted on to replace Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri's production and leadership from last season's Sweet 16 team.

They discussed the transfers in College Basketball, the environment, and culture of this year's team, how they will replace the three departed Seniors, how they will improve, leadership and the type of music they like.

Environment and Culture of This Year's Team Reed spoke first and was asked about the impact that transfers have had on the Miami program. He mentioned the Murphy had a big impact on last year's team after transferring from Oklahoma State and that Rashad Muhammad should have an impact on this year's team, particularly on the offensive end of the court.

Reed next spoke about the environment of this year's team. He is happy with the direction and hard work the younger players have put to this point of the season.

"This team is a hard-working team. What I see right now is not a lack of effort, which is the best part. It's just a little bit of a lack of experience. But the guys will pick things up along the way and be ready to learn and work."

How they Will Overcome the Loss of Rodriguez, McClellan, and Jekiri

The moderator of Operation Basketball asked Reed about the loss of the three Seniors and how it compared to Reed's Freshman season when the Hurricanes lost Shane Larkin and (in the Moderators words) Julian Gamble. Durand Scott and Trey McKinney-Jones were

other key players that Miami lost after the 2012-13 season.

Reed Said:

So I think the biggest difference this year for my freshman year is we've got guys that returned and myself, and Kamari, and Ja'Quan that played a lot more minutes than maybe the guys returning my freshman year. We've also got a lot of talent that came in this year... despite not having the most experienced team, we've got a team full of guys that have experience, some don't have experience, some transfers. We've got a little bit of everything

What Did They Do in the Off-Season to Improve

I've taken pride in putting in work and adding more and more to my game every off-season. This off-season I just continue to shoot the ball and finding different ways to score on different spots on the floor, picking my spots better, finishing around the rim. Other things that don't require skill, like being a good leader to the guys and pushing them

Larrañaga has built a program instead of just a team. In his meeting with the media, Larrañaga spoke about the difference between building a program and just having a season where everything goes right. That has definitely rubbed off on his players. Reed said: "we're here to win the ACC"

Reed and Murphy's Leadership Styles:

Leading is a funny thing...You can't communicate to everybody the same way. Certain guys, you can't yell at, certain guys you can be a little tougher on...It's still a learning process. I'm still learning. I'm sure Kamari's still learning how to do so as well. But I think finding that line will be a big deal with our success this season, knowing when to be tough on guys and knowing when to be a little bit more reserved and let them find their ways. So we're both learning, Kamari and myself, still how to be leaders of this team.."

How Murphy Would Describe Reed:

"We like to call Davon the old soul of the team. He listens to all the classic, old school music. Even last year as one of the younger guys, he was the old head of the team that we call him. But now that he's a veteran on the

team, he's a great leader, leads by example. Great in the books, he's a great friend as well. He's just one of those guys you want to have in your corner."

Asked to elaborate on Reed's taste in music he classified "Old School Music" as Earth Wind and Fire and Mary J. Blige.

How did Murphy Feel About His 2015-16 Season?

Murphy is the most experienced post player Miami has. He is going to have to produce numbers similar to Jekiri what has last season if Miami is going to successful this season.

"I think I could have done more. I think my role...I had more personal goals that I wanted to accomplish that I really didn't get to...thankfully I have another year to do so...to take advantage of the opportunity in my last year in college basketball and try to accomplish those goals as well."

How Do Miami Scorers Compare to LaBryan Nash and Marcus Smart from Murphy's two seasons with Oklahoma State?

"Ja'Quan is definitely a great scorer. He's going to have a lot of opportunities to get in the lane and either finish or create shots. Davon Reed has shown since summer that he's going to be one of our main scorers, if not our best scorer. Bruce Brown is very aggressive on offense as well. You can see him attacking, dunking, and doing stuff like that as well."

It should be an interesting season for Miami, somewhat of a transition season. Larrañaga has done exactly what he discussed last week and that is to create a program. Despite what they lost from last season's team, they have an excellent mix of returning talent with an outstanding recruiting class.

Miami Hurricanes Hoops Picked 9th In ACC Poll

FanSided

Alan Rubenstein

Nov. 1, 2016

The Miami Hurricanes have been picked to finish ninth in the ACC 2016-17 Preseason poll announced Wednesday at the ACC's Operation Basketball in Charlotte.

Duke is the favorite in the ACC, followed by North Carolina, Virginia, and Louisville. The Hurricanes were picked to finish fifth, over 100 points behind Notre Dame in the 2015-16 pre-season poll. They finished tied for second with Virginia at 13-5 one game behind conference champion North Carolina.

The Tar Heels lost to Villanova at the Buzzer in the NCAA Tournament Championship game. Miami lost to the Wildcats 92-69 in the South Regional Semifinals at Louisville's KFC Yum Center.

The Hurricanes enter the 2016-17 season without their two leading scorers and leading rebounder. Shooting Guard Sheldon McClellan is playing for the Washington Wizards, Point Guard Angel Rodriguez plays for Cholet in France and Center Tonye Jekiri is playing in Turkey for Bandirma Kirmizi.

Point Guard Ja'Quan Newton, Forward Kamari Murphy, and Guard Davon Reed will be the three counted on to replace McClellan, A-Rod and Jekiri's leadership and production. Sophomore Anthony Lawrence Jr. should join Murphy on the front line.

Miami has a lot of depth entering the 2016-17 season. This could be Larrañaga's deepest team to date during his tenure in Coral Gables. There are numerous candidates to become the fifth starter.

The most likely is sophomore center Ebuka Izunda. The Sophomore would give the 'Canes a true five, but at 6'10 205 he needs to bulk up to man the middle. Freshman Bruce Brown could play shooting guard, sliding Reed to the three or Brown's classmate Dewan Huell could start at the four or the five.

Brown and Huell are the core of a recruiting class that is ranked 15th in the country by 247 Sports. They are the 22nd and 23rd ranked players in the class of 2016 and two of Miami's highest rated recruits ever on the hardwood.

The 6'11 220 Huell has spoken openly about this season being a one and done player and applying for the 2017 NBA Draft. A graduate of Norland High School, Huell is also one of the highest rated recruits ever out of Miami.

Asked by the Miami Herald in March about the possibility of being a one and done Huell responded: "That's the goal". Huell is not listed among top 60 draft prospects by Draft Express or NBADraftNet.

Huell's draft express scouting report says: "Huell doesn't have a ton to him as a player but he's well worth tracking given his size and athletic ability. Huell will have to get bigger and contribute more as a defensive rebounder and post defender, but his ceiling is high."

Per the Herald, Draft Express lists 10 freshman one-and-dones and NBADraftNet had 16 one and done. Asked by the Herald what he needs to work on, Huell said: "Work is on my mind — getting better, improving...I need to work on everything — just take it to the next level."

Miami gets commitment from four-star forward Deng Gak

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Oct. 29, 2016

Miami basketball coach Jim Larrañaga has said with his program coming off NCAA probation, he's seeing a difference on the recruiting trail.

And Tuesday morning, he picked up yet another coveted prospect.

Four-star power forward Deng Gak verbally committed to Miami, choosing the Hurricanes after receiving interest from the likes of Duke, Kansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Florida, Seton Hall and others.

"First off, I'd like to thank my family for supporting me throughout this long process and all the coaches that have recruited me up to this point," Gak wrote on Twitter. "After thinking long and hard, I've decided that the University of Miami is the best fit for me to continue my education and basketball career."

The 6-foot-9, 210-pound Gak, who hails from Australia and plays for Blair Academy in New Jersey, is the third four-star player to commit to Miami's 2017 class, joining guard Chris Lykes.

Last season, the Hurricanes had one of their top recruiting classes in program history signing McDonald's All-American Dewan Huell and four-star prospect Bruce Brown.

Now, Larrañaga is adding to that haul.

Sheldon McClellan Sees Childhood Dreams Come True

FanSided
Ben Mehic
Oct. 29, 2016

Washington Wizards: Sheldon McClellan and Danuel House played together as children in Texas and now they've realized their NBA dreams.

Sheldon McClellan and Danuel House grew up together dreaming of one day playing in the NBA.

The Houston natives have known each other since middle school and used basketball to grow their friendship. After parting ways in college, McClellan and House went on to become standout players at Miami and Texas A&M, respectively.

Both players went undrafted in the 2016 NBA Draft and their chances of realizing their dreams, let alone playing together at such a high level, became slim.

McClellan, a 6-foot-6 guard, signed a partially guaranteed deal with the Washington Wizards shortly after the draft ended and was essentially a lock to join the team for training camp.

House agreed to play for the Wizards in summer league, but was considered a long-shot to make the roster.

While together on the team, both players were competing.

Summer league presents a weird dynamic, with 12+ players theoretically playing together, but all competing for just a few roster spots.

McClellan struggled and didn't stand out from the competition.

House, on the other hand, showed off his athleticism and ability to knock down shots from deep, leading the Wizards to several exhibition victories alongside Kelly Oubre in Vegas.

House, like McClellan, agreed to a training camp deal with the Wizards.

Washington built their roster around the idea of versatility this past summer.

McClellan and House, both long defenders capable of guarding multiple positions, fit the description of players Scott Brooks typically likes keeping on his roster.

Still, it's rare to see multiple players make it out of training camp on non-guaranteed deals.

Somehow, they did it.

Last week, Washington Wizards concluded preseason with an impressive victory over the Toronto Raptors and announced three cuts right after the game.

Jarell Eddie, Johnny O'Bryant and Casper Ware – all of whom had prior NBA experience – were let go by the team.

McClellan and House had apparently done enough to win spots over players who had a taste of the NBA.

McClellan, in particular, rose his level of play in preseason and provided a substantial spark off the bench. House, in limited minutes, showed that he was capable of defending and impacting the game beyond the box score.

The odds of the two players making it out of college and playing together in the NBA after going undrafted were almost

nonexistent. They seemingly had a better chance of winning the lottery – twice.

Chase Hughes of CSN Mid-Atlantic chronicled their journey from high school to the pros, specifically how they beat the odds and realized their dreams together.

"It's a special moment, as far as both of us being from Houston and both growing up playing against each other," McClellan said. "Now we have a chance to grow in this organization together. It's just been a bonding thing from when we were little to now."

The opportunity for the two players to contribute during the regular season is there.

Neither McClellan nor House were expected to make the NBA. They weren't expected to beat out several experienced players for roster spots. And now they're not expected to crack Brooks' rotation. If there's a duo that can do it, it's the one from

Hurricanes Add PF Deng Gak to 2017 Recruiting Class

FanSided

Alan Rubenstein

Oct. 29, 2106

The Miami Hurricanes continue to add to their 2017 recruiting class. Jim Larrañaga received a verbal commitment from Power Forward Deng Gak earlier this week.

Gak is a 6'10 195 pound four-star power forward. He is the third commit to the Hurricanes 2017 recruiting class. Gak is the 93rd rated player nationally according to ESPN. He was considering eight other schools. Duke, Kansas, and UConn were among the other schools he was looking at.

The Hurricanes had been the co-favorite with Kansas to get a commitment from Gak, To be able to get a commitment going up against Kansas speaks a lot about Jim Larrañaga and his staff. This also shows how strong the program is and the positive direction they are going in.

Gak who is of Sudanese descent was born in Egypt and raised in Australia. He currently attends Blair Academy in Blairstown, New Jersey. Three BA alums have played in the NBA including Luol Deng of the Los Angeles Lakers who used to play for the Miami Heat .

Gak joins another big man from Oceania as part of the Hurricanes 2017 recruiting class.

Four Star Point Guard Chris Lykes is the third player in Miami's 2017 class. He is the 11th player ranked player at his position and the 52nd ranked overall in the class of 2017. Lykes will likely backup Ja'Quan Newton in 2017-18 and then take over running the team in 2018-19.

From FanSided Busting Brackets via Scout.Com, Gak said: "From watching (Miami's) games last year and some of their practices this year, I really liked how they utilize their forwards and the freedom they have,"

Miami will have to replace its captains Devon Reed and Kamari Murphy at the end of this season. Murphy will be counted on to help replace center Tonye Jekiri and Reed will be a key on the wing to help overcome the loss of the Hurricanes leading scorer from a season ago, Sheldon McClellan.

Murphy averaged 5.6 points per game and 6.0 rebounds per game last season in almost 25 minutes per game. The Hurricanes will be counting on him more this year. Reed is the Hurricanes leading returning scorer at 11.1 PPG.

Gak is going to battle with Sophomore Anthony Lawrence, Jr and Freshman Dewan Huell. Lawrence and Huell will both challenge for starting spots and playing time this season. By the 2017-18 season, the starting frontline could be Lawrence, Huell, and Gak.

Deng Gak to join Vasiljevic at Miami

Pick and Roll Hoops Australia

Liam Ellison

Oct. 26, 2016

Talented 6'11 big man Deng Gak has verbally committed to Miami, and will join compatriot Dejan Vasiljevic at the Hurricanes for the 2017/18 season.

The athletic forward had narrowed his commitment down to five schools; Duke, Florida, Kansas, Miami and Indiana. He visited Florida, Indiana, Kansas and Miami, settling on the latter and publicly stating via a post on his Twitter account that the Hurricanes are the best fit for him both from an educational and basketball standpoint. Gak becomes the latest Australian to join a school playing in a major program (ACC), following in the footsteps of the likes of Isaac Humphries (Kentucky), Jack White (Duke) and Louisville duo Mangok Mathiang and Deng Adel.

In September 2015, Gak embarked on a move to New Jersey to attend Blair Academy. It is the same school that Loul Deng attended, also of South Sudanese descent, and is aiming to follow a similar pathway to the NBA.

Born in Egypt, Gak then moved to South Sudan before settling in Sydney, Australia. As a scholarship holder at the Basketball Australia Centre of Excellence, he would go on to represent Australia at the 2015 FIBA U19 World Championship as a 17-year-old, playing against athletes two years older than him. In that tournament, Australia finished seventh.

Gak cuts an imposing figure on the court. Standing at 6'11 with a huge 7'5 wingspan, he has great athleticism and agility while also possessing the ability to cover the court well. The 18 year old's mid-range jump shot is hard to guard

due to his extremely high release point.

The young Aussie oozes of potential and raw natural talent so it's no surprise he was recruited heavily by some major conference schools. He becomes the third recruit for the Hurricane's 2017 incoming class, and will look forward to joining his Emu's team-mate Vasiljevic.

So, Jim Larrañaga did not have the best diet growing up

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Oct. 26, 2016

Last year at the ACC's basketball media days, Jim Larrañaga told stories about being mistaken for Larry David, and also learned how to do the Nae-Nae.

This year, he told people about his insatiable appetite for chocolate-peanut butter treats.

Growing up in Bronx, N.Y., Larrañaga played a lot of basketball — sunup to sundown on the city courts — and was a high school star at powerhouse Archbishop Molloy under legendary coach Jack Curran. All while fueled by copious amounts of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups.

"I had some terrible eating habits as a youngster," he said. "My mom gave me 50 cents to go to school ... and that 50 cents was to buy like a hot dog or a hamburger and a drink. And instead of spending it on good, nutritious food, I bought 10 Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. And I did that every day for four years."

Let's unwrap this, here.

According to Reese's website, two Reese's Peanut Butter Cups — one package — contains 210 calories, 13 grams of fat and 21 grams of sugar. There's also five grams of protein there.

Let's operate under the assumption the nutritional content of a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup hasn't changed since the late '60s, because that's quite possible. Let's also say he meant 10 individual cups, not 10 packages.

If he ate 10 cups every lunch period, a shaggy-haired, teenage Larrañaga would

have consumed 1,050 calories, 65 grams of fat and 105 grams of sugar every lunch period — in just Reese's. If Larrañaga meant 10 packages, that becomes 2,100 calories, 130 grams of fat and 210 grams of sugar. Even for a 6-foot-4, ultra-active teenager, that's a lot.

If he was hungry today, Larrañaga could equal that by downing a Brownie Cookie Dough Blizzard from Dairy Queen, which packs 1,140 calories, 48 grams of fat and 121 grams of sugar.

Or two.

"My high school coach was asked by my wife, do you know what my husband ate for lunch? And he said, yeah, 10 Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. Everybody knew. So I'm not proud of that."

For a dude running on a ridiculous amount of sugar, Larrañaga did OK. He became a standout at Providence College, where he presumably cut down on the cups. He took George Mason to a Final Four and Miami to a pair of Sweet 16s. The Hurricanes are picked to finish ninth this year, but have a history of surprising people.

"I hope my players are eating better than I did, but I do have a sweet tooth," he said. "Even today."

Hurricanes picked to finish ninth in the ACC

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Oct. 26, 2016

There's a lot Jim Larrañaga doesn't know about his team. He knows his probable starting lineup (point guard Ja'Quan Newton, two-guard Davon Reed, small forward Anthony Lawrence Jr., four-man Kamari Murphy and center Ebuka Izundu) and has faith a talented freshman class will contribute early.

What that means in terms of wins and losses? Unknown.

That was reflected in the Hurricanes' standing in the preseason ACC poll, conducted Wednesday at the league's annual media days. Miami, which made the Sweet 16 last year and graduated three players critical to that run (point guard Angel Rodriguez, leading scorer Sheldon McClellan and center Tonye Jekiri), was picked to finish ninth.

Duke, which took 85 of 91 first-place votes, was a clear-cut No. 1. North Carolina, which earned six, was No. 2, followed by No. 3 Virginia, No. 4 Louisville and No. 5 Syracuse.

In the middle tier: No. 6 North Carolina State, No. 7 Notre Dame, No. 8 Florida State, No. 9 Miami, No. 10 Virginia Tech and No. 11 Clemson.

No. 12 Pittsburgh was further back, No. 13 Wake Forest behind that, and No. 14 Georgia Tech, No. 15 Boston College.

Miami hosts Division 2 Barry in an exhibition at 7 p.m. next Wednesday. UM opens the regular season at 7 p.m. Nov. 11 against Western Carolina.

As UM noted on its Twitter account, the Hurricanes have never finished below their preseason projection under Larranga.

NCAA Men: 2016 Top 5 Australian Freshmen

Pick and Roll Hoops Australia

Luke Sicari

Oct. 26, 2016

With the new college basketball season just weeks away, the Australian talent is booming across the collegiate scene. This includes a number of freshman looking to make an immediate impact with their respective schools.

We breakdown the top five incoming Aussie freshman to keep an eye on heading into the new season.

2 | Dejan Vasiljevic | Miami

Dejan Vasiljevic comes into his freshman year as one of Australia's most explosive and exciting scoring talents. His shooting ability is awe-inspiring, as Vasiljevic can hit the three-point shot in any way imaginable. Off the dribble, dotting the eye with a defender in his face? No worries. Coming off a number of screens, whether those be on or off the ball, leading to an open look? Even better.

Despite learning curve of new players, Miami sets high hopes for season

The Miami Hurricane

Isaiah Kim-Martinez

Oct. 26, 2016

Basketball season is right around the corner, and the Hurricanes have high expectations to continue the success following a season where the men's team made it to the Sweet Sixteen of the NCAA Tournament.

"I've made it plain and clear, I'm not trying to go backwards," senior guard Davon Reed said in a press conference on Monday. "I see that we have the talent to be back in the NCAA Tournament and be one of the top-tier teams in this league, but it's not just going to be given to us."

Miami has plenty of talent returning to the team, including the slashing Reed, defensive anchor redshirt senior forward Kamari Murphy and the offensive firecracker that is junior guard Ja'Quan Newton. That being said, one of the challenges that the Canes are going face this season will be to adjust to having five new players, four of whom are freshmen, in the rotation who have yet to play their first game with the team.

"Something I see right now with a young team is the inconsistency," Head Coach Jim Larrañaga said. "We want to see a consistent effort defensively and a more consistent performance offensively, but we know we need to be patient with the young guys."

The freshmen are top recruit forward Dewan Huell, guard Bruce Brown, international guard Dejan "DJ" Vasiljevic and center Rodney Miller. Redshirt junior guard Rashad Muhammad will also be playing his first minutes for the Hurricanes. He sat out last season due to NCAA transfer rules after coming to Miami from San José State.

"I think we had a great recruiting class with them coming in," Murphy said. "You have seen the talent, especially on the offensive side, from the beginning."

That is something that has been no secret; the newcomers can score the basketball. They have added to the array of offensive ability that the Canes already have, with players who thrive off driving to the basket.

"We are very athletic and get out in the open court well," Reed said. "We can be a good, high tempo team because we attack the rim."

According to Larrañaga, offense hasn't been as much of a concern as the other end of the court, where there is noticeable need for improvement, especially with the less-experienced players.

"The area that needs the most attention is our interior defense and rebounding," Larrañaga said. "We are going to have some challenges as far as defensive conversion is concerned."

Reed echoed his coach's points, speaking about the importance of defense for the team's success.

"If you can't defend anybody, you're going to lose every game," Reed said. "Offense is something you can figure out as the season goes, but defense is something you got to have from the beginning."

Reed and Murphy are the captains this season and are taking it upon themselves to make sure that the young team does what it needs to do to win games.

"Now we have the process of teaching them the defensive principles," Murphy said. "Especially when you have four

freshmen, it's all about teaching and game experience."

Reed has made himself known to the team, being vocal in what he expects from each and every one of the players.

"I got a big mouth and I talk a lot, so it's natural for me," Reed said with a smile. "Just trying to make sure that myself and Kamari hold everyone accountable. The little things that people may not know. Not giving a token effort to certain things but actually playing hard and taking everything seriously. Just trying to be that leader more than anything and letting people find their way, but also making sure that they know what it is that we do."

Larrañaga is confident that despite the fact that the Hurricanes have a lot of room for growth, they will figure it out and reach their goals for the season.

"I would describe our culture as playing up to your capability," Larrañaga said. "I think this team will do it."

Miami will open the season with an exhibition match against Barry University at 7 p.m. on Wednesday at the Watsco Center.

Scout's Take: ESPN 100 PF Deng Gak picks Miami

ESPN.com

Adam Finklestein

Oct. 25, 2016

Blair Academy and PSA Cardinals power forward Deng Gak announced his verbal commitment to Miami on Tuesday, giving head coach Jim Larrañaga his third pledge and second ESPN 100 product in the 2017 class. Here's a look at what Gak will bring to Coral Gables.

Why he committed: Gak was on Miami's campus earlier this fall before taking visits to Kansas and Florida last week. Duke and Indiana were two other schools that were involved to somewhat varying degrees earlier on in the process. Ultimately, Gak's commitment had a lot to do with Larrañaga continuing to build a relationship with him, long after he left campus, and selling his vision for how the budding four-man would be able to utilize his versatile tool set within Miami's system. There was also a degree of familiarity to the roster with fellow Australian Dejan Vasiljevic in his freshman year, and in large part assistant coach Adam Fisher, have made that corner of the globe an increasing niche in their recruiting efforts.

What he brings: Gak is a multi-talented four-man with a very high ceiling. He has good height and length for his position, is athletic and agile, has a skill set that stretches the floor and is only just beginning to tap into his potential. He changes ends very well and is extremely fluid for his size, so he's a factor in the open floor. Offensively, he has a very soft touch both around the paint as well as facing the basket. He shoots it consistently to about 18 feet right now and projects as being able to extend that range beyond the arc with relative ease down the road. He can put the ball on the floor a couple of times, has shown

flashes of a passing instinct and has a high basketball I.Q. He moves well for his size defensively, is quick off his feet and able to block some shots coming from the weak-side of the floor and has also been very well coached, especially on the defensive end of the floor. Physically, he's a work in progress and needs to add quite a bit of muscle mass to his frame and become more consistent playing through contact on both ends before he's able to make consistent contributions in the ACC. However, he's only been in the United States for a little over a year, has already made nice strides in adjusting to the speed and physicality of the American game and is known for his strong character and work ethic.

How he fits: In the short-term, Gak is going to solidify the frontcourt rotation and provide an insurance policy should current freshman Dewan Huellmake an earlier jump to the NBA than expected. That tandem provides Miami with two skilled options at the four spot and are thus nice compliments next to prototypical bigs like Ebuka Izundu and Rodney Miller as well as high level athletes like Huell and Michael Gilmore. There's also the potential for Larrañaga to go big. In the long-term, Gak will perhaps require some patience as he continues to fill out and learns to play through contact but fast forward a few years down the road and it wouldn't at all be a surprise to see him emerge as a key player for Miami as an upperclassmen.

Who he reminds us of: The most common comparison for Gak is Luol Deng who came from a very similar background, also starred at Blair Academy and was known as much for his character as he was his basketball abilities. That isn't necessarily to say that Gak is going to end up being an NBA veteran, but it isn't out of the question either if he follows the model and continues to grow and

develop with each passing year.

How the class is shaping up: Gak is the third prospect to commit to Miami in the class of 2017. He and point guard Chris Lykes are both ESPN 100 products. Lykes is one of the most dynamic playmaking guards in the country. He's only 5-foot-6 but he's an absolute blur with the ball in his hands and proven playmaker against the highest levels of competition in the country. While the Hurricanes could call this class complete right now and be very happy with their efforts in 2017 they also remain in the hunt for both five-star shooting guard Lonnie Walker as well as four-star big man Lance Thomas.

Reading High senior still undecided on basketball choice

Reading Eagle

Mike Drago

Oct. 25, 2016

According to the crystal ball used by some basketball recruiting websites, Lonnie Walker IV will play at the University of Arizona next season.

One Wildcats recruiting website has the Reading High star committing to coach Sean Miller's club within the next few weeks.

Walker laughs when he hears or reads such things.

"One (website) called me and said I was going to Miami," he said Monday evening after completing an intense workout with the Red Knights at the Geigle.

Walker is amused by the talk but admits he's far from making a decision about his basketball future. He said there are no early clubhouse leaders among his final five of Arizona, Kentucky, Miami, Syracuse and Villanova.

"Oh no, all five are still even," Walker insisted.

Some experts crossed Kentucky off the list when Walker abruptly canceled an official visit scheduled for last weekend. Walker said he plans to reschedule for November; a family situation caused him to scratch last week's trip.

Walker has taken two of his allotted five official visits, to Miami, in late September, and to Arizona, Oct. 7-9.

He heads to Villanova this weekend and has a visit scheduled to Syracuse Nov. 4-6.

"I'm just taking all my officials, then me and my dad and mom are going to sit down and talk about what type of experience I had (at each)," he said.

The NCAA has an early signing period, from Nov. 9-16, but it's unlikely Walker will wrap up his decision in time for that. His goal, however, remains making a decision before the start of the Red Knights' season Dec. 9.

Pennsylvania's Player of the Year as a junior said he didn't know what to expect before his first official visit but admits he was blown away by the presentation made by the Hurricanes.

"They set the bar very high," he said. "They put so much effort into focusing on me. It showed how much they wanted me; I never had that much love from a school. It was definitely a great experience."

He said he spent the weekend building a bond with potential future teammates, including former Neumann-Goretti star Ja'Quan Newton.

He said Miami basketball coach Jim Larrañaga let him know in no uncertain terms that he was a priority recruit.

"Davon Reed is a senior and their shooting guard, and that's basically my spot to take," Walker said. "He said I'll be the highest-ranked recruit that he's ever recruited."

Miller and Arizona put on a fullcourt press as well and Walker came away suitably impressed.

He said he had dinner at the coach's house with five-star recruit Deandre Ayton and other Wildcats commits, and that he shot pool with Miller.

"They've got a great coach who's very hungry to get that national championship," Walker said of Miller. "You can see it in his eyes that he wants me to be part of that legacy."

Walker said he's focusing on each coach's style of play and how it fits his game and on the type of players each coach is recruiting and how he'll fit in with them. The 6-5 Walker was named Berks Player of the Year for the second straight season as a junior after averaging a team-best 16.9 points, 5.3 rebounds and 3.6 assists per game.

He doesn't know where he'll end up but he does know this much: "It's going to be hard to decide, I think."

8 things to know heading into the Miami season

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Oct. 24, 2016

Mark Richt and the football team grabbed most of the attention at the University of Miami in recent months, but basketball coaches Jim Larrañaga and Katie Meier have been busy preparing to unveil their 2016-17 teams in the next few weeks.

The men play their first exhibition game at home Nov. 2 against Barry University, and the women open the season Nov. 11 at Kentucky.

Here is what Larrañaga and Meier have learned about their teams through the preseason:

1. JaQuan Newton will likely replace Angel Rodriguez as starting point guard. "I really like how JaQuan is playing, and we're trying to develop Bruce Brown and DJ Vasiljevic into viable options," Larrañaga said. "It's very, very clear that JaQuan is the most comfortable, most experienced and he's shown some very good leadership qualities."

2. Vasiljevic, a freshman from Australia, is even better than advertised.

"DJ is seriously good. Offensively, I'm very, very comfortable where he is. He's going to be able to score the ball, share and handle the ball. He's smart and knows how to play. His challenge is going to be on the defensive end of the floor. He has to use his savvy and cleverness we see on offense on his defense, as well.

"You'll love him. He's smart, articulate, funny. He's very team-oriented. Gets along great with the guys. The coaches love him. He is everything we thought he'd be, and a whole lot more.

3. Sophomore Emese Hof has emerged as a vocal team leader, Meier said. "Yesterday, Emese said, 'Can we huddle?' and I said, 'Sure,' and she grabbed the team and probably said some words I don't want to translate and just got 'em and I was so proud. That was a very good moment. She is a warrior and is just asking for everyone to have the same mentality."

4. Freshmen Serena-Lynn Geldof (Belgium) and Sarah Mortensen (Denmark) "have high-level basketball IQ and will be very, very special."

5. The women's team has plenty of incentive to start strong. "I don't have to create fake pressure. We're opening at Kentucky, we're at Ohio State. What else do I have to say?"

6. Dewan Huell, the highly-acclaimed recruit from Norland High, will help the team, but needs to put on some beef.

"Dewan is like a lot of young, big guys, trying to find himself," Larrañaga said. "In terms of output in practice, we've been very pleased. We're working on his skill development, specifically his jump shot. As that part of his game improves, he'll get to add more and more. He has a lot of strengths that will impact our team. An outstanding defensive rebounder. He runs the floor extremely well. He's a very good target up in the air to get the ball to. He clearly has to get stronger. He came in at 215, he's now 225, but the players he's going to be battling against are 250, 280."

7. Anthony "Amp" Lawrence will get "significant" playing time at small forward and power forward.

8. Seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy are co-captains. Murphy said he

is "holding the freshmen accountable." Reed, who experienced the NIT and the NCAA Sweet 16, told the newcomers: "I'm not going backwards," and challenged them to step it up.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/sports/college/acc/university-of-miami/article110271197.html#storylink=cpy>

Erik Swoope follows Jimmy Graham from Hurricanes basketball to NFL

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 21, 2016

It was the moment Erik Swoope had imagined over and over for the past two years as he toiled in obscurity on the Indianapolis Colts practice squad — Andrew Luck scrambling, looking his way, and delivering a pass into his arms as the crowd roared.

That is exactly how it played out last Sunday with 10:52 to go in the game against the Houston Texans. The Colts led 20-9 and faced first-and-10 at their own 30-yard line.

Swoope, the former University of Miami basketball player, found himself on the receiving end of Luck's pass and did what he had practiced so many times.

He shed a defender, stayed in bounds and raced up the sideline for a 35-yard gain until he was forced out of bounds.

It was Swoope's first NFL reception since joining the league as an undrafted free agent in 2014. He savored every moment.

"I was trying to run as fast as humanly possible; and I kept repeating to myself, 'I actually have the ball. I actually have the ball!' " Swoope said by phone on Wednesday.

"Coach [Chuck] Pagano always says, 'Prepare like a starter,' because anything's possible, guys go down, and you never know when they're going to need you. This happened to be the week for me."

With starting tight end Dwayne Allen listed as "week to week" with an ankle injury, Swoope moves up to the No. 2 spot at tight end behind Jack Doyle. He played in 41 snaps last Sunday and is

expected to be called upon again this Sunday against Tennessee.

"I think we all have [seen progress] from where he started," Pagano said of Swoope, who is 6-5 and 243 pounds. "For a guy that's never played football, the guy's doing a nice job, run game and pass game."

Swoope has been working tirelessly and getting guidance from another Canes forward-turned-tight end, Jimmy Graham.

"When I first started to embark on this journey, Jimmy took me under his wing," Swoope said. "I study everything he does, every time he's targeted. In the offseason, we work out together in Miami. He's been an amazing mentor."

Swoope never considered switching sports during his UM basketball career. Despite Graham's NFL success, Swoope did not figure that was an option. He never played football as a kid because he was much bigger than his friends (6-2 and 200 pounds at 12) so he would have been placed on older teams.

He focused on basketball and soccer, where he was a decent midfielder. Growing up in the Los Angeles area, his sports heroes were Shaquille O'Neal of the Lakers and Cobi Jones of the L.A. Galaxy. Swoope, 24, wound up at UM in 2010 and became an important role player.

As a senior, he averaged five points and 2.7 rebounds, and the last 10 games he averaged 9.7 points and 4.4 rebounds. He was known for his strength in the weight room with a bench press of 360 pounds, and he squatted 495 pounds.

A scout from the Denver Broncos saw

Swoope play and was intrigued. He put in a call to UM basketball coach Jim Larrañaga, who suggested Swoope give football a try. Eager to take a crash course in the sport, he began playing the Madden 25 video game. He tuned into the NFL Network, and watched every video he could find of the NFL Scouting Combine.

He also began catching passes from his older brother, Devin, who was attending Barry University at the time and had played football at Northwood (Michigan) University.

In early April 2014, the Broncos sent a scout to the UM campus and put Swoope through a battery of tests as the UM basketball staff and Graham watched and lent support. Other teams found out and also inquired about him. He felt the Colts were the best fit, partly because there are so many UM connections.

Pagano was an assistant at UM. Swoopes' first Colts tight ends coach was former Cane Alfredo Roberts.

Offensive coordinator Rod Chudzinski played tight end on UM's national championship teams in 1987 and 1989. Frank Gore and Phillip Dorsett are his teammates, and Reggie Wayne and Andre Johnson were there in previous years.

"I've learned so much," Swoope said. "It's my new passion. I barely watch basketball anymore. Only to support ex-teammates. And being with so many UM guys, I am experiencing the 'U' football legacy that everyone talks about."

"Switching to football was the greatest decision of my life."

Hurricanes Basketball: 3 Key Questions for 2016

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 12, 2016

Yes, we are still smack dab in the middle of football season.

So I won't stray too far from the gridiron, but Miami Basketball's season is just around the corner.

And while this year's team will look far different than last season's Sweet 16 bunch, they still have a chance to be very, very good.

Let's take a look at some key things to watch, as Coach L's team prepares for the coming year.

#1 Make no mistake about it, this is junior PG Ja'Quan Newton's team now. Is he ready?

"The thing I've noticed more than anything is how much higher he is jumping, he's actually becoming a better athlete. He's got the ball in his hands constantly. As much as Shane Larkin did. As much as Angel Rodriguez did. As we have developed as a team I have seen him take on more of a leadership role." - Coach Larrañaga during this week's presser, on the development of Newton.

Coach also said that Newton was elevated to captain alongside Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy (a pair of seniors).

Newton is no longer a 6th man. He's the lead G on this team. Watching Larkin and Rodriguez during UM's 2 Sweet 16 runs, we know vital that role is. And it sounds like Newton is ready for the challenge. We know he can score off drives and on the break, and we also know he is a feisty defender. His jump shot and distribution skills as well as aforementioned leadership, are the keys to the season. UM has plenty of scorers, Newton needs to get his talented teammates involved and be the stir that stirs the drink. Listening to Coach L rave about his early progress bodes well for this team.

#2 Are there enough shots for the plethora of scorers on this team?

Davon Reed is likely your #1 option at the 2/3. And Reed is an accomplished shooter/finisher. Can he take his game to the next level? How many touches are enough for Reed?

San Jose State transfer Rashad Muhammad is also a known scorer. He averaged over 13 a game in his last stop (albeit on a terrible team). Is he the new sixth man? Can he follow suit of another former transfer in Sheldon McClellan and be a more efficient as well as explosive scorer.

Freshman Bruce Brown is too good not get his. Coach L and others have compared his game to that of Russell Westbrook. He might end up leading this team in scoring.

Dewan Huell comes to Coral Gables with even more hype than Brown. The three time State Champion from Norland H.S. is 6'10, but with a versatile skill set. He could be a Top 3 scorer by season's end.

What about Dejan Vasiljevic? He's a natural shooter, who is likely going to have to learn on the fly as the team's back up PG? But he too will be most natural putting the ball in the bucket as he develops.

Anthony Lawrence Jr. has also earned the chance to see the ball more. Something tells me his unselfish game will fit well with the other players around him. But he will have hot nights too, where he could go for 20.

That's a lot of firepower.

But this group needs to find a way to work together, and settle into roles.

Not everyone can be the Alpha Dog.

#3 What might be the starting line-up/rotation?

Coach all said right now with the 10 scholarship players, the team is broken down like this.

Two Units:

#1 Returners - Newton at the point, Reed at the 2, Lawrence at the 3, Kamari Murphy at the 4 spot, and Ebuka Izundu at the C.

#2 Newcomers - Dejan and Bruce interchangeable at the G spots, Muhammad at the 3, Huell at PF and Rodney Miller at the pivot.

But that is not necessarily your UM starting line-up/bench.

Newton is set at the point. That's a given.

Reed too, will start.

I like Lawrence as the 3. He can do a little of everything, and has the unselfish game to compliment the scorers.

But if Brown is too good to come off the bench, Lawrence's unselfish nature might be tested as he becomes a reserve, and Reed slides to the 3.

Murphy because of his experience, is probably your starting PF. He needs to improve his consistency on the glass.

At the 5, I like Huell. But Izundu is probably a better defender at this stage of the game. So this could go either way.

Muhammad and/or Brown are your 6th man candidates.

That's a lot of talent on the bench.

The only player who I think may redshirt is Miller.

Coach L has a lot of interesting decisions to make about this team/rotation.

If this team gels it could be good enough to contend in the ACC and beyond.

Stay tuned 'Canes fans.

Coaches Larrañaga and Meier prep for season's start

Miami Herald
Linda Robertson
Oct. 11, 2016

University of Miami basketball coaches Jim Larrañaga and Katie Meier are dealing with construction dust and offseason rust as they prepare for opening games four weeks from now.

While the locker rooms, weight room and offices are undergoing a \$1.7 million renovation, the Hurricanes are adjusting to new teammates — five on the men's team and four on the women's team.

Larrañaga, known for his creative motivational tactics, brought in a group of Navy SEALs to address his players. One exercise called for the players, led by guard Ja'Quan Newton, to do jumping jacks in perfect form and unity. After the first one, Newton wasn't satisfied.

"All of a sudden Ja'Quan barked out, 'One perfect jumping jack!' and the rest of the players responded, 'One perfect jumping jack!'" said Larrañaga, whose team lost 92-69 to eventual champ Villanova in the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament last season. "That's the message, not just to do it OK but to do it great."

Meier said she's "way ahead" of schedule at practice, where she was able to install a complicated defense in one day, thanks to her players' experience and the knowledge of the two freshmen from Belgium and Denmark.

"We better be good because it's the hardest schedule we've put together," said Meier, whose team lost 74-71 to South Dakota State in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Meier praised senior guard Jessica Thomas, "who is playing out of her

mind. She was really disappointed by that NCAA loss. That's fueled her, and it's diesel."

"We expect a full, great season from Keyona Hayes, who should average a double-double; she's dominating practices," Meier said. "Shaneese Bailey is more explosive than Riquana Williams was. Her closing speed is frightening.

"I like my talent. We've got a lot of different looks."

Larrañaga, who said only 300 season tickets remain on sale, complimented freshmen Bruce Brown ("High-energy guy, reminds me of Durand Scott"); Dejan Vasiljevic ("Very good offensively"); Dewan Huell ("Terrific athlete, fun kid to be around"), 7-0 Rodney Miller, and transfer Rashad Muhammad. Newton is handling the ball as much as Shane Larkin and Angel Rodriguez did.

Huell, charged with misdemeanor battery last month, is "working through" the legal process, said Larrañaga, who did not suspend Huell over the incident in which he attacked a man visiting his ex-girlfriend at her FIU dorm.

Larrañaga said he wasn't aware that UM's NCAA probation ends Oct. 21, but he's glad to put it behind the program.

"That's more than five years we've dealt with it," he said. "But now that it's over I can see a difference in recruiting. We signed Dewan and Bruce, two highly regarded players."

Larrañaga dismissed Donald Trump's "locker-room talk" analogy, saying the presidential candidate's demeaning comments about women would not be acceptable among his players.

"I don't use vulgarity," said Larrañaga, who does not permit cursing. "The language you use and the way you interact has to be first class."

As for the renovation project, he compared most of the facilities of his ACC adversaries to a Four Seasons or Ritz Carlton hotel.

"We're more like the Delano, that boutique place, a small private school, great location, different from a big state university that has all the bells and whistles," he said. "We give you a lot of personal attention. But it's far more challenging to build a house when you have fewer dollars to work with. You have to be creative."

Larrañaga said he's proud of UM alum Sheldon McClellan, the undrafted rookie who is playing for a starting spot with the Washington Wizards. "We've been texting," he said. "Sheldon is definitely an NBA talent."

Undrafted rookie Sheldon McClellan on track to earning Wizards roster spot

Washington Post
Candace Buckner
Oct. 8, 2016

Sheldon McClellan can laugh about it now.

When McClellan thinks about this past spring and how he was the leading scorer for a Sweet 16 team but did not initially receive an invitation to the NBA draft combine, the creases around his eyes bunch up and his mouth curls into a grin. On this Saturday afternoon — while McClellan wears a Washington Wizards practice jersey — the snub just seems funny. And so he laughs, though the disappointment still stings.

“I felt like I had a great year to get invited initially to the combine,” said McClellan, who played his first two college seasons at Texas and his final two at Miami, “and when I didn’t, I kind of felt disrespected.”

McClellan, 23, was only summoned to the combine after another player had dropped out. Then in June, every NBA team with a draft pick passed on him.

If he continues impressing the Wizards in what has been a promising preseason, however, he will likely fill one of three open roster spots.

McClellan scored 20 points in 32 minutes of action in the Wizards’ double-overtime win over the Philadelphia 76ers on Thursday. Besides that performance, he has shown potential behind closed doors in practices.

“Like every player that comes into this league, he has a lot to learn about what we do and [how to] be able to do it consistently, but he’s had a good start to his pro career,” Wizards Coach Scott Brooks said. “He’s had a lot of good practices and a couple of good moments, or good games, and he’s played well, but it’s a long training camp. He still has to focus on being consistent with his habits, practice and game. But he’s played well.”

The match of the Wizards and McClellan, a versatile 6-foot-6 guard, has been brewing

for a while. The team scouted McClellan in college and from the time the draft process began, keeping a careful eye on his stock. Since the Wizards did not have a draft pick, they would either have had to make a deal to get into the second round to take McClellan or wait it out.

“I do think there were draft-and-stash opportunities for him, but the Wizards had always expressed a high level of interest in him,” said Chris Caputo, Miami’s associate head coach. “We were in contact a good bit about him.

“It was like, if he went undrafted, then he was coming to Washington,” Caputo continued. “They made it clear they liked him.”

As expected, immediately after the name of the 60th and final pick of the draft was called, McClellan received a text from his representation at Octagon.

“The Wizards are done!” McClellan said, recalling the message. “I didn’t even talk to other teams, because we already knew that this was the right place for me and we already talked about that going in.”

Even so, after agreeing to a two-year, partially guaranteed deal, McClellan had to hold up his end. During his first professional experience, at the Las Vegas Summer League, he looked overwhelmed. In five games, he averaged just 2.6 points, 1.4 rebounds and 0.6 assists. McClellan knew he had played like a guy who had gone undrafted.

“Aw, man. Summer league, it was rough for me,” McClellan said. “My first time being away from college and playing with different guys, so it just took me a longer time to get adjusted, honestly. I know a lot of people didn’t see what they [saw in me] in college.”

McClellan decided to stay in Las Vegas to attend Tim Grgurich’s highly respected skills camp. Inside that gymnasium, McClellan and fellow Wizards rookie Danuel House took the challenge against several up-and-coming NBA players, including Kristaps Porzingis

and Jordan Clarkson. McClellan also worked out some of his frustrations against the rookies who had been drafted over him earlier in the summer.

“We kind of took it personal that we didn’t get drafted and all those other guys did,” McClellan said of himself and House. “That really helped my confidence and helped me grow as a player.”

Then, in August, McClellan swung by Los Angeles for the team’s mini-training camp. Again, he wanted to prove himself. So every time he saw John Wall handling the ball, McClellan dropped into a defensive stance. He did the same with Bradley Beal. McClellan continued this approach into his first NBA training camp, taking on his veteran teammates whenever possible.

“He’s not scared of anybody,” Wall said of McClellan. “He’s got a lot of heart. Anytime [we] play a one-on-one drill ... he always calls out, like, me or Brad. He always wants to take on the challenge of guarding the best player. That’s something you don’t see too often from a rookie, not worrying about the scoring the ball but worrying about trying to guard the best player and that’s how you get yourself established in this league.”

McClellan recognizes that nothing is certain — NBA teams have until Oct. 24 to set their rosters and contracts are not guaranteed until Jan. 10. He knows he has to keep learning and growing; he points, for instance, to his attempt at a game-winner in Philadelphia, when he followed a strong blow-by move with a weak up-and-under layup that was blocked.

Still, McClellan said, “I feel like if I keep doing what I’m doing, I’ll be fine.”

With veteran leadership gone, Hurricanes still set to compete

FanSided

Kyler Proffitt

Sept. 28, 2016

Miami is coming off a solid season in which they finished up at 27-8 overall and made a Sweet 16 appearance. The Hurricanes had a strong roster led by multiple key pieces who have now departed from the program due to graduation.

They lost starting guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, who combined to average just under 29 points per contest. Another notable loss includes Tonye Jekiri, who was a rim protector for Miami. Those three guys were the foundation of the 2015-16 roster and were go-to players in crunch time.

But have faith Miami fans, head coach Jim Larrañaga built up a formidable recruiting class.

It includes two 5-star prospects in guard Bruce Brown and forward Dewan Huell. Both of these guys will be huge contributors this upcoming season and will help fill the holes left by McClellan and Jekiri.

The 'Canes also add 4-star center Rodney Miller, who stands in at 7-foot.

The final piece to round the recruiting class is guard Dejan Vasiljevic. Now most fans have not heard of him because he's a recruit out of Australia, but nonetheless he can help this team immediately.

Despite the losses, Miami returns some quality players. The player who will likely take over the reins at point guard is Ja'Quan Newton. He was a 4-star recruit out of high school and is sure to step in with Rodriguez out of the picture. Davon Reed and Rashad Muhammad will round out the backcourt at the two-position.

The front court returnees include Anthony Lawrence Jr. and Kamari Murphy. Lawrence came in as a 4-star recruit and didn't show much production last year, but he has an opportunity to prove something. Murphy was used in the rotation pretty heavily in 2015-16, so his experience and defense will be an asset to this roster.

Miami has a nice core, one that includes a number of experienced players mixed with youth. But the biggest problem for the Hurricanes is consistency. They had games last year where they beat Virginia and Duke but then they went on the road and lost to North Carolina State. Larrañaga has to figure out a system in which his team can develop some consistency to make it deeper into the tournament.

With the loss of so many key assets, there is probably a question as to who will be where this year. Luckily, I've broken down the roster and determined a possible rotation.

PF Murphy Sharpening Tools to Be More Involved on Offense

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Sept. 21, 2016

Kamari Murphy was pleased with his first season playing at Miami.

The 6-foot-8 power forward averaged 5.6 points and 6.0 rebounds in 32 games, making 28 starts, for the Hurricanes, who advanced to the Sweet 16 finishing with a 27-8 record

“I think it was pretty good,” Murphy said. “I could have done a few things a little better, but overall with our team success I think I played my role to the ‘T’ and that’s what teams need--guys to play their role and nothing extra. We just hit a team that was on fire so I’m still happy with the season.”

This season, which begins with preseason practice on Oct. 2 and the regular season opener on Nov. 11, Murphy will be looking to make more of an impact on offense in his senior year.

“I’m looking to be a low-post presence this year and definitely get the ball a lot more, making things happen,” Murphy said. “I definitely have to rebound more than I did and I’m looking to be the leading rebounder now that Tonye (Jekiri) is not here and just be that vocal leader on the court, helping other guys out.”

To make more of an impact on offense Murphy has been working on picking his spots more, establishing go-to moves, and improving his touch around the rim.

“Everybody knows I can catch lobs and stuff like that, but I’m working on stuff on the ground where I can finish myself,” Murphy said. “I’ve been working on my touch, my handle, and more with my shot—just sharpening all of my tools.”

Murphy takes the honor of being the Hurricanes’ strongest player on the team according to teammates and coaches.

“I probably don’t look like it, but I am,” said

Murphy, who can bench press 185 pounds 22 times.

The Hurricanes return five players from a year ago and will have five newcomers eligible to play this season as they look for back-to-back NCAA tournament appearances for the first time since making it to three straight from 1998-2000.

“We have a change in personnel,” Murphy said. “Other guys last year that didn’t have to do certain things have to do it this year. The new guys coming in have got to be more ready than the new guys that came last year because we don’t have that depth that we had from the year before. I think it’s coming along well. We’re still working with the new guys. The guys that have been here have been doing our job to help them as well. It’s a process like with any freshman, but I think we’ll be good by the time we have our first scrimmage and first exhibition game. We’ll have major improvements.”

Murphy has been one of the vocal leaders on the team and he has made sure to help the young players understand the importance of working on their games in the offseason.

“Definitely making sure they stay in the gym and make sure they’ve got the right mindset because playing pick-up and stuff like that I kind of can enforce what the season is going to be like as far as physicality, rotations, and stuff like that,” Murphy said. “That’s why we play open gym a lot. I think the older guys like myself are guiding the young guys the ropes and showing them what it’s going to be like every game. Some have adjusted quicker than others, some still have time to go, but there’s nobody out there that is a lost cause. Everybody is contributing in some way.”

Four freshmen—Dewan Huell, Bruce Brown, Rodney Miller, and Dejan Vasiljevic—have been on the same team during pick-up games against the returners.

“They’re not intimidated by the next level,” Murphy said. “I don’t know if they’re

comfortable with us or it’s just their mentality, but from the get you could tell when we score on them they come right back at us. They’re very competitive in that nature, but we just have to see as practice goes on and learn defensive assignments, defensive lingo, and stuff like that is all stuff they have to learn, but initially they have the competitive spirit.”

Huell and Miller are two frontcourt players Murphy will be helping along the way.

“Rodney is good around the rim,” Murphy said. “He definitely has to work on a few things with defense. Dewan offensively is better than Rodney, but he has to work on defense as well as get stronger. I think those two things with them will come along as the seasons go on and the year goes. With those two guys I’m confident we’ll play with them.”

Michael Gilmore is a 6-foot-9 forward transfer from VCU who will have to sit out this year due to NCAA transfer rules. Murphy will look to give him guidance as someone who also transferred to Miami and sat out a year when he came from Oklahoma State in 2014.

“I can tell from the workouts that we’ve had that he’s one of the more mature transfers and he understands what he has to go through,” Murphy said. “He’s already a vocal leader out there for the upperclassmen. When I sit down and talk to him I will explain to him that it’s a long process and you feel like you’re not even on the team because you’re not in the game playing, but it’s what you do behind the scenes and with what people don’t see and that next year you get to perform. If he puts in the work, he’ll be just fine.”

Where's the pancake mix? Former UM star Angel Rodriguez adjusts to life in the French league

Miami Herald
Angel Rodriguez
Sept. 20, 2016

For the second time in his young life, Angel Rodriguez has packed his bags and ventured off to begin a new life in a foreign land, where finding pancake mix is much harder than he expected.

Rodriguez, the Puerto Rican who moved to Miami on his own at age 15 to pursue his hoop dreams, became a star point guard at the University of Miami and earned a spot on the San Antonio Spurs Summer League team. But he didn't make the cut, so he signed a 10-month contract to play in the French first division, with a team called Cholet Basket in a town of 55,000 best known for its red linen handkerchiefs.

It was definitely culture shock, starting with his first trip to the grocery store.

"The products look completely different, I can't read the labels, and I couldn't find Alfredo sauce or pancake mix," Rodriguez said by phone on Tuesday. "I looked all over for pancake mix, and they don't have it. I asked the other American guys on the team and they told me about a grocery an hour away that has a small section with American products, so I drove there and I found pancake mix."

He does love the bread there ("I can't stop eating it," he said) and is getting used to smaller portions and organic vegetables. He enrolled in a French class.

Rodriguez has also had to adjust to a French style of basketball, which means less dribbling, more quick passes and longer runs rather than sprints at practice. He is one of five U.S. players on the team, along with Isaiah Swann (Florida State), David Noel (North Carolina), Graham

Brown (Michigan), and Benjamin Dewar (Lake Superior State).

All the other Americans are older and have played in France, so they have been helping Rodriguez get acclimated.

"I couldn't be more thankful for those guys because I am the only rookie, so they've made me feel more comfortable," Rodriguez said.

He says it can get lonely living alone in a town 4,400 miles from Miami. His wife, Jesenia, will be visiting in 10 days, and she'll be back over Christmas for a vacation to Paris, London and Milan, but she is finishing her college degree so can't move to France. Rodriguez passes the time watching Netflix, reading, streaming college football games and talking on the phone through What's App and FaceTime, sometimes as late as 4 a.m. when there is no morning practice.

"One morning I was making breakfast at 11 a.m. and my cellphone rang, and I was like, 'Who would be up in the U.S. at 5 in the morning to call me, and it turned out it was Coach L (Jim Larrañaga) FaceTiming me,'" Rodriguez said, laughing. "That tells you what kind of coach he is, that he'd FaceTime me at 5 in the morning just to see how I'm doing."

One month in Europe has made Rodriguez appreciate U.S. college facilities. "Americans can be spoiled," he said. "I would tell college kids now, 'Don't take what you have for granted.' Not everyone goes to the NBA, many of us end up in Europe and South America, and trust me, the facilities are not the same."

Although he still dreams of making the NBA, Rodriguez embraces his opportunity with Cholet.

"You can't convince me that I can't play in the NBA, but I understood that I was against the odds. Chances of me making a team now [are] not very high, realistically. That only motivated me. I've got to take a different path. But economically how I grew up in Puerto Rico, I never imagined I'd be in position to give my kids, my family a lifestyle that I didn't have. I am thankful for every opportunity, because you live and you learn through everything."

Colts Q & A: Meet Erik Swoope, Shaq's biggest fan

Indianapolis Star
Stephen Holder
Sept. 17, 2016

IndyStar Colts Insider Stephen Holder will talk with a member of the team each week for a wide-ranging, offbeat conversation that sheds light on their personality, background and interests.

This week: Tight end Erik Swoope.

Question: You played basketball at the University of Miami, so let's talk hoops. Who was your favorite player as a kid?

Answer: Shaquille O'Neal. I had jerseys and everything. I had his Magic jersey when I was real little. And I remember on my brother's eighth birthday, we surprised him and went to a (Lakers) game. I had the poster. I knew his movies. I've watched every one of them a million times.

Q: Wait, his movies were terrible. You were that big of a fan?

A: Oh, yeah. "Kazaam" was my movie growing up. I would rewind it and watch it again. I loved Shaq and his personality. He was hard to hate because, despite his tough times on the free-throw line, he was an animal. I just respected him. As a kid, when you see somebody that dominant, it's like, you're amazed.

Q: Do you remember your first dunk?

A: Yes. It was a week before my 13th birthday. I was playing in Moreno Valley, Calif., and I was playing in a regional to get to (AAU) nationals. This was in seventh grade. I remember it all. I remember the shoes I was wearing. I remember the jersey. I remember the gym, the basket – everything.

Q: That's a pretty seminal moment for a young basketball player, isn't it?

A: Oh, yeah. So, I had a goal. I had heard that Shaq dunked at 14 and Kobe (Bryant) dunked at 14 and Vince Carter dunked at 14. So, I was like, 'All right, I've got to dunk before 13.' And I dunked a week before I turned 13.

Q: How tall were you then?

A: I was about 6-1. I had a little bounce for a 12-year-old.

Q: Do you remember your best high school game?

A: Yes. (Practice squad safety) Lee Hightower will hate me for this, because he went to Loyola High School. That was Harvard-Westlake's big rival. My senior season – and this is the most storied rivalry in our conference – I had 35 (points) and 15 (rebounds) at home, and we won. Then we went down there and I had 37 and 20. We ran through them. We really beat them down. Those two games were huge. Because at our school, the only thing that mattered was beating Loyola. If we didn't beat them, it was a wasted season.

Q: So, what's the bigger thrill: dunking on someone or catching a touchdown pass?

A: See, I haven't caught a touchdown yet. So I'm not sure. I did get a tackle the other day to get the team going on special teams. I have to say, hearing 60,000 people roar, you don't see 60,000 people at a basketball game. So, it brought me back to some big (basketball) moments. I'll have to get back to you on that one.

Q: Are there any other really good basketball players on the team?

A: I haven't played against any of these guys. But I've heard rumors that Darius Butler is supposed to be really, really talented. I've heard that on many, many occasions. Of course, Joe Reitz is a player.

He played in college. I've shot around with Donte Moncrief and he has a pretty decent shot.

Q: Finally, if you weren't playing football, what do you think you'd be doing?

A: That's something I've been trying to figure out. I was an economics major at the University of Miami. But something I've always been passionate about is medicine. I might be trying to find a way to get into medicine. I spend most of my day with the trainers here, and I'm not hurt. I'm just asking questions. I just like to inquire. I just didn't get a chance to pursue it while I was in school.

Q: What sparked that interest?

A: I think it was just me being hurt as a kid. I had a couple of injuries and I got to learn some things and I was just blown away by how the body works. If you have an ankle injury, it could actually be your back or something else. It just really sparked my interest.

A Closer Look at Miami's 2016-17 Schedule

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 13, 2016

Miami Basketball released its 2016-17 schedule yesterday.

And it has no shortages of challenges.

Fortunately for 'Canes fans, almost all of them will be watchable on major networks, and Coach L and squad return a team that should be able to handle them.

UM gets a National Championship quality Duke team twice this season (1/21 & 2/25), a quality Stanford club OOC, a GW team who beat UVA last season, and also has trips to Louisville and Syracuse in a gauntlet of a schedule.

The Hurricanes will learn early how good freshmen Top 30 prospects Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell are as they take on the Cardinal in the AdvoCare Invitational 11/24.

Potential match-ups with talented clubs like Iowa, Seton Hall, and Florida also loom, should the 'Canes advance.

Down the stretch veterans like Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy will be asked to provide leadership as they finish their schedule with road contests in 3/4 including at UVA and at FSU.

Overall it's a schedule worthy of a team with aspirations of returning to the Sweet 16 or going further.

With a mix of veterans, incoming stars, and proven returning talent like PG Ja'Quan Newton, UM should still be a factor in the ACC and Nationally.

Coach L knows though, they have their work cut out for them:

"The ACC, from top to bottom, is the best basketball conference in the country and will provide our players a tough test every night against the most talented teams in the nation," Whether we are at home or on the road, we will need to play at our best because nearly every night we are playing against nationally-ranked opponents." - Jim Larrañaga

Analyzing the 2016-17 ACC schedule

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Sept. 12, 2016

Conference play for the Hurricanes begins in 2016, not 2017.

Miami, which reached the Sweet 16 last year, hosts its first ACC opponent when North Carolina State comes to town on Dec. 31. That game tips at 4:30 p.m., so everyone will be out in time to party.

This is after a non-conference schedule where Miami won't have to travel much, but looms as super-important for Jim Larrañaga to figure out how to utilize his new group of players. Miami two starters (senior swingman Davon Reed and forward Kamari Murphy) and sixth man Ja'Quan Newton, who is taking over at point guard. UM will need greater contributions from sophomore forward Anthony Lawrence Jr. and center Ebuka Izundu. Larrañaga will also spend the early part of the year figuring out what he has in transfer shooting guard Rashad Muhammad and five-star freshmen Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell and Australian guard Dejan Vasiljevic.

Miami has a tough stretch in January, hitting the road to face Syracuse to open a run of four road games in five outings. The last of those four roadies is Duke on Jan. 21. Miami's first national telecast of the year is North Carolina at home Jan. 28. Miami also plays Duke on CBS Feb. 25, five days after visiting Virginia.

The Hurricanes should have a very good idea of their standing by then.

Reed Ready to Lead Hurricanes in 2016-17 Season

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Sept. 6, 2016

Davon Reed is Miami's leading returning scorer and 3-point shooter.

Reed enters his senior season as the primary leader of the team and someone who carries himself in a professional manner on and off the court.

"The guy who has probably impressed me the most was Davon Reed," said VCU transfer Michael Gilmore. "He seems really professional and sharp. He's very punctual about everything he does. He has a set schedule and time he does things. He acts a certain way and carries himself with a certain class. That was one of the biggest things I've seen out of everybody. It's really giving me a pretty good feel."

Reed, a 6-foot-6 shooting guard from Ewing, N.J., averaged 11.1 points, 4.1 rebounds, and 1.2 assists a game last season while shooting 46.9 percent from the field and knocking down 46 3-pointers starting all 35 games for the 27-8 Hurricanes.

"I think one of the greatest attributes any player can have at any level is consistency of effort and performance of skill and Davon has been very, very consistent throughout his career," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "We hope that he can not only be consistent, but actually elevate his game where he can be an all-conference-caliber player. We think he's capable of that. The challenge for him is can he do it when he has young players around him who are not quite as ready as his teammates were last year."

He is one of five returners from last season and will be counted on to provide more scoring and leadership to a cast of newcomers expected to make an immediate impact.

"I am one of the returning leaders and leading scorers so there's obviously that expectation and we are missing a great deal with Sheldon

(McClellan), Angel (Rodriguez), and Tonye (Jekiri) and even Ivan (Cruz Uceda) being gone so I have to step in that role," Reed said. "I'm not really feeling any pressure with that. It's just my time to step in and be that leader in all angles."

He has always been known as a tireless worker and this offseason is no different.

"It's his senior year, he has to keep trying to get it," sophomore forward Anthony Lawrence said. "He's doing all of the little extra stuff—stuff that the normal person is not doing."

Putting in extra work is something Reed has taken pride in and something that has been instilled within the Hurricanes program in recent years.

"Since I've been here the culture has been to be in the gym on your own time and not just when we practice, but to work on your game outside of team-oriented stuff and perfect your craft," Reed said. "That's been something I've been embracing, not just this summer, but every summer since I've been here. Each summer I've just tried to work harder and harder and add more to game. It's especially important this year because I'm the leader of the team in so many ways and I've got to set that precedent for everybody else and continue to work on my game."

Reed is a solid two-way play who has been working on continuing to be an all-around player.

"Just continuing to sharpen everything whether it be ballhandling, shooting, working on touch around the rim, finishes, everything so I can be a more complete player," Reed said.

The team has resumed workouts after a three-week layoff in August and Reed has liked what he has seen from the team during the offseason.

"Everybody has been getting better," Reed said. "Kamari (Murphy) has been hitting the

jump shot more consistently and been more of a threat offensively. Ja'Quan (Newton) has been looking great. He has been in the gym working with his mid-range game You can see him getting more control with the feel of the game. A lot of people have been working. Rashad (Muhammad) has been looking good. Everybody's been working. I'm feeling really confident with us."

Pick-up games have been competitive between the returners and newcomers.

"Pick-up has been great," Reed said. "High level and high intensity and workouts with Coach L have been good. We've been learning with Coach L there. The biggest thing that I have been happy about is the guys have been competing, even the young guys. There's really no fall-off when it comes to the competition, but we still have got a lot to learn and a lot of things to work on before the season gets here. But we're doing well so far."

Miami is scheduled to begin preseason practices on Oct. 2 in preparation for their Nov. 11 regular season opener.

"My senior year is here and I'm just trying to make it back to the NCAA Tournament," Reed said. "I've already said I don't want to go backwards so that's the goal. Whatever my team needs me to do to help get there, I'm willing to do whether it be score or whatever."

Erik Swoope on verge of being next basketball player-turned-NFL tight end for Colts

ESPN.com
Mike Wells
Sept. 1, 2016

INDIANAPOLIS – Erik Swoope arrived to the Indianapolis Colts in May 2014 as a giant lump of clay that had to be molded into a football player.

Swoope spent the first 22 years of his life playing every sport but football. He had never played at any level, not even Pop Warner football. He attended the University of Miami on a basketball scholarship.

Now, two years later, Swoope is headed into the Colts' final preseason game not worried about doing enough to show the coaching staff he's worthy of being on the practice squad, but rather focused on further locking in his spot as the team's third tight end and becoming the latest basketball-player-turned-NFLer.

"He's gotten better every single week," coach Chuck Pagano said of Swoope ahead of Thursday's preseason finale at Cincinnati. "He gets better every day at practice. He's producing in games. If you look at that position and you look who's there, he's making a case for himself. Not only as a tight end but in special teams, he's doing a nice job."

There was concern over who would be the Colts' third tight end behind Dwayne Allen and Jack Doyle after they decided not to re-sign Coby Fleener in the offseason.

Swoope, who has been active for only one game in his two seasons with the Colts, embraced the challenge and has left little doubt that he belongs on the active roster on weekly basis during the regular season. He has five receptions for 56 yards in the preseason.

"He is a big-body guy, he has a big catch radius, he can run, he can get open and he can separate," Pagano said. "Now it will come down to the heavy-lifting stuff, the running game and being consistent with blocking. He is a determined guy and for never playing football until, I think, this is his third year doing it, he is doing a heck of a job. He just needs to keep getting better."

Swoope didn't take part in organized football growing up because he only wanted to play if he could be on the same team as his friends. But he weighed 50 to 60 pounds more than they did, which meant he could not play in the same league.

Offensive coordinator Rob Chudzinski played a pivotal role in recruiting Swoope to sign with the Colts as an undrafted free agent. Chudzinski played and coached at Miami, and he's also a former tight end. The Colts took a chance on Swoope as a tight end because that position translates from basketball most easily.

Catching the ball, a skill required to play tight end, was something Swoope struggled with early, because he was more worried about doing everything necessary leading up to the moment where the ball was thrown his way, such as getting off the line of scrimmage and running routes.

The 24-year-old has developed in that area and he's added muscle. Swoope's size and athletic ability makes him a nice target in the red zone for quarterback Andrew Luck. He can go up and get the ball in a fashion similar to the way he used to go up and snatch down rebounds on the basketball court. Swoope needs to improve his blocking skills, but he'll also be a key player on special teams this season.

"I'm just out here focusing on getting better because nothing is ever guaranteed," Swoope said. "I knew the opportunity was there. There's still work to be done."

Being on the active roster on a game-to-game basis is the next step in Swoope becoming the latest college basketball player-turned-NFL tight end. San Diego's Antonio Gates and Seattle's Jimmy Graham followed that path. Graham used his fifth year at the University of Miami to play football after playing basketball his first four years at the school.

Former Colts tight end Marcus Pollard played basketball at Bradley University before Indianapolis signed him as an undrafted free agent in 1995, just as they did with Swoope.

"You see the football understanding start to come around where he's doing things that aren't necessarily drawn up the way it is on the play," Chudzinski said of Swoope earlier in training camp. "He's making adjustments that you'd expect from somebody who has played the game quite a bit. I'm really pleased with him in all aspects. He's not just been a pass-catcher, he's blocked, he's pass blocked, he's run blocked and he's improved in all areas so I'm excited about him."

Larrañaga, Staff Wrap Up Busy Recruiting Period

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Aug. 16, 2016

The month of July is a grind for college basketball coaches.

Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga and his staff worked 21 consecutive days between two days a week at UM working with the current players and the other five on the road recruiting over a three-week span.

“With that kind of schedule there is no rest,” Larrañaga said.

Each staff member watched about 30 games over each of the three five-day recruiting evaluation periods.

The full slate of games are combined with a busy travel schedule including multiple flights and rental cars used to get from one tournament to another.

For example Larrañaga spent the first week traveling to Atlanta, driving to Augusta, Ga., flying to Charlotte, N.C. and then driving to Spartanburg, S.C. seeing players participate in all three of the major shoe company (Nike, Under Armour, and adidas) events.

His assistants had a similar schedule.

The second week had his staff in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Va.

Larrañaga spent the final evaluation week in Las Vegas driving to multiple tournaments.

“With those trips you’re constantly on the move and we try to stay in contact with our players so I’m texting them, texting parents, on the phone calling people, and it’s non-stop for 21 consecutive days,” Larrañaga said.

After the evaluation period ended, his staff began the process of trying to get recruits on campus.

“Then the real fun begins now you’ve got to find out of the recruits you looked at and evaluated them to see which ones can help your program, now you have to convince them to come take a visit,” Larrañaga said.

Overall it was a positive month for Miami.

“From our perspective all is well,” associated head coach Chris Caputo said. “It’s difficult. We feel like you’re lucky if you can get someone early and that’s good and then be prepared to go into September, October, and November like we did this year with an understanding of trying to get the best fit which doesn’t always mean getting someone early.

“Also don’t panic if you miss on a couple guys because I think history here has shown you can get a Sheldon (McClellan) or Angel (Rodriguez) in the spring and some different things play out. We got Shane Larkin in August. In some ways a traditional recruiting calendar July is a heavy month of chasing guys around, but when it comes to actually signing those guys things take a lot of twists and turns.”

2017 RECRUITING CLASS

Washington, D.C. Gonzaga four-star point guard Chris Lykes verbally committed to Miami in June. UM was at a number of Lykes’ games following his commitment to have their presence there.

Miami has three more spots open in the 2017 class.

“We have two seniors, one scholarship that we haven’t used, and we get back one scholarship from the NCAA sanctions so we have four scholarships available,” Larrañaga said. “And you have to figure there are over 700 kids transferring every year in all likelihood we could lose one player so we could end up with five more scholarships this season after signing five guys last year.”

Schools are allowed to host 12 players for official visits and players are only allowed to visit five schools.

“To be one of the select five for a high-level recruit is not easy when there’s 40 other schools he’s looking at,” Larrañaga said.

Norcross (Ga.) power forward Lance Thomas is scheduled to visit on Sept. 17. Bishop O’Connell (Va.) center Nate Watson will visit Oct. 8.

Boca Raton St. Andrew’s School three-star shooting guard Anthony Polite and Vermont (Vt.) Academy four-star shooting guard Christian David have announced Miami is in their final five.

Fort Lauderdale Calvary Christian four-star center Victor Uyaelunmo has Miami in his final eight.

Westtown School (Pa.) four-star Brandon Randolph has Miami in his top 12, but Miami is a long shot as Crystal Ball has him pegged for North Carolina.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation period, which is not limited to only July, is a lengthy process that begins as soon as possible for prospective recruits.

“It begins really at an early stage of high school basketball player’s career and even in elementary or junior high,” Larrañaga said. “Players are identified at an early age now because there are scouting services with guys making a living off selling scouting service reports to college teams and they will go to the AAU events for kids that are 12 and under. Even before they get to high school they are being rated. Once you get that scouting report you start communicating—not with the individual himself—but maybe the AAU coach and you get numbers and information on them as to where they’re going to be playing. You build that into your recruiting schedule.”

Larrañaga continued:

“For very college basketball program they have their own philosophy as to when you should begin the process, but for most ACC coaches it’s as soon as you hear about them.”

SOUTH FLORIDA FEATURES TALENTED 2019 DUO

Larrañaga and his staff have made local University School 2019 standouts Balsa Koprivica and Vernon

Carey Jr. a top priority. Both players were recently ranked in the top five in their class (Koprivica No.1 and Carey 4) by 247Sports.

Larrañaga watched Koprivica and Carey at a tournament in April in Indianapolis. He was the only head coach in the country that was there watching them at 8 a.m. on a Saturday morning.

Miami was one of the first to offer both players and they are hoping their early interest and strong following throughout the summer seeing nearly all of their games will pay dividends when they make their decisions.

PROGRAM PERCEPTION IMPROVING

The perception of the Miami basketball program has improved in recent years with the success the Hurricanes have had over the last five years under Larrañaga including an ACC regular season and tournament title, two NCAA tournament appearances advancing to the Sweet 16 both times, and averaging 24 wins a season.

“I think the one thing is if you have a body work to some degree of success of style of play, branding of your head coach, your program, and playing on television a lot—those things are a little bit more tangible when you’re having these discussions with people,” Caputo said. “I think that’s where the great programs throughout the years have been able to create a vision that’s very tangible to recruits like, ‘This is what it would like for you to be a player here. This is how we play. This is where we play. This is what our head coach is about. This is the history of what we’ve done.’”

“I think early on in our tenure although we had a history at George Mason and coach had a history prior to that at Bowling Green and as a successful assistant coach, I think every time you take over it’s sort of a new way to look at particularly with guys who don’t have a lot of a long-term memory. It’s more short-term memory. For a guy who might have seen Shane and Angel they might look at that and say, ‘OK I really know what it would be like to a point guard in that system’ and it becomes more tangible.

“Whether you’re getting more reception from guys that are higher ranked and things like that, I think sometimes that might have to do with location, geography, and timing and things like that. But I think our blue print tries to remain the same, but every year is a little different.”

Despite an increase in interest, the challenges remain the same.

“I think we’ve gotten more interest, but it becomes more challenging because we’re limited to having only 12 players visiting the campus,” Larrañaga said. “If you only have 12 players and have five scholarships like we did this year, it’s hard as heck to go 5 for 12. That’s almost one of every two that visits and when your competition is Duke, North Carolina, Michigan State, Indiana, Kentucky, Florida, Florida State—those are a lot of really good basketball programs and you’re just one of five, six, or seven schools that are really wanting the kid.”

Just a Kid from Miami Gardens: Five-Star Miami Signee Dewan Huell's Path to a McDonald's All-American

RMF Magazine
Jesse Nadelman
Aug. 4, 2016

DEWAN HUELL wasn't always the best player on the court. In fact, at one point Dewan Huell's career didn't involve a court, or a basketball. Long before a trip to Chicago for the McDonald's All-American game, a five-star recruiting rating, and a signed letter of intent to the University of Miami (FL), Huell was a seventh grade football player.

"After I broke my collarbone, my Mom said I never could play football anymore," Huell said. "I didn't want to sit home and do nothing because I knew it would lead to nothing good, so I started playing basketball."

That decision to hang up the cleats for Jordan's would be a decision that would change Huell's life. But the sport transition started off rough.

"I started playing basketball in seventh grade," Huell said. "I wasn't really coordinated and couldn't dunk a basketball. I didn't really have any confidence because I wasn't good enough."

Huell soon went from not dunking to throwing down slams at the United Center in Chicago. But it was a process, to say the least. He needed to be developed and complete the transformation from football to basketball with the help from his personal basketball trainer, Coach Perez.

As time went on, Dewan's game got stronger.

"When I started working with Coach Perez, I started to believe I could be good," Huell said. "When eighth grade year came, I was the best in town. I had a good jump shot, could dribble enough to get around people, could block shots and rebound. It was the first year I dunked in a game."

"Dewan's struggles earlier in his basketball career was his inability to use his size to his advantage," Coach and mentor Jean-Camille Dubuisson said. "When I saw him in seventh grade, I thought he was horrible. He would let 5'3" guys up his chest, grab rebounds over him, and even at times block his shots. But to his credit, every year he has gotten better. The kid is a gym rat."

By the time Dewan Huell reached high school, he was already a starter for legendary head coach Lawton Williams and Miami Norland as just a freshman. But the start at Norland would open a new opportunity, a new challenge, and a new chapter his life.

TALENT you have naturally, but skill is only developed by hours and hours of working on your craft. The storied quote is quite depictive of Dewan Huell. He was born with the height, always one of the tallest players on the court, and from football to basketball he always has had major athleticism.

But the skill that Huell has developed, the skill that made him a five-star recruit with offers from almost every top program—Kansas, North Carolina, FSU, Florida, Louisville, etc. before eventually committing to Jim Larrañaga and Miami—was acquired solely from hours of dedication he put into the game.

"I had to sacrifice a lot of things for basketball," Huell said. "I had to stay focused and not let my surroundings put me in a bad situation. I gave up going out to parties, staying up all night, and clowning off in class. I had to focus in."

During the summer following sophomore year—after he had just won his second state title for

Norland—Huell had just finished a Saturday morning workout with head coach Lawton Williams. A three-hour work out that Dubuisson says, "is grueling. From 7 AM to 10:15 AM."

Most players had left the gym, induced with pain after such a taxing workout.

Dewan Huell isn't like most players.

When Dubuisson showed up to the gym—close to noon—for a workout with his team, Huell was still at gym, nearly two hours after his tough workout with Miami Norland. He then went up to Dubuisson.

"Hey Coach, can I workout with you guys?" Huell asked him.

Dubuisson couldn't believe it. Huell had just gone through a tough workout for three hours, and was still at gym nearly five hours after he had arrived at 7 AM.

"Dewan, you just went through a serious workout with Coach Williams, you're not going to make it through my workout," Dubuisson had answered him.

But once the clock struck noon, Huell was out there with the rest of Dubuisson's players, stretching out along with them. As if he were fresh as walk-on seeing his first action of the year. Because Huell was that fresh, he was always fresh and ready to play, burying the fatigue that most players would let emerge.

The workout went from 12 PM to 3 PM, and Huell didn't let up once. As Dubuisson says, "it's like he had another gear."

But even after another gruesome workout concluded, Huell tuned the gear up one more level. There was an open gym with top high school, college, and professional players from 5 PM until dusk and Huell was still there, as just a rising junior, running the floor even after all of tear his body and taken on in workouts that day.

"The kid impressed me that day. That's when I knew he was special," Dubuisson said.

Because that's what All-American's do. They impress people, they sacrifice, and they work until they can't work no more.

HANDS covering his face, body feeling achy, emotions frozen in shock, Dewan Huell sat down on the bench at Dillard High School. It would be the last time he ever stepped on the court with 'Norland' or 'Vikings' across his chest. His next school basketball game he will be wearing, 'Hurricanes' across his chest. He will be playing in front of thousands of people, and the game will likely be televised on ESPN or FOX Sports Florida.

After capturing the state championship for Miami Norland in his freshman, sophomore, and junior years, Huell's high school career had come to a close in the 7A regional finals against a younger, Dillard team.

"Nobody likes losing," Huell said. "That was the first time my whole high school career where my season ended before a state title. It hurt but Coach Williams told me that night that I had nothing to be ashamed of. I had a great high school career, and accomplished things that most kids never get to accomplish."

But one game doesn't define a career, and such is the case for Huell as a Viking. Right from the start in his freshman year he was a major part in helping Lawton Williams capture three of the legendary coach's six state titles. Even in the final loss to Dillard, Huell had done his part, dropping 18 points on six of thirteen shooting.

"I would say once he gets going he gets going,"

Miami Norland 6'5" guard—Chattanooga commit—David Jean-Baptiste, and a great friend of Huell's said about his dominant play for the Vikings. "He gets his buckets inside early, and then the rest of the game will flow and he'll have a big game."

Over the course of their careers at Norland, Jean-Baptiste and Huell have concreted a close bond, both on and off the court.

"Growing up, I didn't really have a big brother and I didn't know anyone coming into Norland from middle school," Jean-Baptiste said. "These past two years Dewan has been really big on my confidence and believing in me. Even more than myself."

Huell's connection with the program at Norland began back in eighth grade, when Huell met head coach Lawton Williams for the first time. After all, Norland happened to be the school Huell was zoned for, and was a defending state champion and already established as one of the best programs in Dade County history.

The first time the two met would be the start of a forever lasting relationship. A bond between a coach and a player, for the ages.

"He just kept me focused," Huell said on his relationship with Williams. "He helped me out. Not just as a coach, but as a father figure. He always helped me out. Our relationship is great. I call him if I have any type of problems, he tells me what I need to do to correct it basketball wise and off the court."

When Huell first walked through the Miami Norland doors as just a freshman, there was already much expected. He had played phenomenal in his eighth grade season. And besides, anytime there's a 6'8" freshman basketball player, people are going to turn heads.

"[Expectations] were high when he walked in," Lawton Williams said. "But he came here at a time when we had two veteran big men so he could just learn. He grew a lot strength wise and just the knowledge of the game."

Huell's role was secondary his first two years, although still a major one. He played alongside current Florida Gulf Coast point guard Zach Johnson as the two brought home two straight state championships, and top schools like Miami were already showing interest in 6'9" underclassman forward.

"He was getting college interest even just as a freshman," Christina Pierre, Huell's mother, said. "One thing I always let Dewan know when he was young was that there's no 'I' in team so don't let get out of your head just because everyone is looking at you as far as recruiting and college. It's always a team effort. And he just remained focused."

But after his sophomore year, Norland had lost seven players from the previous team—including four starters—which put the pressure on Huell to become the main anchor for the Vikings' program his junior season.

And contrary to previous seasons, the expectations for Norland weren't as high, many stating the loss of too many players as a factor that would yield Norland from capturing their fourth straight title. But what they didn't know, is that Dewan Huell was still there. And Huell would prove those skeptics wrong in a monster eleventh grade season.

"He looked to score more," Williams said of how Huell's game changed into junior year. "We needed

Just a Kid from Miami Gardens: Dewan Huell's Path

(Cont.)

him to, and he was more vocal."

Huell averaged 19.2 PPG and 9.1 RPG as he led Miami Norland to the school's fourth straight state championship, capturing the Miami Herald's 6A-8A Player of the year award, and was named to the All-Dade first team for R.M.F. Magazine and the Miami Herald.

"We were hungry that year because a lot of people slept on us," Huell said. "We wanted it more.

"I knew I had to score more that season, pick up slack myself. So in the off-season before junior year I worked really hard to become more of a leader that season."

He would cap off his phenomenal junior campaign by playing in the Under Armor elite circuit and traveling across the country for travel basketball events in front of college scouts and NBA GMs.

His stock jolted, as Huell was ranked the number 23 prospect in the class of 2016 by ESPN, and deemed a five-star, ranked number 25 by Scout.

"There were a lot of good kids out there that summer and a lot of college coaches and NBA GMs watching," Huell said. "They were valuable experiences that taught me to be a stronger player. I worked a lot in the off-season to get stronger."

Before the loss to Dillard in regionals, Huell had led Norland to the top of the R.M.F. Magazine Respect 25 rankings for most of the season, with wins over Wellington in the Hoop Hall Classic, Chaminade-Madonna, Westminster Academy, Miami Central, and other top teams.

Huell also captured his fourth district title his senior season; he won one in each of his high school years.

It may have been the last result of his high school career, but the loss to Dillard won't be what people remember of Dewan Huell's memorable career at Miami Norland. A legendary one, and as Lawton Williams said, "I've never coached a player more dominant."

* * *

SINCE freshman year, the Miami Hurricanes had been in hot pursuit of the local 6'10" star Huell. Jim Larrañaga and his staff could see he was special, and he was right in their backyard.

Capturing the prized five-star, however, would be challenging. Bill Self (Kansas), Leonard Hamilton (Florida State), Roy Williams (North Carolina), and other top programs and coaches were all in on the Miami Norland product.

But, the Hurricanes were active. Lawton Williams says Miami would come to the school, call Dewan regularly, and they worked hard at getting him.

That persistence paid off.

On Wednesday November 18th 2015, Huell committed to Miami.

"I'm most looking forward to playing in the ACC," Huell said. "It's the best conference there is in college basketball right now. I want to go in there and win immediately."

"When we did go and visit they did show a lot of the opportunities he will have to further his career," Pierre said on her son's choice to go to Miami. "We really enjoyed the program they did offer and the things that they did show us, but at the end it was Dewan's decision and that's where he wanted to go."

For the Hurricanes, the decision echoed a message Jim Larrañaga stressed at his introductory press

conference back in 2011, about the importance of recruiting in Florida. He had struck gold in his own backyard.

For Huell, it was about not only staying home and continuing his legacy in the 305, but it was about the chance for the Hurricanes' coaching staff to develop him, and help him reach his goal of playing in the NBA.

"Miami is my hometown team," Huell said. "They've got a lot of good recruits coming in at different positions and I'd like the chance to be apart of a great, young team. They fit my style of play, it's just a perfect match."

Huell's journey won't come to a halt just getting to Coral Gables. Huell marks the first five-star recruit Miami—still managing to reach the Sweet 16 in two of the last four years—has landed since 2008. Huell looks to take the Hurricanes to the next level, and the Miami staff couldn't be more excited for his arrival.

"I like everything about his game," Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga told USA Today High School Sports. "What separates [Huell] from other big guys is that he's terrific defensively. Most high school players who are highly recruited are offensive-minded and have a lot to learn defensively when they get to college. That's not true with Huell."

And at Miami, maybe Huell will finally earn some respect, something he and many close to him feel he is still yearning to receive.

"My hardest moments in basketball are living up to the hype of my name," Huell said. "I will always have doubters, but it's just that much better to prove them wrong."

Those doubters have been there since he walked through the Norland doors as a 6'8" ninth grader, and they will follow him to Coral Gables as a 6'10" five-star All-American.

"The only struggle I see for [Dewan] now is that people don't give him the proper respect," Dubuisson said. "Even with him being a McDonald's All-American people still question his abilities. Why? I don't know.

"He's been a four-year starter at a powerhouse in Miami Norland, he's won a state championship three out of four years in high school, he's played for Team USA, he's been a first team all-county selection, he's been coached by Lawton Williams—arguably the best coach in Dade County history—what else do you want from the kid? Oh, did I forget to add he's going to the University of Miami for free?"

Huell will hear these doubts the rest of his career. LeBron James still hears them, there's even still doubts about Michael Jordan. But it is those doubters that will fuel him as he continues his path, the next stop Coral Gables.

From the day he will step on the University of Miami campus—as he did at Miami Norland—Huell's legacy will continue as the next hometown hero in the 305.

* * *

FOOTBALL ended for Dewan Huell from an injury, and one night it seemed like Huell's promising basketball career would vanish the same way.

In eighth grade—Huell's first full-year playing basketball—Christina Pierre got a call one night from Lawton Williams, saying that Dewan had broken his finger. Pierre rushed to the gym, picked up Huell, and immediately drove him to the emergency room.

"That's it, you're done playing basketball," Pierre had said to him, recalling in the moment the broken

collarbone injury that forced Dewan to give up football. "I'm not letting you get injured anymore."

But unlike how the collarbone injury went down, Huell wouldn't give in to his mother's wishes this time. Pierre remembers him telling her about his NBA dream, and how this was just the start.

"I'm going to make it pro, Mom," Huell had told her. "I can't give up now. If LeBron James and Dwyane Wade can do it, so can I."

This time, Pierre gave in, and allowed him to continue playing.

"It was certainly close," Pierre said. "I was close to making him quit in that moment."

Nearly five years later, Huell was still playing basketball. And he was sitting on the couch with Pierre watching ESPN, waiting for the participants in the 2016 McDonald's All-American game to be announced.

And then there it was. Huell's name was announced.

The same kid that had just started playing the game in seventh grade, and called himself 'uncoordinated' at that age, was playing in a game with the 24 best high school basketball players in the nation.

"It was a great feeling," Huell said. "Not too many top players in Miami have ever gotten elected in the McDonald's All-American game. That was a great feeling, I mean to be apart of the 1% that got elected, that's a blessing right there."

Just getting his name announced, would give his mother chills.

"It was amazing," Pierre said. "Only 1% of players do get elected for the game, and Dewan has worked really hard throughout his high school career to get there. It was just a thrill for me, even just watching him get nominated."

As great as Huell and Pierre's memory of Dewan getting elected was, the experience at the All-American game would be even better.

For Huell, meeting the other top players in nation, playing on the court at the United Center on ESPN, was surreal.

"The game was amazing," Huell said. "Playing on national T.V. with all the great players and those activities they had us doing, it was great. Having us going to the Ronald McDonald house to give back to the kids was cool. It was a great feeling just to be there. There was a great vibe, and everybody had a lot of fun."

As for Pierre, just watching her son throughout the events were moments she will never forget.

"Just sitting in the stands was a thrill," Pierre said. "Throughout the whole process, I mean it was stressful because there were different scouts coming at me and calling me so it was kind of stressful, but I remained humble, just enjoyed the experience that doesn't happen often, and had fun."

And so as the McDonald's All-American game concluded, Huell's high school career did too. A remarkable one, to say the least, had concluded.

It's a good thing Huell hung up his football cleats in seventh grade for Jordan's. The first time Huell stepped on the court would be the start. The start of a Miami Garden products' stupendous basketball path.

A path, and a career, that is just getting started.

After summer workouts, still plenty of questions for 'Canes hoops team

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Aug. 1, 2016

Like most college basketball coaches, Jim Larrañaga is ready for a little bit of a breather.

For him, there hasn't been much time to catch a breath since the Hurricanes' season ended in March with a Sweet 16 loss to eventual national champion Villanova. There have been off-season conditioning programs, recruiting trips and summer workouts to keep him busy -- and help him begin to gauge where his Hurricanes will be come next season.

Miami will find itself in some kind of rebuilding mode with three of its top players and two of its leading scorers -- Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez, and Tonye Jekiri -- graduated. So this summer, much of Larrañaga's efforts have centered on working to continue putting together a team he thinks will be able to compete in the ACC.

Back for the Hurricanes this year will be Kamari Murphy, who was, at times, one of the strongest defenders Miami had on the floor. Guard Ja'Quan Newton, who earned praise as one of the better "Sixth Man" players in the country, returns and is ready to take on a bigger role as point guard. Davon Reed, who started all 35 games last season, is back too. And incoming freshmen Dewan Huell, Bruce Brown and Dejan "DJ" Vasiljevic helped give the Hurricanes one of their best recruiting classes in program history.

So while Larrañaga isn't quite ready to name a starting five yet (and who could blame him?), he feels like the Hurricanes -- who will run a new offense this season -- will still be competitive. And before he went off to a well-earned vacation, he sat down with local reporters and shared some of his thoughts on where the Hurricanes stand now. Here they are, in his own words:

On what the team has done since the season ended: "I think we've had a productive summer with our veterans being here almost the entire summer and then the freshmen joining them in the month of July. I think, from the progress that I see in the weight room, we're heading in the right direction. The weight room is very, very significant to us. How strong you are really determines how well you're able to battle for position on the floor, especially near the basket where the game is won.

We have a lot of young guys. I just looked at their numbers for the NBA bench press test and that was something that we did when they first got here, for the freshmen, that we've been doing for years for all of our players. I like the improvement I see. Are we where we need to be at this early stage? The answer is no. We've got to get stronger, we've got to be able to battle for position on the floor, especially to rebound the basketball at a high level. We've also worked diligently on ball skills, some very, very simple things. Fundamentals that we expect all of our players to know, some of them know and some of them don't know. And to teach them what is correct and what is expected is easy. What is difficult is to learn it. That takes time. So while they're working on getting stronger, they're working on becoming more skilled athletes. I like the work ethic in the weight room, on the court, I like that they're working hard in the classroom while they're here. I like that they're engaging with the community. We have our Jim Larrañaga summer basketball camp and the players are in there, working with those young kids and getting to know them. Those kids are the fans of the future for our Hurricanes basketball program, so

it's been a good summer."

On whether veterans Davon Reed, Kamari Murphy and Ja'Quan Newton have met expectations:

"Our success in the last several years has been based on our ability to put experienced players out on the court who have learned what it takes to win at this level. Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy are our most experienced players. You can add Anthony Lawrence to that group as another player who we feel we can definitely count on.

"I also have high expectations for Ebuka Izundu, who I see has a great deal of potential, but he hasn't realized that potential under game conditions yet. We also have a player, Rashad Muhammad, who came here at 157 pounds and as of Friday, weighed 180. We see the improvement in his maturity. Hopefully, with the addition of our freshmen, we'll be able to eventually put together a talented, experienced team, a well-balanced team of perimeter and frontcourt play on the court."

Comparing this summer to others:

"One of the things about this summer that is similar to the first summer I came is a lot of new faces. When I first came, I didn't know any of the players and neither did any of my coaches, except what we saw on video and what we saw on video was what things needed to be changed, what things needed to be emphasized, what would be our priorities going forward. With having only 10 scholarship players available right now to play the season and half of them have never worn a Miami uniform before, the challenge is to get the guys that have never played for Miami before up to speed with the guys who have competed at a very high level and reached the Sweet 16 last year. We've got a ways to go."

On Ja'Quan Newton's development:

"I think Ja'Quan has done a good job. I don't think we'll know how good until actually November rolls around. One of the challenges for him is to take on much more of a leadership role. It's not that it's easy, but it's easier when you're the sixth man, you come in and play as hard as you can and play as well as you can, which he did very, very well. That's different than being the guy. You're totally in charge as the point guard and you've got to be directing traffic from the start of the game to the end of the game and you've got to be doing it every day in practice so when the games occur, you've prepared your team very well. He has to be like a coach on the floor. He's the floor general."

Is that maturity coming through? That leadership?

"I would say I'm seeing it at times. Not as often, not as consistent as we'd like it, but he is making a transition, really from being a scoring guard to being a point guard. Now, as a point guard, you still score -- Angel Rodriguez was our second-leading scorer, Shane Larkin was our leading scorer -- but there's another category for them to be very aware of and that is that leadership of distributing the ball and getting others involved in the game. The better you do that, the better you'll be playing."

Is anyone pushing him in practice?

"The guy that I think has made his presence known, almost from day one, is DJ Vasiljevic. He can play the 1 or 2, he's matched up with Ja'Quan, he's played with Ja'Quan and I very much like the way they've supported each other. I texted with Ja'Quan one day and asked him how the games were and who he played with and he raved about DJ and how much he felt like he was helping him. I texted DJ an entirely different question and he texted me back, 'I think I'm doing

better. Ja'Quan is really helping me.' When you see players complimenting each other during the summer time, that's a very good sign."

On Anthony Lawrence:

Amp probably has as challenging a role as Ja'Quan does because the way I see Amp is he's a versatile guy and he has to have the ability to play both the 3 and the 4 for us. As a 3 man, he becomes much more of a guard, almost like a point guard. As a 4 man, he's got to be able to guard bigger guards and rebound the ball, so, in a sense, he's got to be able to play all five positions on the court. He's capable of doing it physically, but it's a major challenge for any player mentally. For him, he's working at that. I think it was one of the reasons why, as a freshman, he was a little inconsistent. We asked him to do too much by learning so many positions on the court.

On Ebuka Izundu, Rodney Miller and Dewan Huell -- and what he wants to see emerge at the center position:

"First of all, matchups are so important, the 4 and 5 are identical positions and we'll be making our decisions for those guys on who they should guard. Last year, for example, we used Anthony Lawrence to guard [Villanova's Daniel Ochefu] in the NCAA Tournament. We asked him to guard the 5 man on several occasions because he's very strong and he's very crafty as a defender. He's actually better guarding post players than he is perimeter players. Dewan, on the other hand, is not as strong as Anthony is right now, but working toward that. We have to figure out when those two are in the game together, who guards the 4 and who guards the 5? We're going to be constantly quizzing ourselves as to how do we match up properly defensively and how do we utilize their skills offensively. And from an offensive standpoint, we've already planned on using an offense we've not used before."

On whether the mindset is different when you have a young team vs. a veteran team:

"Whether you're a veteran team like the Shane Larkin team, when Shane Larkin and Tonye Jekiri were the only freshman and sophomores on the team and everybody else was a junior or senior, it's how you blend those two guys in. They were obviously two key components in our run to the ACC championship, regular-season and tournament championship. This year, we have five veteran players and five newcomers that are eligible to play in games. And they've got to blend themselves. We don't know quite frankly at this early stage who'll be the starting five or the guys off the bench who rotate in. It takes a team effort to really have great results and great success. So whether a guy is starting and playing 30 minutes a game or coming off the bench and playing 8 or 10, his role is important. Our job as coaches is to find the right role for them. Some guys might be ideal for starting jobs, other guys might be ideal for coming off the bench. Finding out which those are is the real challenge."

Larrañaga encouraged by Hurricanes' summer progress

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Aug. 1, 2016

Asked for a summer "State of the Union address," Jim Larrañaga opened with this:

"I think we've had a productive summer with our veterans being here almost the entire summer, and the freshmen joining them in the month July. I think the progress I've seen in the weight room, we're heading in the right direction."

He's encouraged by how they're playing in front of the basket, "where the game is won." They're working on ball skills. If he was rolling out a starting lineup tomorrow ... well, he's glad he doesn't have to answer that question.

Larrañaga gave reporters an update on his team, with summer workouts in full swing and the start of the season more than three months away:

* Replacing guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan and center Tonye Jekiri won't be easy, but Larrañaga will lean on veterans Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy, and hope Ja'Quan Newton continues to develop into a point guard. "Our success in the last several years has been based on our ability to put experienced players out on the court who have learned what it takes to win at this level," Larrañaga said. "Ja'Quan, Davon and Kamari are our most experienced players and you can add Anthony Lawrence as another player to that group we feel we can definitely count on."

* Newton, who shined as a sixth man last year, has a full plate. He needs to improve his outside shooting, cut down on his turnovers, and involve his teammates. The leadership is perhaps

his biggest challenge. "I'm seeing it at times," Larrañaga said. "Not as often, not as consistent as we'd like it. ... It's easier when you're the sixth man. You just come in and play as hard as you can, as well as you can, which he did very, very well."

* With regard to pushing Newton's development, Larrañaga said freshman Dejan "D.J." Vasiljevic "has made his presence known, almost from day one. ... I very much like the way they've supported each other." Vasiljevic can play on or off the ball, but profiles as a point guard. There's a good chance he could be Newton's backup.

* He wasn't asked about him Monday, but Larrañaga has been laudatory of freshman Bruce Brown, who has been a tough competitor in practices. Expect Brown to have a major role as an aggressive 2-man.

* The versatile Lawrence will play the 3, where he will be a large, ball-handling guard, and the 4, where he will guard post players and rebound. "In a sense, he's got to be able to play all five positions," Larrañaga said, praising him for being strong and crafty enough to guard bigger men. "He's capable of doing it physically, but it's a major challenge for any player mentally." Larrañaga said some of Lawrence's freshman inconsistency to being asked to train at multiple positions.

* Larrañaga has "high expectations" for center Ebuka Izundu, who "has a great deal of potential, but he hasn't realized that potential under game conditions yet." Larrañaga has raved about the 6-10 lefty's athleticism and offensive gifts.

* Without an experienced center like Jekiri, Larrañaga will use a variety of players depending on matchups. Izundu, Murphy, Lawrence, plus freshmen Dewan

Huell and Rodney Miller can play there. "Dewan is not as strong as Anthony is right now, but is working toward that," Larrañaga said. "We have to figure out when those two guys are in the game together, who guards the 4 and who guards the 5. We're going to constantly be quizzing ourselves as to how do we match up properly defensively and how do we utilize their skills offensively"

* Larrañaga mentioned that UM will use "an offense we have not used before." No details, of course.

* Guard Rashad Muhammad is now (6-foot-6 and) 180 pounds, Larrañaga said, after arriving from San Jose State two years ago at 157 pounds. Larrañaga said Muhammad "can shoot" (37.8 percent on threes at SJSU, but consistently sinking deep threes in practice), but cautioned that games are different than practices. It seems that at worst, Muhammad will be a shooter coming off the bench.

* A key for Murphy, a skilled defender and rebounder, is foul shooting. Improving his 55.8 percent clip at the line will help keep him on the court at the end of games.

* With the July recruiting period over, Larrañaga and his wife, Liz, will try to get a vacation to Sarasota, where they have a home (Dick Vitale is a neighbor). He swims, he rides his bike – and watches "a lot of video there," he said. "It's been my type of vacation for 45 years."

Freshman G Vasiljevic Impressing During Summer Workouts

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Aug. 1, 2016

Dejan Vasiljevic went toe-to-toe with some of the best high school prospects in the country.

Vasiljevic dropped a game-high 29 points with six 3-pointers for Australia at the FIBA U17 World Championships two years ago in the championship game falling to the United States featuring Kansas' Josh Jackson and Malik Newman, and Duke's Jayson Tatum and Harry Giles.

Playing at the international level has given Miami's 6-foot-2 freshman guard confidence he can continue to be successful against some of the nation's best.

"It's been surreal to represent your country," Vasiljevic said. "It just gives you different types of games and you have to prove how you can be better than those guys in the world."

Since Vasiljevic arrived at Miami in May he has impressed his teammates and coaches with his shooting ability and work ethic as he works towards a spot in the rotation this season.

"He is a very skilled basketball player," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "D.J., I don't know for sure, but I'm guess he's been at his height and weight for two or three years so he's kind of mature physically and he's also mature in terms of basketball skill and IQ, which means he's going to be able to contribute right away."

"How much actually depends on two things—one, what position he plays best and where we need him the most; and the second is who does he play well with. What we've seen so far I think he's a good combination with everybody. That gives me the flexibility of playing a number of different combinations. We've got flexibility at the one and two."

Senior guard Davon Reed likes what he sees from Vasiljevic:

"D.J. has been impressive more and more each time he steps on the court. He's a worker. I've been in the gym with him a lot this summer. He's been working on his game and he can shoot the heck out of the ball. He'll definitely be able to help us."

Fellow freshman Rodney Miller was surprised with Vasiljevic's ability.

"I didn't know much about him coming from Australia and we clicked automatically—a great dude and a heck of a shooter," Miller said. "Just a really cool guy to be around."

BACKGROUND

Vasiljevic's parents are from the former Yugoslavia and moved to Canada where Vasiljevic was born in Calgary.

The family moved to Australia when Vasiljevic was six years old.

"I'm a bit multi-cultural," said Vasiljevic, who is 19 years old.

Growing up he watched a lot of basketball—both NBA and college—after a brief stint with soccer. He's a fan of Kobe Bryant and the late Drazen Petrovic, a European star who played five seasons in the NBA.

"Just the way he was a natural scorer," Vasiljevic said of Petrovic, who also hailed from Yugoslavia. "He has that feel for the game with ease and how hard he had to work to get to where he was. Unfortunately he passed away young, but he's probably one of the best shooters ever. Growing up my dad showed me a lot of film of him and said if you want to be as good as him you have to work hard. He showed me tapes of how hard he worked and how many shots he put up in the gym. He was a gym rat."

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Vasiljevic has been adjusting to being in a different part of the world in search of furthering his basketball career.

"It's been good," Vasiljevic said. "I'm just adapting to the culture and the lifestyle and being away from home. I'm further away than the rest of these other guys, but I've adapted well. Homesickness kicked in a little bit the past couple weeks, but that's just natural when you've been away from home. But I feel I've done well and the coaches have helped."

It took some time getting used to a new location, but he has been adapting.

"The first couple of weeks were a bit of a maze to find my classroom and where I was supposed to go, but the team is unbelievable and my teammates take good care of me," Vasiljevic said. "I'm enjoying the atmosphere and I love it."

He visited Miami during the recruiting process and was happy with the atmosphere the school and program provided.

"They just talked about what they can offer to me both educationally and as a basketball player as well," Vasiljevic said. "When I came on visit I felt very comfortable as well. It was a family environment and they took good care of me. Everyone was looking out for me and I felt it was the right choice even though it is further away from home."

He appreciated the UM coaches' approach when recruiting him.

"During the recruiting process the coaches weren't nagging me and weren't talking about other colleges and how I wouldn't fit there," Vasiljevic said.

SUMMER WORKOUTS

Vasiljevic has been participating in the offseason program for nearly three months and has been making strides in his game.

"I feel I am doing well," he said. "Coaches and my teammates are happy with the way I am progressing. I feel I have done a good job of taking care of my body and getting into the weight room and practicing hard."

The team has been having two hours of practice a week during the summer in addition to work outside of the allotted time period.

"Everyone competes here," Vasiljevic said. "It doesn't matter if you're playing pick-up or an actual game, everybody wants to win. Athletes are different here—they're more athletic and quicker than you and if you're a little smaller you have to beat them at your own game. I'm not the quickest or the most athletic so I have to use my smarts and my IQ to try to do the best I can to beat them."

Teammates have praised Vasiljevic's work ethic and the extra time he has been putting in on his own.

"I try to get in the gym even if we have practice and in the weight room," Vasiljevic said. "On the weekends I try to get extra work done. You have to earn these guys' respect so I just try to be a professional. This is my job now and I'm trying to get where I want to get which is the NBA or play somewhere professionally in Europe so I'm looking to impress everyone."

Vasiljevic has primarily been a shooting guard throughout his basketball career, but has been playing some point guard since his arrival at Miami to help spell Ja'Quan Newton.

"I'm trying to adapt to being more of a point guard and leading a team. I'm trying to learn from Ja'Quan and Davon (Reed) who has been here the longest and they have experienced everything. I'm working on my ballhandling and the IQ of the game."

BREAK

The team will have a break from offseason workouts from Aug. 5-22 before resuming their two hours a week.

Talented Freshman Huell Working Towards a Big Year

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 25, 2016

Dewan Huell walked into a gym over the weekend and slapped hands with a number of high school players, who were happy to see him.

Huell, a Norland High product, is a big deal in the community.

He is also a big deal at the University of Miami.

Huell, a four-star recruit and 29th overall prospect according to the 247Composite, is the first McDonald's All-American to attend Miami since Darius Rice in 2000.

"Being a McDonald's All-American everyone is going to look to you to having a big freshman year," Huell said. "Behind that is a bunch of work—work you have to put in."

Huell enrolled at Miami last month and is looking to put the high school All-American label behind him.

"It's the college level now so that don't matter," he said. "That was just a high school achievement. It doesn't matter now."

Huell, who stands 6-foot-10, is a skilled big man who can knock down shots in addition to finishing around the basket. He has been concentrating on improving his ballhandling ability during summer workouts.

"I think Dewan has a lot of physical talent," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He can run. He can jump. He's quick laterally. Dewan is someone who has won a lot so he's really competitive and wants to win.

"The difference between high school and college is the physicality of the game and the guys you're going against are not only as tall as you are, which is different than high school where he was normally the tallest guy on the court every night, but not only are they as tall as you some of them are taller and almost all of them are stronger so his biggest advancement has got to be in strength and conditioning—I don't mean conditioning running he's going to be able to do that. I mean in fighting for low-post position in conditioning yourself when someone is trying to push you out and not letting them. It's very, very hard that's 6-10, weighs 215-220 pounds and if he pushed that hard in high school it would have been a foul every time."

Huell has also been adding strength and is up to 221 pounds—seven pounds heavier than he arrived—with a goal of being 230-235 for the season.

"We're working on a lot on our body and I've been adjusting," Huell said. "I've got to get in condition. I'm getting real tired easy."

Summer workouts and pick-up games have been an adjustment for the talented freshman.

"It's a big change from the high school level point blank period," Huell said. "All the guys are stronger, faster, well-coached and well-skilled. I've just got to get conditioned well in the weight room."

Huell is part of a four-man freshman class that ranked 14th nationally.

"As a group we're pretty good," Heull said. "We've got a lot of work to put in so we can be one of the best freshman classes. We all want to go out there and

perform good to help the team out."

Four-star shooting guard Bruce Brown (Boston, Mass.), three-star center Rodney Miller (New York, N.Y.), and three-star guard Dejan Vasiljevic (Australia) round out the freshman class.

"I like D.J. a lot," Huell said. "He's a real good shooter and a real good passer. Bruce is real physical. Rodney is big and physical too and takes up a lot of space. I'm pretty cool with all of them. They're good guys."

Huell believes the Miami program is a "a top school and on the rise."

The Hurricanes will be looking for a big year this year according to Huell:

"We're an ACC championship team and a Final Four team. We all want to win and we all want to do that by any means necessary."

Ranking the Top 25 Freshmen of the 2016-17 Season

Bleacher Report

Kerry Miller

July 5, 2016

Bruce Brown, Miami

Even with the loss of Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, Miami still has quality backcourt options in Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed and San Jose State transfer Rashad Muhammad. Brown (a combo guard) will be a welcome addition and may well be handed a starting job, but he isn't nearly the "must have" addition to this roster that the majority of the players in the top 25 are on their respective teams.

Freshman Huell Not Shy About NBA Aspirations

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 29, 2016

Dewan Huell is working towards reaching the NBA.

Miami's 6-foot-10 athletic freshman has been working towards that goal since he arrived on campus last month and does not plan on being in college for the duration.

"I'm not going to rush it, but I'm trying to get out of here as soon as possible," Huell said.

Huell knows reaching his goal won't be easy and he must improve.

"It's going to take work, determination, and dedication," he said.

One of the areas he needs to improve is his strength, which has been a point of emphasis. He arrived at UM at 214 pounds and is already up to 221 with the goal of being 230-235 for the season.

"That's going to be the difference between how long I'm here--the quicker I get stronger," Huell said.

Huell pays close attention to his improvements in the weight room.

"I look at myself every day," he laughed.

Huell has also been working on his game—two hours a week with the team and more time on his own—during the summer.

"I'm doing a lot of individual things like spending a lot of extra time in the weight room and gym workouts working on my ballhandling and shooting," he said.

He's hoping to develop his game like his two favorite NBA players.

"I like watching Anthony Davis play and Lamarcus Aldridge," Huell said. "I like their games. They're patient. Real good inside and outside scorers and mid-range."

Huell is a local South Florida product who starred at Norland High School winning three state titles and was named a McDonald's All-American—the Hurricanes' first in 16 years.

Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga wants Huell to focus on being successful at the college level.

"What he has to learn and all of our freshmen have to learn is how I develop the skills you need to play in college," Larrañaga said. "And if you get good at that, then how do you develop the skills to even play at the next level? We always start out with those very basic things."

Teaching fundamentals is something the UM staff focuses on with the freshmen.

"With Dewan we're starting, like we do with all of our freshmen, with basic fundamentals," Larrañaga said. "Things that you might assume all players should know and be able to do, but there's a huge difference in doing it at the high school level and doing it at the college level."

Two fundamental skills the staff will be looking for Huell to improve on is his dribbling and passing.

"Dewan at his size one of the things we will be working with him on is his dribbling and passing skills because we don't want him turning the ball over," Larrañaga said. "We don't want any of

our players turning the ball over, but it's more common for a freshman to turn it over because when he gets bumped and pushed he thinks it's a foul because it was a foul in high school and in college it's just play on."

Huell was a four-star recruit according to the 247Composite. He picked Miami over offers from a number of schools including Florida State and Mississippi State.

"Comfortability," Huell said as a deciding factor. "Coach L develops players and I trusted him to do that with me."

How Jim Larrañaga turned Miami on to Hurricanes basketball

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

June 7, 2016

Like the Richts, Jim Larrañaga and his wife, Liz, were empty nesters when they came to Miami. And the coach was taking over a program with a bit of an attendance issue.

When he took over in 2011, he read an interview with outgoing coach Frank Haith. One thing Haith mentioned sticks with Larrañaga today.

“He said no one knew him, not even the people in his own building, meaning the BankUnited Center,” Larrañaga said. “They didn’t recognize him. He thought people didn’t care about basketball, that no one knew he was the basketball coach. I interpreted that as, well, he must not be out in the community much. Everywhere I’ve been, people recognize me.”

That’s not an accident, and it didn’t happen overnight.

As he detailed in a conversation with the Post last month at the ACC spring meetings in Amelia Island, Larrañaga set out to speak to board of trustee meetings, faculty functions, corporate events, chamber of commerce meetings, basketball clinics, community centers. His fantasy camp for adults, his youth camps for young players, serving food in the dorms and greeting students waiting in line for a game — everything is an opportunity to connect, to “make them feel a part of your program,” he said.

Grabbing people’s attention in Miami, getting them to come to games, is more than winning.

It’s talking shop with high school coaches, including those who may never produce

a Miami-caliber player. It’s taking a few minutes to chat in the hallway when noticing a familiar face (or 90 minutes over two days when an inquiring reporter shows up). It’s doing lunch, as Larrañaga recently did, with a friend of a friend, a local builder worth “in the neighborhood of \$3-4 billion,” sharing stories with him, inviting him to a game.

“That’s work,” said Larrañaga, 66. “It’s fun for me – I enjoy getting to know people – but I also see it as part of my responsibility as head coach of the University of Miami to cultivate people to support the program.

“Some schools look at it very differently. Some coaches don’t feel like it’s their responsibility to generate enthusiasm for their home games because they’ve got a built-in fanbase that’s been there for decades. There are teams in our league that have been selling out since the ‘60s. Not us.”

Last year, they did. Season tickets sold out for the first time in UM’s history – any sport, not just basketball.

Support from the athletics department — UM has upgraded the BUC and greatly improved the technology as well as the recruiting and operating budgets available to the basketball team — is a major part of that. Winning of course, is another. The Hurricanes have been to the Sweet 16 twice in the last four seasons. But part of it is Larrañaga allowing national TV’s cameras into his locker room, and having no problem hamming it up if the setting allows, showing his personality.

“I get emails,” he said, smiling as he recalled one received after UM lost to Villanova in the Sweet 16. “I got one from a fan who has hamsters as his pets. He

names them after his favorite sports figures.” One of them hamsters, light brown in color, is named Coach L.

The Larrañagas don’t have any pets themselves (their Schnauzer/Poodle mix, Simon, died 20 years ago at age 14). They live in a gated Coral Gables community, and when they moved there they felt at home “immediately.” That wasn’t the case when Larrañaga took his first head coaching job at Bowling Green in 1986.

“We were Yankees,” he said. “We were outsiders. We weren’t from the Midwest. It took us a long while before I felt like we were accepted. I felt like when we left, there were still a lot of people who didn’t accept us.”

He found acceptance — and success — at George Mason, where he integrated into the community long before he became a national figure during their 2006 Final Four run. Like Richt, who was beloved in Athens, Ga., Larrañaga was wary of leaving it behind. “I didn’t want to give that up. The people were so nice,” he said.

But “even in the first months” at Miami, “everyone was so friendly and nice we felt like we belonged.”

Larrañaga remembers Muhammad Ali, recalls locker room shuffle

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

June 4, 2016

One of the most enduring images of the 2013 NCAA Tournament – the one in which the Hurricanes made their first Sweet 16 appearance under men’s basketball coach Jim Larrañaga – was the post-game locker room celebration after Miami beat Illinois to earn that coveted berth.

As he walked off the court after that intense 63-59 win, Larrañaga, who is rarely at a loss for words, struggled with the message he’d deliver to his players in the locker room.

Then, inspiration struck, and Larrañaga invoked the name of Muhammad Ali, who died late Friday.

“Every timeout, I kept repeating the same words, ‘You have to fight. We’re in a fight. You have to fight like a champion,’” Larrañaga recalled Saturday. “As I headed to the locker room, I asked myself, ‘What do I say to the team? What’s the message? And as I walked through the locker room door, I started to say to myself, ‘Of course! Muhammad Ali, the greatest fighter of all time.’ That’s when I said to them, ‘I asked you guys to fight and who did I see out there but Muhammad Ali’ and I did my version of the Ali Shuffle.”

That celebratory moment was shown far and wide throughout coverage of the 2013 tournament and on the day after Ali’s death, Miami’s basketball program paid tribute to Ali, sharing that video one more time on Twitter with a brief message of condolence.

And like so many in sports and beyond on Saturday, Larrañaga paid tribute

not just to Ali’s accomplishments in the ring, but his societal impact during a turbulent time, a time during which the boxer refused to be inducted into the U.S. Army and was convicted of draft evasion, stripped of his heavyweight title and was banned from boxing for three years.

“He believed in his faith he couldn’t go against his beliefs. He believed that what he was doing was right and it was amazing,” Larrañaga said. “He lost the better part of his career, he lost millions and millions of dollars and he challenged the establishment. He challenged the boxing world. He challenged the political world. He challenged the civil rights world. And after years of battling, I think he earned the respect of so many people not only in this country, but around the world for fighting for his beliefs. ... His conviction and commitment to those beliefs, I think, is the greatest example of anyone in my lifetime.”

Larrañaga shared Saturday that he had the opportunity to be at a Best Buddies charity event with one of his heroes in recent years, but the normally outgoing coach was in too much awe to introduce himself to the legendary boxer – a fact that would probably surprise those who know Larrañaga well.

“When I saw him, I couldn’t believe it. I was in awe of him as an icon. I couldn’t speak. I didn’t even have the courage to go up to him and say hello or shake his hand,” Larrañaga said. “That’s the only time our paths crossed and it was briefly.”

That moment aside, Larrañaga knows his one little tribute to Ali – captured on film and shared during one of the most significant moments in his tenure at Miami – will live on, particularly for college basketball fans in Coral Gables

and beyond.

And the coach is perfectly fine with that, considering what Ali meant to boxing and the world beyond.

“I think he’s the greatest underdog to ever achieve the success and respect that he would eventually earn because of the kind of man he was,” Larrañaga said. “He was the underdog against the United States justice system. You know how they say you can’t fight city hall? That expression? Well, this wasn’t city hall. This was the national government, the national justice system and they put all their strength and influence behind prosecuting a man basically for his beliefs. ... And his ability to create interests in the boxing profession is beyond marketing. I mean, he just talked about how great he was and how pretty he was and you couldn’t take your eyes off of him. Then when he converted to Islam, he really created a tremendous political and professional obstacle for himself to overcome. And he never wavered in his beliefs. I was really just in awe of that.”

Cavs' Jones on Six Straight Finals, Leadership, Miami Roots

NBPA
Jared Zwerling
June 2, 2016

James Jones, six straight Finals. He and longtime teammate LeBron James accomplished that amazing feat when they recently defeated the Raptors, becoming the first players to do so since Bill Russell and the Celtics in 1966. And on Thursday, the duo tips off their Finals rematch against the Dubs.

Jones, a 13-year NBA veteran, has a lot more value than being a two-time NBA champion (2012 and '13) and the 2011 All-Star three-point winner. James calls the 35-year-old "the greatest teammate I've ever had," he's a go-to advisor for Cavaliers players, holds the title of NBPA Secretary-Treasurer and serves as a life-changing youth influencer in his hometown of Miami.

Speaking with the NBPA this week, "J Hoops" discussed what making history means to him, his unique friendship with James, impacting unprivileged youth in Miami, becoming a leader on and off the court, and much more. His conversation with the NBPA is presented below in a first-person perspective and edited for clarity and length.

As a kid, I would've never envisioned six straight Finals.

You dream as a kid of just hoping to make it to the NBA, and then to play in the NBA and to win a championship. But to be able to say that I've been a part of six of those runs, I take a lot of pride in that. My role has been different with every single team, but at the end of the day, the goal has always been the same, which is to win it. And I look back on the sacrifices I've had to make as a player throughout my career and I don't regret a moment of it, because ultimately I consistently end up where I want to be, which is playing meaningful basketball at the end of June.

I've sacrificed playing time. I've been a great shooter my entire career and my roles have always thrived. But there's definitely been opportunities for me to go elsewhere and play a bigger role and have a bigger impact, but the end result wouldn't be about winning; it would've been about numbers, stats. So I don't have a problem ever sacrificing numbers and stats for experiencing winning in the Finals. Experiencing competing to the end of June makes my career worthwhile where I have no regrets.

What's overlooked about making consecutive Finals is the mental discipline and physical discipline, the maturity. Every year, you have to embrace change. So a lot of times you have to exceed expectations, and a lot of times you just have to bounce back and remain motivated and driven after you've been able to do it consistently. That requires you to give more and more time to the game. You have to sacrifice family time.

The older you get, it takes a lot longer to get your body back to the place where it needs to be. You have to spend more time invested in your body, more time invested in recovery. And you just have to give more to the game. It's just a constant grind where you're basically living it 24/7, 365 a year.

My diet has been critical, but my philosophy is to never lose an edge, never get overweight, never get tired. I just prided myself on making sure that regardless if I'm playing a game or not, for the rest of my life I always want to be at my peak. And that comes before everything else. So I try to make sure that even through the challenges, the trials, the ups and downs, you just want to make sure the one tool in my toolbox, which is my body, is always in tip-top shape.

LeBron James and Bill Russell

Making the Finals again with LeBron is special because he's chasing something exceptional. I'm chasing the same thing, but just coming at a different angle. At the end of the day, it's about maximizing potential and opportunities—and that's his focus. That's why he's been able to continually improve and find ways to impact the game and change. It's a similarity that we share that makes our relationship special because rarely do you have guys on different spectrums—one elite superstar and one elite reserve—on the exact same page.

I look at LeBron more like a stepbrother. It's one of those things where the relationship isn't built on

your youth growing up. It's sharing the exact same experiences, the exact same situations. The context is different; it's kind of like a late merger. You respect each other's independence, but at the same time, enjoy each other's common bond.

As much as you want to be similar, you also want to be different because your identities are different, your upbringing is different, your background, your concepts, your context of what you're experiencing. But at the end of the day, he understands that when I say the only thing I care about is winning, it's not just lip service.

It's demonstrated in everything I do from decisions I've made, as far as how I play and who I play with from a professional standpoint—contracts, playing time. But also privately—the time I invest in my teammates, the time I invest in the game, the time I invest behind the scenes even when I'm not playing or when I'm playing.

I actually have met Bill Russell—just total respect. It was a very straightforward conversation, just talking about work, leadership and winning. He said, "You can't win unless your best players are willing to sacrifice for winning, and if your bottom players aren't willing to do the same, it has to be one common goal. You'll always have different agendas, but the goal must always be the same, and if that's winning, special things happen." I have an amazing amount of respect for those kind of guys because they were the elite guys making the sacrifice.

Miami Roots and Cleveland Leadership

My dream growing up as a kid, I just wanted to play in the NBA. Then when I had a chance to see that it could become a reality, I said, "I want to play 10 years." And then after that, it was, "I want to win a championship—just one championship. That will be a dream come true." It was never, "I want to make X amount of dollars or I want to be in an All-Star Game, or I want to do this or that individually."

For me, it was always from a team perspective. Being in the NBA would mean that I'd be on an NBA team. Winning a championship would mean that I would have to be on a very good NBA team. So I've exceeded expectations because I've won multiple championships, been to the Finals six straight times, played with Hall of Famers—some of the best players this game will ever see—and I'm still rolling.

The longer I've been playing, the more my expectations have increased to the point where I feel like I still have a lot further to go. And when it's all said and done, I'll look back and say, "I enjoyed it and I got the most out of my career."

I will always have a special connection to Miami. That was a big part of why I craved a desire to get back to Miami and play for the Heat in 2008, and win at home for the kids and for the city. My desire and my dream was to be an inspiration, and still is that way to be an inspiration because growing up, I didn't attend my first NBA game until I was in college.

Jones at his Crew Camp last year. (Photo courtesy of James Jones)

Jones at his Crew 22 Training Camp for underprivileged kids last year in Miami. (Photo courtesy of James Jones)

The more I played, the better I became, and the more I saw that the NBA was a possibility. So to be able to give the city someone as a blueprint and say, "It's possible to do it because James has done it," it's great. But more importantly, it just shows local kids in Miami, which is a melting pot and a diversity community, that anything is possible. In my life, I try to help kids decipher what the recipe for success is. It's consistency, a desire and a relentless effort to be a pro.

This summer, I'll be hosting my sixth annual Crew 22 Training Camp at Florida International University for one week in mid-July. I'll be working with around 100 kids, boys and girls from 11 to 14 years old, who are homeless and from foster and group homes—just those kids that want an opportunity to see their dreams come true.

The event is not just about basketball. We have empowerment sessions, marine biology classes, field trips to go bowling, courses for rope climbing 30 feet in the air—different things to foster team building. We also have swim safety demonstrations because drowning accounts for many youth deaths in South

Florida.

Also, the kids go on a tour of FIU, which is special because they have the opportunity to be the first generation in their family to go to college. During the week, I'm also going to have a fitness day with former boxer Evander Holyfield.

When I'm done playing, my goal is to expand my Legacy Foundation into a year-round program. I'm also starting to explore an interest in consulting with my wife, Destiny.

Looking back, it actually never was an inspiration to be a leader. I always had a thirst for knowledge to understand everything about the things I was involved in. For me, knowledge is power. With the game, my view in order to be a great basketball player, to be a great teammate, you have to understand everyone's role, you have to understand all the components of everything—the schemes, the adjustments, the perspectives from coaches, from players—because that's the only way you can help everyone in every situation.

As I did that, I found myself becoming a resource in the NBA. People start to come to you and ask you questions, and start to take your lead or follow your advice. Then before you know it, you're a leader and you're not even trying.

My message to players is while we're becoming more visible and more popular, at the end of the day, it's still what you do behind closed doors that drives the visibility and popularity. I think our guys are doing a better job of showing that side—being a parent, being a brother, being a community leader, the amount of power that you put into your craft, the late-night gym sessions. So my message to our guys is always show a little bit more of the input and not so much the output.

Now in Cleveland, it's getting to the point where I can just watch the guys figure it out on their own. I've enjoyed that with this team because Year 2 is where a lot of young guys make leaps and bounds in terms of growth. So I get a chance to sit back and look that we're talented enough as a team, both mentally and physically, and a lot of times I don't need to say anything.

#TheLand is really just about buying in completely to this family and this goal, which is winning a championship for Cleveland. We're very close as a team. We're a group that prefers to just lounge and talk. We're a dinner or lunch type team. We're very casual, sit back and talk basketball, talk life, reminisce, low energy, because we look at how much energy we expend away from the game. We're trying to make sure that all of our energy goes to the game.

We're better prepared to face the Warriors because we're healthy and we're playing with our primary guys. Last year, we were playing with a lot of contingencies throughout the season, throughout the postseason, so this year our guys have had a full year of experience. That makes a difference when you're talking about split-second decisions in the biggest moments of the year.

Winning a title always gets better because the longer you play, the closer you come to the end of the road. And the longer you play, the harder it becomes. So it'll be special just like one was better than none, two was better than one, and three will be better than two.

Post NBA Draft Deadline - ACC Power Rankings

Courier-Journal
Jeff Greer
May 28, 2016

The NBA Draft entry deadline has come and gone, and it's now a lot easier to judge the 2016-17 rosters for college basketball teams.

In the ACC, it's Duke and then everyone else. But while Duke is loaded with talent and the clear frontrunner, there are a bunch of teams with the potential to challenge the Blue Devils.

* UNC, even after losing Marcus Paige and Brice Johnson, has a solid core coming back from its run to the national title game, plus five-star big man Tony Bradley and two four-star guards in Brandon Robinson and Seventh Woods.

* Virginia loses Anthony Gill and Malcolm Brogdon, the Cavaliers' two best players, but London Perrantes is back with a bunch of intriguing returning players and a nice recruiting class - and Memphis transfer Austin Nichols is ready to go.

* Louisville lost Damion Lee, Trey Lewis and Chinanu Onuaku, but the Cards have reliable point man Quentin Snider and a trio of sophomores - Donovan Mitchell, Deng Adel and Ray Spalding - who appear primed for breakout seasons.

Clemson, Florida State, Miami, NC State, Notre Dame, Pittsburgh, Syracuse and Virginia Tech all have talent, too, which makes what I'm about to do feel really dumb. I am going to take a stab at some early offseason ACC power rankings, because it's always basketball season and I love it when people insult me.

Here goes nothing ...

1. Duke

The Blue Devils can go at least 10-deep next season. They have the nation's top recruiting class coming in, with PG Frank Jackson, SF Jayson Tatum, PF Harry Giles and C Marques Bolden all five-star prospects who could start. Oh, yeah, and they have that Grayson Allen kid back, too. He's pretty good. Amile Jefferson, Luke Kennard, Matt Jones and Chase Jeter give Duke some experience. Coach K's team will be the clear-cut preseason No. 1 and a favorite to win its second national title in three years. No pressure or anything.

2. North Carolina

Roy Williams may have lost his two best players, but there's a lot coming back to Chapel Hill. Theo Pinson and Justin Jackson form a nice wing pair, with Joel Berry at the point and Isaiah Hicks and Kennedy Meeks occupying the post. The key for UNC will be finding some outside shooting, which was the Heels' biggest weakness last season. Perhaps Robinson, Woods and sophomore Kenny Williams can help.

3. Virginia

A lot rides on Nichols filling the void left by Gill, and there's plenty of reason to think he can do that. Perrantes is one of the best point guards in the country, and I loved watching Kyle Guy on the AAU circuit. Ty Jerome is a nice point guard coming in, though he'll play behind Perrantes. Then there's a bunch of Cavaliers to pick from - Marial Shayok, Devon Hall, Isaiah Wilkins, Darius Thompson, Jarred Reuter - for breakout options. And it's Tony Bennett, who has become one of the best coaches in the country.

4. Louisville

To me, Rick Pitino's team would have leapfrogged Virginia and maybe UNC if Onuaku came back, but instead the Cards are a team with one proven commodity in Snider, a veteran role player in Mangok Mathiang and a bunch of players with potential to become very good, starting with Adel, Mitchell and Spalding. Incoming freshman VJ King is a smooth scorer, and Penn transfer Tony Hicks is an intriguing talent at combo guard. U of L needs one of Jaylen Johnson, Anas Mahmoud and Matz Stockman to step up in the frontcourt rotation.

5. Syracuse

I really struggled picking someone fifth here, but Syracuse is Syracuse, and the Orange frontcourt is going to be pretty solid. There's Tyler Lydon, Tyler Roberson and Dajuan Coleman back, plus transfer Pascal Chukwu, who is 7-2 and can fill space in the paint. The backcourt will include Franklin Howard and Colorado State transfer John Gillon at point and Tyus Battle and Matthew Moyer coming in as the wings tasked with replacing Trevor Cooney, Malachi Richardson and Michael Gbinije. I am happy to concede here that attempting to rank Nos. 5-12 is a total crapshoot and will come back to haunt me.

6. Virginia Tech

Buzz Williams and his group of returning players have generated quite a bit of ... buzz ... this offseason (sorry*), and for good reason. Five of Tech's top six scorers from last season will be back, and the Hokies won 10 ACC games last season with that core. Given the expected improvement over the offseason, and my belief that Buzz is a really good coach, Virginia Tech should get to double-digit league wins again this season. (*I'm actually not that sorry.)

7. Miami

The Hurricanes lost a lot after this season, with Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri all moving on, plus a few transfers. But Jim Larrañaga has Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed, Anthony Lawrence and Kamari Murphy back, plus a quality group of newcomers. Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell are blue-chip prospects who should play right away, and Rashad Muhammad will be eligible this coming season to give Miami another wing scorer.

8. Pittsburgh

The hiring of Kevin Stallings wasn't exactly received well in Pittsburgh. It seemed like such

an odd choice after the school appeared to let its winningest coach, Jamie Dixon, walk without much of a fight. Things had plateaued at Pitt and then started to drop off, sure, but the situation looked like the perfect scenario for a young, up-and-coming coach to come in and pump some zest into the program. That said, there's talent there - Mike Young, Jamel Artis, Chris Jones and Cam Johnson form a solid nucleus, with guys like Sheldon Jeter and Ryan Luther back to help. Damon Wilson has big shoes to fill following James Robinson, and the incoming freshmen can contribute.

9. Notre Dame

Losing Zach Auguste and Demetrius Jackson hurts, obviously, but I like Bonzie Colson, VJ Beachem and Steve Vasturia - and Mike Brey - enough to consider the Irish as an NCAA Tournament team. The point guard spot is a question, with TJ Gibbs and Matt Farrell expected to share that duty. Then Brey has a stable of bigs who can help Colson with the rebounding haul. He seems especially high on Martin Geben, a rising junior, to carry some of Auguste's big-man responsibilities.

10. NC State

The Wolfpack needs three things: A fully healthy Dennis Smith Jr. who plays the way he did on the AAU circuit last summer; Terry Henderson living up to the hype; and five-star big man Omer Yurtseven being the stud recruiting analysts say he is. If Yurtseven is that good, and he is paired with BeeJay Anya and Abdul-Malik Abu, NC State should have a solid top six (with Maverick Rowan in there, too). Depth is a little concerning, but the potential for Smith and Yurtseven is awfully high.

11. Florida State

A lot of people are bullish on the Seminoles, and I get it. Xavier Rathan-Mayes is a good player, and Dwayne Bacon is super talented. Jonathan Isaac can be a stud as a freshman, and Trent Forrest and CJ Walker will help in the backcourt. The potential, like NC State, is through the roof. But I just don't trust FSU to live up to the hype. Bacon was paired with XRM and Malik Beasley, a projected first-round pick, last season, and FSU went 8-10 in the league and lost 14 games overall.

12. Clemson

The funny thing about putting Clemson 12th is that I really like the Tigers. Jaron Blossomgame coming back is huge, and so is having a solid group of returning players - and a few quality transfers - around him. Brad Brownell's team was one of the surprises in the ACC last season, winning 10 games, but the sledding may be a bit tougher this campaign. Clemson has the talent to make the NCAA Tournament, but somebody has to finish 12th in a league with 12 tournament-quality rosters.

13. Wake Forest

14. Boston College

15. Georgia Tech

Colts Notebook: Swoope eyes step up to active roster

The Herald Bulletin

George Bremer

May 25, 2016

INDIANAPOLIS — There wasn't one particular moment when it hit Erik Swoope he'd become a football player.

Rather, it was a series of observations and small revelations that led the way.

"My first year, I was trying to make a lot of comparisons," the former University of Miami basketball standout said Tuesday as the Indianapolis Colts continued OTAs. "OK, this is like what I used to do. This is like what I used to do.' As I began to study and see different guys play, I was like, 'Basketball and football have nothing in common.' And once I really understood that in my heart, then the plays and everything we're doing started making more sense."

Swoope is fully aware of his surroundings this spring, and the timing couldn't be better.

With the free agent departure of Coby Fleener to New Orleans, there's an opening for an athletic tight end to join the mix with versatile Dwayne Allen and sledgehammer Jack Doyle.

Swoope has made his candidacy to fill the vacancy clear.

"He's made tremendous strides basically every day since he's been here," Colts head coach Chuck Pagano said. "Obviously, that piece of clay and that body that we saw early on is much different now. Again, we're in shorts. We're running around in just helmets is all. The heavy lifting that has to come from that position that they have to do as an in-line blocker — some of that stuff where you do it whether it's out of the

backfield or on the line of scrimmage, move tight end stuff — we're going to find out a lot more obviously going into this training camp once we get the pads on.

"He's doing a good job. He doesn't look like a guy that's never played and a basketballer that's playing football for the first time."

Swoope is trying to follow in the footsteps of such hardwood-to-gridiron stars as San Diego's Antonio Gates and Seattle's Jimmy Graham, the latter of whom also played for the Hurricanes.

But he understands time is running short.

Swoope turned down offers to play professional basketball overseas when he signed with the Colts in 2014. He's spent an apprenticeship of sorts ever since, being cut at the end of training camp and spending the regular season on the practice squad.

Now he feels it's time to show what he's learned.

"And that's mainly me challenging myself," Swoope said. "Two years of studying is more than enough."

C Izundu Aiming to Be Better Defender in Offseason

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 24, 2016

An injured ankle has slowed Ebuka Izundu 's offseason, but he's working to be a key player after playing limited minutes as a freshman.

"I'm very excited," Izundu said. "I'm trying to get some extended minutes. I can't wait."

Izundu, a 6-foot-10 center, and fellow sophomore Anthony Lawrence could round out the starting lineup to go along with penciled in starters Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed, and Kamari Murphy.

"(Ebuka and Anthony) have some experience, but their roles are going to be expanded this year and we need them to play really, really well for us to be good because those five guys could actually be a starting five," head coach Jim Larrañaga said.

For Izundu to hold down a starter's role he will have to make immense improvements on the defensive end of the court.

"I just need to stop fouling," he said. "That's what I really need to work on this year. Getting in foul trouble is going to put me right on the bench."

Limiting fouls is something former UM center Tonye Jekiri had to work on throughout his career at Miami and he showed improvements as an upperclassman. Jekiri recorded a foul every 6.7 minutes as a freshman and 8.1 as a sophomore to every 9.8 minutes as a junior and 9.3 as a senior.

Izundu only played 79 minutes last season, but committed 17 fouls at a rate

of one foul every 4.6 minutes.

Jekiri has given advice to Izundu to help him be a better defender and cut down on fouls.

"He gave me some advice on how to guard the screen because I would hedge a lot and get back late to my man so he told me to flatten my hedge and move my feet as fast as I can to hold him off because the point guard is going to catch up with him eventually," Izundu said.

Jekiri also gave Izundu constant messages during last season:

"You have to do things better, go harder every time, and don't let anyone push you around."

In addition to better positioning, Izundu is hoping added strength in the offseason will help him be a better defender. He weighed 200 pounds when he first arrived at UM last summer, but is up to 214 pounds with a goal of reaching 230-235 for the season.

Izundu has been limited this summer with a high ankle sprain early at the beginning of offseason workouts, but resumed action last week.

"My jump shot is getting better and I'm getting stronger," Izundu said.

Miami has been holding practices two hours a week during the summer and will continue until a three-week break begins on Aug. 5.

"I think we're going to be very good, but we just have a little work to do," Izundu said. "

Gunma's Hamilton happy to help others shine

**Japan Times
Ed Odeven
May 18, 2016**

The Japan Times has featured periodic interviews with players in the bj-league since 2006 in this long-running series. Gary Hamilton of the Gunma Crane Thunders is the subject of this week's profile. Because the league's final game was held on Sunday, this article wraps up the series in its current format.

Position: Power forward
Hometown: Los Angeles
College: University of Miami (Florida)

Noteworthy: Hamilton is one of the elite rebounders in bj-league history. He won rebounding titles in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 seasons while playing for the Shiga Lakestars, averaging 14.3 and 15.2 rebounds a game, respectively. In the 2011-12 campaign, Hamilton was No. 2 in boards (11.4 a game) while suiting up for the Rizing Fukuoka. For the 2014-15 season, his rebounding average (9.7) was No. 9 overall. He's also finished in the top 10 in the league in assists and steals on multiple occasions, telling stats that underline his versatility and all-around skills. ... This season, Hamilton, one of the most gifted passing forwards in the league's 11-season history, joined Gunma in February and appeared in 22 games. He averaged 8.9 points, 10.8 rebounds and 3.8 assists. The Crane Thunders finished ninth in the 12-team Eastern Conference, falling short of earning one of the conference's eight coveted playoff spots. ... He's also played pro ball in Poland, Germany, Uruguay and Slovakia.

Hamilton has three younger brothers who have also played NCAA Division I college basketball. Jordan, a 25-year-old guard/forward, went to the University of Texas (2009-11) and has played in the NBA for the Denver Nuggets, Houston Rockets, Los Angeles Clippers and New Orleans Pelicans, as well as in the NBA Development League, Russia and Venezuela. Guard Isaac, 22, has been enrolled at UCLA since 2013. The youngest, 20-year-old Daniel, an athletic swingman who starred for the University of Connecticut for two seasons, then declared for the 2016 NBA Draft in April.

You played a little less than half the 52-game season for the Gunma Crane Thunders, making your season debut on Feb. 6. Would you say you had a solid season in the 22 games you played for Gunma?

I feel like I could've played a little bit better, but with the rule changes (due to the reduction in imports this season to two per team on the court from three), and coach (Hirokazu Nema) was trying to divide minutes, it was a little difficult to get a (solid) rotation.

From your perspective, what were the biggest changes that have taken place in the bj-league since you made your debut here with the Shiga Lakestars in 2009?

The biggest change I would say is the import rule, from five (per team) to now three imports, who just want to be competitive and want to compete. Not only are you competing in practice, but you are competing in the gym and trying to get that rhythm is a little bit difficult. I know everybody wants to play a certain amount of minutes, so you can clash or it can turn out to be a good thing. ... But the teams that win and have a winning record, they have managed it and figured it out. I think that's the biggest (change).

The problem on our team was there was just a lot of disagreement ... because everybody wanted to play. ... I just watched everything unfold, and it unfolded in a bad way I would say, in not making the playoffs. So it really didn't work out for the better.

The Crane Thunders just missed out on the eighth and final playoff spot for the Eastern Conference. If the team had another two to three weeks in the regular season, do you believe Gunma would've squeezed into the playoffs and overtaken the Aomori Wat's for the final spot? And how disappointing was it for you that the team missed out on the playoffs?

It was too inconsistent. ... And once we shot past a couple teams, we got a little too comfortable.

I couldn't help as I wanted to and what happened happened.

Are you interested in returning to Gunma for the 2016-17 season? Is that something you've discussed with the team?

No, I haven't. I haven't talked to anybody about returning or anything like that. I'm not sure if it would be a possibility if I would go back to that team. I'm not sure what direction they want to go in.

I was in South America (Uruguay) previously and our season ended early, so so I just came down from the word of Wara (Gunma guard Takamichi Fujiwara) and coach (Hirokazu Nema, former Shiga assistant). It was friendship-based, and they figured I could come in and help them out, and I came in and did what I did. It just fell short.

With the bj-league becoming a part of the new B. League (including the NBL and NBDL) under the restructured Japan Basketball Association, the sport's governing body here, it will cease to exist as a separate entity. That said, in the bj-league's 11 years there have been a handful of rebounders for many years at the top of the list, including yourself, Chris Holm, Wendell White and Reggie Warren, among others. Beside rebounding excellence, what do you think your legacy is as a bj-league player?

I think my legacy has been what my dad would describe myself as I would be like a "go-through player," not so much a go-to player. I play a lot of team basketball. I think three out of the five years that I played in this league I led my team in assists and rebounding, which is really unusual for a guy at my position.

Definitely rebounding, but aside from that just a playmaker and getting my teammates involved in the game, because I felt like I could get my teammates going and then I could get going a little bit better. I know coming to Gunma after my arrival I was able to help Thomas Kennedy's points per game (24.6 final scoring average, No. 3 in the league) go up a little bit. He was able to thank me for that success, and that made me feel good as a teammate, knowing that you've come in and just helped somebody.

Any additional thoughts on your legacy?

A playmaker, team player-type of guy. And I pride myself on that, distributing the ball and helping guys get better looks. ... A go-through player, not a go-to player.

Who are five or so of the toughest players you've competed against at both ends of the floor during your years in the bj-league? Who's been the hardest guy(s) to score on? To defend?

(Hamamatsu's) Reggie Warren's a good competitor. He competes. He's real chatty. He's a fun guy to play against.

(Sendai's) Wendell White, definitely, is smart, he can set up anything. He got the MVP honors for a reason.

I would say just going back that (facing retired Ryukyuu legend) Jeff Newton was a tough task. He would quietly give you that 25 points, not knowing where it came from. But he was just knocking down every opportunity; he wasn't missing any open shots for sure.

Playing with and against (Toyama's) Masashi Joho, he's just a tough, scrappy, athletic scorer. He can compete on the defensive end also. ... To play against him, he's always going to give you the dagger; when you think you are going to win this game, he'll definitely knock you out.

(Former Shiga teammate) Mikey Marshall was a "silent assassin," with big baskets at key moments.

(Retired Osaka Evessa legend) Lynn Washington was just a competitor that was strong, had a strong will. Just strong is how I would describe that guy. He was just like a general. He led his team to a lot of success and you've got to tip your hat off to him for what he's done on the basketball court, for sure, you can't take that away from him.

In your own words, what descriptive words do you think best sum up how you play on the court?

Definitely, a hard-hat, blue-collar player. Tough and in some sense just a leader, vocal.

Think back to growing up, at what age do you have idea or dream to pursue career as a pro player? What gave you the self confidence that this would happen?

Well, growing up I was dreaming to be a professional something, and it started out playing American football, actually, and I didn't make the transition over to playing basketball even until I was 16. (Before that), I didn't play organized basketball at all, I was playing it in the streets in Los Angeles. I was just playing for fun and I always had a hoop in my backyard.

That transition going from 6-4 (193 cm) to 6-8 (203 cm) in one summer between my freshman and sophomore year in high school just gave me the confidence to want to go out and pursue basketball in general, and then just the raw skill set that I had in the three years in high school, going up against a lot of major schools going into college gave me the confidence to know ... that I could go to the next level, whichever it was knowing that it was basketball outside of the NBA, and playing abroad was definitely going to be my next move after the University of Miami.

Just being 6-8 gave that confidence alone. There's a lot of guys that say, "If I had that height, if I had that height," and if they were over 6-5 what they would do with it from the athletics point of view. I didn't want to disappoint those guys that were dreaming to be my height, so I had to do something and that confidence came from just height alone actually.

During your four seasons at Miami you appeared in 119 games and made 37 starts. Did you develop a stronger all-around basketball IQ by having that chance to come off the bench and watch the game a bit more than if you were starting all of those games?

I think coming off the bench did help me a great deal. Competing well in practice and playing well against starters lets you know that you do belong out there so when you get your opportunities, you have to make the best of it.

When I was sitting there and watching the games unfold, what I can do was just help us in any kind of way. It was definitely a plus that I was able to pick my spots about how I maneuver around the court, and just know that I can get in the game coming off the bench ... and if a guy (on the other team) was a little bit winded while I'm fresh, that is an advantage.

We practice all week, so you know what your teammates are going to do. You know what your teammates are capable of, so just being able to get that feel of the opponent was an advantage in my eyes.

What was your biggest thrill or most memorable performance/game as a college player? What made it special?

I remember being on the court versus UConn my sophomore year, in 2003. We were playing the University of Connecticut at home, and we were down two (points). ... I was guarding the inbound, and I was able to get a deflection and have the opponent fumble the ball in the corner, and our best shooter was guarding the corner, and Darius Rice was able to retrieve the ball and hit a 3-point shot at the buzzer to win the game playing against a top team in the country like that.

It was amazing. It was unbelievable. ... I was just glad to be a part of it.

(Reporter's note: UConn reached the Sweet 16 at the NCAA Tournament that year, then won the title in 2004.)

You don't hear a lot about deflections, isn't that true?

Yeah, that's not even a statistic. It probably should be, you know? How did your father, Gregory, make a positive impact on your life? How did he influence you and help you in your growth and maturation as a student and young man?

My father, just being around when I was growing up in South Central Los Angeles. Just to even have a father was huge looking back at it as an adult now. I didn't really pay attention much when I was younger, but a lot of guys that I grew up with didn't have their fathers present or in their lives at all. So just the fact that my father was able to be a father to me and a mentor to a lot of my friends was just a blessing in itself.

Outside of sports, just life advice and everything like that was huge for me and just a huge impact for my father to be there for me, all four of my brothers and my sister, just giving you life gems and everything like that, was huge for me.

As far as athletically, he didn't really like football at all. He was a big baseball and basketball fan and he grew up playing (both). He really, really wanted me to play basketball, because I went to the same high school as him, so for three years I went to Crenshaw High School, that's the high school that he went to. His coach, Willie West (a Los Angeles

High School Sports Hall of Fame inductee), was still there coaching the basketball team, so I was trying to do everything I can. Coach was still in contact with my father just from a friendship standpoint...

With my dad just being focal and sharing his opinion on how I should try out for the team, and like I said, growing those 4 inches over that summer definitely made me want to give it a shot because I was just tired of getting hit in my legs playing football. ... So I just gave it a shot, and if it wasn't for him I probably wouldn't ever think I was good enough to play basketball because that was our primary sport at the high school. They were pretty good; they had a pretty good team.

The tryout was at Crenshaw, over 300 students tried out. It was ridiculous. Only about 15, 16 guys made the varsity (team). Actually, when I made the team, I didn't expect to make varsity at all. I was thinking I had zero chance. I was going to be like a JV-type player, and so after practice in the first month I had got moved up to varsity before the season even started and they brought a junior down to JV and moved me up to varsity.

I didn't get much time but it was a heck of an experience for me, and that was another confidence booster that just helped me want to play the game more and want to be better.

After three years at Crenshaw, when you transferred to rival Susan Miller Dorsey High School as a senior, was it a difficult move?

Going into my senior year, there was a real competitive team at Crenshaw. (Dorsey) was a rival school. There was a lot of controversy with that because there were also rival gangs, too. That transition going there and having to deal with off-court issues. ...

Not being a gangster or anything, but just being associated with that school, they just suspect anything like that just because of the gang culture.

So I had a rough time making a transition and it was actually a tough time making a decision. It was something that I had to pray about with my family, just prayed that I could go there and be safe, most importantly, and not worry about basketball, because that was going to take care of itself. But everything actually ended up working out. A couple of guys that I went to junior high with, so they were able to help me out and vouch for me.

In high school, college, and at the pro level overseas in the various places you've played, who are some of the better-known guys you've competed against on opposing teams?

(Reporter's note: As a freshman, Hamilton had a season-high 12 rebounds, against Providence College, while battling inside against the Friars' Ryan Gomes, a future NBA player. He recalled that encounter during our phone interview.)

To be able to get (12 rebounds) against a guy that was eventually an NBA player, that was another confidence booster for me. Gomes was a little-bit undersized guy that made it to the next level and had a solid career in the NBA (2005-12, Boston Celtics, Minnesota Timberwolves and Los Angeles Clippers; 2013-14, Oklahoma City Thunder). So that was real big for me, and that was a real memorable game for myself.

I would say at university one of the better guys at my position was Mike Sweetney (Georgetown), he was a pretty good guy. He ran the floor like a deer and probably weighed 280 (127 kg). Just real strong and could do so much with that size. He was so versatile at that size. It was just ridiculous.

In those UConn battles, playing against Charlie Villanueva, Ben Gordon, Emeka Okafor, those guys were always a powerhouse over at UConn.

Transferring over to the ACC (when Miami left the Big East for the 2004-05 academic year), I think about playing at Cameron Indoor and playing (Duke standouts) J.J. Reddick, Shelden Williams and Shavlik Randolph.

At Wake Forest, probably one of the biggest competitors I've ever played against and ever seen a guy that wanted to win more was Chris Paul. He was just a vocal leader and sportsman, who would do anything to get the job done. And just looking back at that time and watching a young guy as a freshman lead seniors and juniors, upperclassmen, the way he talked to them was like a point guard should talk to them. He'd get your attention. Maybe you wouldn't like what he said and you were going to talk to him later, but those words that he was using were choice words — and he got your attention, for sure.

In the pros, playing over in Germany, I played with a guy named Brandon Jenkins from the University of Louisville. He was telling me stories about playing for Rick Pitino. He's an athletic point guard and he's still playing, he's playing over in (Slovakia) right now. He's a great competitive guy.

What were the many backyard basketball games like for the Hamilton boys? Were they super competitive, spirited battles? Did you mostly play in the backyard or in local parks and gyms as well?

We did a little bit of both. We had a lot of two-on-two battles. ... I would never ever not let them play if they were able to compete. I would let them get on the floor just to get a sweat in the backyard, just to have fun competing and turning it into a fight nightly, so we all had that drive and that competitive edge, which started playing backyard basketball for sure.

It would be me and the youngest versus the two that were in the middle, so they wouldn't take it easy on the youngest one.

Have you heard of other families that have had four siblings, brothers and sisters, play D-I basketball?

Crazy story, a guy I played high school with ... Onye Ibekwe, he was my age and we played over on the same team at Crenshaw, and he had a younger brother Ekene Ibekwe that went to the University of Maryland, and he had a younger sister (Chinyere) who went to UCLA, and their youngest sister (Ify) to University of Arizona. That is exciting to see that success through our families.

Are you proud setting the bar for your brothers in basketball, being a role model for them?

Most definitely ... but at the same time being that pioneer for them, setting that bar so high, is also a great thing, too. Just being the first one, like the guy putting together the blueprint, so I'm definitely proud to start a little basketball team .. and hopefully those guys will be as successful as possible.

Big opportunity awaits freshman Dejan “DJ” Vasiljevic

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

May 16, 2016

Between trips to Coral Gables and China, Dejan “D.J.” Vasiljevic has a busy summer ahead.

The Australian freshman arrived at UM on Saturday, having traveled approximately 9,700 miles from his home in Melbourne. He’ll take classes and train for a little less than a month, then travel more than 15,000 miles round trip to China to participate in what he and UM coach Jim Larrañaga called an Australian national team development camp. Then it’s back on campus for more summer classes and more training until the school year begins in August.

“It’s an amazing honor to have a chance to represent my country, showcase my talents with the national group and be able to perform at the highest level,” he said Sunday via phone, as he was moving into his dorm room.

Vasiljevic, a 6-foot-2, 195-pound combo guard who describes his game as “versatile,” is one of the top junior players in Australia. He shined at both the under-17 and under-19 international tournaments. However, he will be a rookie at the camp, which he said will be held at two locations in China from June 23-July 2. The 19-year-old expects to be tested by veterans like Chicago Bulls forward Cameron Bairstow, 25, Brisbane Bullets (Australian NBL) guard Adam Gibson, 29, and Illawarra Hawks (NBL) guard Mitch Norton, 23.

“It’ll be a lot tougher,” Vasiljevic said. “They’re older than me and far more experienced. They’ll treat me like a rookie. I’m going to embrace the challenge.”

Basketball Australia spokeswoman Lisa Hasker said Vasiljevic will be part of “an ‘emerging’ Boomers team with a couple of Olympic squad members and a couple of Aussie college stars” like himself. They will play a tournament in China. The tournament is in its “final planning stages,” Hasker said.

Larrañaga, who signed Vasiljevic as part of the first top-10 recruiting class in program history, said the camp will be a spectacular opportunity for the freshman. He won’t be a part of the “Boomers” squad that plays in Rio from Aug. 5-21, but he could be in line for future Olympic duty.

“It would be like one of our college players being included in USA Basketball’s preparation for the Olympics,” Larrañaga said. “He’s not an NBA player, but we want to include him in the trials because we think when LeBron James and Dwyane Wade and these guys are done, he’ll have graduated in the program. We’re not intending on them being with the Olympics this year, but in four years, we think in all likelihood, they’ll be considered.”

Since the camp runs between UM’s Summer A and B sessions, Vasiljevic, who is studying business and economics at UM, will have to convince his professors to let him take “A” finals early and get ahead of “B” coursework.

Larrañaga was impressed with the email Vasiljevic sent him this spring, asking how he could both attend the national camp and also do what’s best for the Hurricanes. “It was so well-written and so thoughtful and so understanding,” Larrañaga said. “This is a sharp individual. This kid knows what it’s all about.”

Will he be able to fit everything in?

“I’m not the decision-maker. That’s up to faculty members, but they’re going to love the kid,” Larrañaga said. “Who wouldn’t want a young man to experience being with their national team? What an honor that is – and what an educational experience to go to China.”

Larrañaga reflects on receiving George Mason's highest honor

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

May 13, 2016

Jim Larrañaga didn't go home after a long week at the ACC spring meetings north of Jacksonville. He spoke along with Mark Richt at a Hurricane Club event Thursday in Atlanta, then flew north for a special celebration.

Larrañaga will receive George Mason's highest honor, the Mason Medal, at the school's commencement ceremony on Saturday.

"I see the award as being won by a host of people," Larrañaga said. "It's about so many people who helped us. I might be the one who is being honored, but it's about the team effort we got from the time we arrived."

Larrañaga, who will be joined by his wife, Liz, his two sons Jay and Jon, and daughter-in-law Elyssa at the ceremony, deflected credit to his assistant coaches and players. Most importantly, he said, then-school president Alan Merten supported his program and "included me in ways basketball coaches usually aren't." For that reason Larrañaga — who said he receives plenty of support at Miami — was nervous about leaving George Mason in 2011.

Reflecting on the honor while sitting on a deck at the Amelia Island Ritz-Carlton, he also spoke of "The Insiders," a group of dedicated basketball boosters who helped raise money for amenities the Patriots had never had: charter flights, a golf cart to shuttle recruits around campus, a renovated locker room.

"We were busing to a lot of games," Larrañaga said. "When we went from Northern Virginia to UNC-Wilmington,

that was an eight-hour bus trip. It became a one-hour flight, so we weren't fatigued. The first year we did it was the first year we beat Wilmington at Wilmington."

Larrañaga went 273-164 in 14 seasons in Fairfax, winning more games than any coach in Colonial Athletic Conference history. His time included five NCAA tournament appearances and, of course, the 2006 Final Four run, the first time a mid-major advanced that far in 27 years. Before he arrived in 1997, the Patriots had seven consecutive losing seasons.

The George Mason Medal is designated by the George Mason University Board of Visitors to be the university's highest honorary award. This medal is for those with "a record of service to their community, state, or nation consistent with the level and quality of George Mason's public service in his own time," according to a UM release.

Though not a Revolutionary War figure like Mason, Larrañaga led enough progress in his area of expertise to be worthy of the honor. Before 2006, much of the country didn't think about George Mason much. Now they're the shining example of the Mid-Major That Could.

Transfers Turning into NCAA's Free Agent Market

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
May 8, 2016

We live in an age of instant gratification. We get annoyed if a website takes more than a few seconds to load. We pay extra for same-day delivery. We do our banking online because drive-through isn't fast enough anymore.

We want our news now. Our photos now. Our TV shows on demand.

It should come as little surprise, then, that college basketball players raised in this generation are more impatient than ever, unwilling to wait for playing time, itching to bolt if their expectations aren't met.

They are transferring at such an alarming rate that the trend is being termed "an epidemic" and was one of the hottest topics at the national coaches meeting during the recent Final Four.

More than 700 players are transferring this spring from the 351 Division I men's programs around the country. That's an average of two per team. Roughly 40 percent of them are switching schools in their first two years. Seventy-five of them have graduated and are changing schools for their final year of eligibility, a growing movement that has decimated some mid-major rosters.

Ten years ago, only 250 players transferred. Three years ago, it was around 450.

"Transferring 25 years ago was really frowned upon, was like there was something wrong with your basketball program if someone wanted to transfer to another school," said University of Miami coach Jim Larrañaga, who has had six players transfer in and out over the past three years.

"Now, transferring is so commonplace that last year I heard a statistic that only seven Division I schools did not have someone transferring. That means 344 schools had at least one transfer, and two was normal."

ESPN analyst Dick Vitale is deeply troubled by the trend, calling it "sickening." He puts some of the blame on high school coaches and AAU coaches for inflating players' egos with unrealistic expectations and on college coaches for raiding other programs when they get a whiff of an impatient player.

"I think it's a scenario where coaches have to start looking in the mirror, too, because I think coaches are involved, runners are involved, AAU and high school coaches are involved," Vitale said. "If they sense a kid is unhappy, they make sure and get the word out real quick to the player that, 'Hey, School X would be interested in you.'"

"So right away the thought process is there: 'Maybe if I transfer, wow, it will be a whole different scenario.' Coaches will deny that, but there's no doubt in my mind that coaches look at rosters, see kids who were big-time recruits sitting the bench, not getting any PT [playing time] and they get the word out, not through them, but through somebody, that 'if you leave, we'd be interested.' I really believe that's happening and it's created this unbelievable epidemic."

The college revolving door is not exclusive to student athletes. A July 2015 study published by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found that 37.2 percent of college students who started in 2008 transferred at least once. Of those who transferred, 45 percent switched schools more than once.

"We're not a very patient society," Larrañaga said. "In today's day and age, kids are influenced by so many different factors; and they all have the goal of playing in the NBA; and they're looking for immediate satisfaction, and if it's not there, they'll go search for it someplace else."

Although Larrañaga prefers to develop players over four years, he recognizes that the abundance of transfers opens up a giant pool of talent that can help his program. Three of the key players on the Hurricanes' 2016 Sweet 16 team were transfers — Angel Rodriguez (from Kansas State), Sheldon McClellan (from Texas), and Kamari Murphy (from Oklahoma State). The Canes' 2013 Sweet 16 team was also led by transfers Shane Larkin (from DePaul) and Kenny Kadji (from Florida).

All around the state, players are coming and going to and from the University of Florida, Florida State, FIU

and FAU.

The college transfer market has become like the NBA free agent market, with AAU coaches and other hangers-on often acting as de facto agents. It means college coaches are keeping up with the lists and wooing prospects just as they do high school athletes.

The Hurricanes lost 62 percent of their scoring with the graduation of Rodriguez, McClellan and Tonye Jekiri, so Larrañaga and his staff have been scouring the transfer market in recent weeks and putting on the hard sell with two scholarships available.

They are particularly interested in graduate transfers who might be able to help the team immediately.

Canyon Barry, youngest son of the UM and NBA legend Rick Barry, is due to graduate from the College of Charleston this summer and is looking to transfer for his final year of eligibility. Barry has a 4.0 GPA, is a two-time Academic All-American and is pursuing a master's degree in nuclear engineering.

Larrañaga had lunch with Barry in Charleston a few weeks ago, and Barry visited the UM campus on Monday and Tuesday. He visited Florida a few weeks ago and is also being courted by Northwestern, California, Kansas, Louisville and Ole Miss.

Another transfer Larrañaga has been in touch with is Duke's Derryck Thornton, but he is an underclassman and would have to sit out next season.

Ben Carter, a 6-9 graduate of UNLV, is said to be looking at Miami and would be able to play immediately for his final year of eligibility. In all, there are 75 graduate transfers on the market seeking to play their final season with a new team. Those players are highly coveted because they proved they can compete at the college level, are likely to be more mature than 18-year-olds, and they don't have to sit out a year so they can "help your team get over the hump if you're a little young," Larrañaga said.

The graduate-transfer rule states that if a student-athlete completes his or her undergraduate degree in fewer than four years of athletic eligibility, they can go to another school that offers a graduate program not offered at his/her current school without the penalty of having to sit out a season.

What started as a well-meaning rule for athletes who excelled in the classroom has instead become a way for mid-major players to bolt to higher-profile schools for their final year of eligibility.

Gary Waters, the coach at Cleveland State, is a victim of the transfer craze. Over the past two years, he lost three standout players — Bryn Forbes went to Michigan State, and fifth-year graduates Anton Grady (Wichita State) and Trey Lewis (Louisville) opted for more exposure their final season.

"I understand why the kids do it," Waters said. "It's hard to say no to a high-major team that wants you, and everyone around them is telling them to leave. What bothers me more is that some schools are poaching players from other schools, to the point that they have a War Room and assistant coaches are assigned to track players at other schools who are on schedule to graduate with eligibility remaining. They make lists of players to raid, and then get the word to the kid, through a contact, that they're interested in signing him for the final year."

"Those coaches don't have to put in the work, and they get a finished product, a ready-made player. It's not right. I am penalized because I coached a kid up and got him to graduate early. I know of six or seven mid-major coaches who had multiple players transfer and then lost their jobs the next season because the team didn't perform. I don't know if people realize how severe a problem this has become."

Waters also said the suggestion that players are seeking specialized masters programs is "a farce." Most of these moves are "strictly about basketball."

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said he is more concerned about the flood of graduate transfers than the one-and-done incoming freshmen.

"I would tell you this: The one-and-done from high school is not the story of college basketball," Krzyzewski said in March during the NCAA Tournament. "The one-and-done with the fifth-year graduate player is what is the main story for college basketball. There are many, many more of those. And that's hurt a lot of our mid-major programs when these kids leave and go. Many, many more. Very few one-and-done from

high school, very few compared to that."

Said Vitale: The initial purpose of that rule was very positive. But you can't convince me that the majority of these graduates are transferring for academics. It's about basketball. You're a coach who gives a kid your heart and soul for four years and then all of a sudden the fifth year he runs on you? That's just not right. Abuse, abuse and abuse."

ESPN college basketball writer Jeff Goodman has kept a comprehensive college transfer list for the past eight years and follows the issue closely. He said there are lists of potential transfers that circulate among college coaches, schools get the word out through intermediaries as to who they are pursuing, and when April rolls around, they swarm.

"More often than not, it's not the actual kid [with the idea to transfer]," Goodman said. "I think it's the people around him that are telling him, 'Hey, you should get out of there. You could play somewhere else right away. You're not getting a fair shake. You should be getting more touches, a bigger role.' Social media doesn't help matters, either. People can get to these kids easily and tell them they should leave."

In many cases, the fifth-year graduate players are being more sought after than McDonald's All-Americans.

Larrañaga tells the story of his visit to the home of Los Angeles Lakers power forward Tarik Black in spring 2013. Black, 6-9, was about to graduate from Memphis and was looking for a new challenge for his final year of college basketball. The Hurricanes coaching staff was very interested in him.

"I thought the meeting went very well, though maybe we had a shot, but when I asked him what were the other schools he was considering, he named nine of the best basketball programs in the country, including Duke, Georgetown, Kansas and Texas," Larrañaga said. "He had everybody recruiting him and he ended up going to Kansas."

"It's not like, 'Oh, this kid's transferring, there must be some baggage.' No, these kids are prime prospects, 21, 22, 23 years old, only one year left, they can come in and get you over the hump."

It doesn't appear the trend will cool anytime soon. The NCAA has taken note, although there doesn't seem to be any quick solution.

"The issue of transfer rules, whether it's for undergraduates or graduates, is one of the most hotly debated and discussed, I think, in sport right now, whether it's football or basketball," Mark Emmert, the NCAA president, said at the Final Four. "The challenge is, it's really hard to figure out a right way to resolve this issue."

THE REVOLVING DOOR

Every year, more and more college basketball players are choosing to transfer in the hopes of more playing time and other reasons. Ten years ago, there were 200 transfers nationwide. The past two seasons, more than 700 have transferred — an average of two per school. Here is a look at who transferred in and out at the University of Miami, University of Florida, Florida State, Florida International and Florida Atlantic over the past few years:

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Transferred IN

2013: Donnavan Kirk, Jr., (grad student) from DePaul; Angel Rodriguez, Soph., from Kansas State; Sheldon McClellan, Soph., from Texas.

2014: Joe Thomas, Jr., (grad student) from Niagara; Kamari Murphy, Soph., from Oklahoma St.

2015: Rashad Muhammad, Soph., from San Jose State.

Transferred OUT

2013: Bishop Daniels, Fr., to Rutgers

2014: James Kelly, Jr., to Marshall.

2015: Manu Lecomte, Soph., to Baylor; Deandre Burnett, Fr., to Ole Miss; Omar Sherman, Soph., to Paris (Texas) Junior College.

2016: James Palmer, Soph., to Nebraska.

Looking ahead: Miami won't stop the party in 2016-17

ESPN.com
Myron Medcalf
April 14, 2016

It's never too early to look at what's to come. Over the next few weeks, we will give you a peek at what is ahead for teams in the Power 5 conferences and some other teams expected to be players on the national scene. Next up: Miami.

When Jim Larrañaga left George Mason for Miami in 2011, his new hub featured one of the most appealing backdrops for any young man, athlete or not, in America: South Beach.

The sun sells, man. And if Larrañaga could use it to fire up a program that reached the NCAA tournament just six times prior to his arrival, perhaps he could build something. That was the idea. And after last season's Sweet 16 run -- the second of his tenure -- it seemed more tangible.

But the test comes in 2016-17. Is Miami just another squad riding the ACC's wave or a team that's positioned to do more than make a Sweet 16 run every three years? The latter seems feasible based on the top-15 recruiting class that will reduce the deficit created by the departure of Larrañaga's most important contributors and leaders.

Miami lost Angel Rodriguez (12.6 PPG, 4.5 APG), Sheldon McClellan (16.3 PPG) and Tonye Jekiri (7.6 PPG, 8.6 RPG, 1.0 BPG). That's the collection of upperclassmen who anchored last season's success.

The great Miami rapper and philosopher Pitbull once said, however, "Don't stop the party." And the party won't stop in Miami in 2016-17, although the Hurricanes will reassemble their roster in bullish times for the ACC. Duke should enter the preseason as the No. 1 team in

every reputable poll now that Grayson Allen will return to join Harry Giles and Jayson Tatum, the top two recruits in the 2016 class per RecruitingNation. North Carolina, Louisville and Virginia could all compete for the national title, too.

Miami shouldn't end -- or enter -- the year as an afterthought, though.

Incoming shooting guard Bruce Brown, ranked 31st in the 2016 class by RecruitingNation, and power forward Dewan Huell, ranked 23rd nationally, should crack the starting rotation for a Miami team that might compete for a spot in the ACC's top tier. Rodney Miller, a 6-11 center who played at Oak Hill Academy, could develop into a reliable reserve during his first season, too.

Larrañaga had recruited two ESPN 100 recruits prior to this year's class, which features two. Brown and Huell will launch their collegiate careers with the buffer of a strong returning group.

Davon Reed (11.1 PPG), the top returning scorer from last season, will snatch a greater share of the team's shots in 2016-17. The 6-6 wing who made 40 percent of his 3-pointers last season could blossom next season. Kamari Murphy steps into the starting center role vacated by Jekiri after averaging 5.6 PPG and 6.0 RPG last season. Plus, Rashad Muhammad, the brother of NBA wing Shabazz Muhammad, will regain his eligibility after sitting out last season following his transfer from San Jose State. He averaged 13.9 PPG in 2014-15.

Yet, the final returnee demands both praise and scrutiny. This is Ja'Quan Newton's squad now. The guard averaged 10.5 PPG and 2.5 APG last season. With Rodriguez gone, he'll probably play point guard for a team that lost one of the

nation's best.

That's the major concern with this Miami team.

"He can score and he can pass, but his assist-to-turnover ratio is 1-to-1," Larrañaga told the Miami Herald last week. "If he's really going to be the kind of point guard that can lead our team, he needs to improve to 2-to-1 or 3-to-1."

In 2015-16, both Newton (20.6) and Rodriguez (20.5) ended the year with equally subpar turnover rates. But Rodriguez was the only player on the roster with a top-100 assist rate.

So Larrañaga is right. Newton (2.5 APG, 2.1 TPG) finished the NCAA tournament with five assists and seven turnovers. If he assumes primary ballhandling duties for Miami next season, limiting turnovers will be pivotal. Still, Rodriguez committed turnovers on nearly one-fifth of his possessions, too, and Miami still reached the Sweet 16. That's likely the high mark for next year's team.

The young talent and returning players comprise a solid crew with the potential to get back to the NCAA tournament and build for the future. Larrañaga gained enough to thrive in 2016-17.

Most teams would tumble in the standings after the losses of Rodriguez and McClellan. Miami could slip, too.

But the crew that's coming to Coral Gables and the talent coming back probably won't let that happen.

Thoughts from CanesHoops' Signee, Dejan Vasiljevic

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
April 14, 2016

Nearly three months after his visit and commitment, it is now official - Dejan Vasiljevic is a Miami Hurricane. The dynamic guard signed his Letter of Intent from Australia on Thursday, and it arrived in Coral Gables in time for the start of Spring Signing Period on Wednesday (time zones are pretty grand). We've already spoken with DJ twice, both before and after his January visit, but he was once again gracious enough to answer a few questions. Our questions and his answers are below, lightly edited for clarity and conciseness.

SOTU: Lots of American recruits have commitment or signing ceremonies to celebrate their college choices. Did (or will) you have any sort of celebration, or was it simply signing your name on the line and sending it to the university?

DV: As a family, we discussed this a while back and decided that it should be celebrated due to this being a new chapter of my life. We have planned to host a family gathering to celebrate this achievement but also a going-away party.

SOTU: You went through the recruitment process in a very deliberate way, and committing in January was obviously a major relief for you. What did it feel like to make it official, and knowing that now your future coaches can now speak freely about your impact on the team?

DV: Yes, the recruitment process was an intense and long process. Having many offers from Division 1 schools didn't help, it just made the process even tougher. Committing in January was always the plan, and once I did it, was the right

decision to make and yet today, other coaches keep asking whether I am still committed to the Canes program and I can tell you I'm 100 percent a Miami Hurricanes player. As a person, I don't show much emotion off the court but committing to Coach Larrañaga's program, I knew it was the best fit for me. Coach Larrañaga has called me everyday alongside Coach Fisher to check in on me and how I can impact the team coming into my freshman year.

SOTU: You told us that your plan was to develop as a point guard, and to do your best to fill Angel Rodriguez's shoes from the moment you set foot on campus. How has your game developed in the last few months across your efforts with Perth, the U20s tournament, and the BigV league?

DV: My game keeps improving day by day. I've had many opportunities the last 4 months training with the Perth Wildcats, but also playing one of the post leagues in Australia, the Big V competition. Many scouts and spectators see me as a shooting guard, but these teams have played me at the point position and has improved my point guard skills dramatically.

SOTU: Is the plan still for you to arrive for the first summer session in mid-May? Any other changes to your plans, or other updates you want us to know?

DV: Yes, the plan is the same. I arrive in Miami on the 14th of May and begin to get to work on the 16th. I'm excited and I can't wait to begin my college career at the University of Miami.

Thanks as always to SOTU's CanesHoops Consigliere Josh Frank @JoshDaCane for his work on this piece.

Larrañaga's early look at the 2016-17 season

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
April 13, 2016

Jim Larrañaga didn't rest for very long after taking his team to the Sweet 16 for the second time in four seasons. He had a lot of work to do.

"We're not done recruiting," he said last Thursday, before the Dejan Vasiljevic signing was made official. "We have 10 scholarship players and three open spots [two, after Wednesday]. That's a third of our team."

Looking to avoid roster imbalance and pleased with a top-10 recruiting class that includes McDonald's All-American forward Dewan Huell, top-50 guard Bruce Brown and top-100 center Rodney Miller, Larrañaga said UM is looking at transfers – there were reportedly about 700 available – and doesn't want to bring in another freshman "unless he's a superstar.

"We only have two seniors, two juniors and two sophomores returning. We have a lot of openings. And to project us right now is impossible."

Backcourt

– Asked who will take over for graduating point guard Angel Rodriguez, Larrañaga cracked, "Are you available?"

As of now, the plan is to turn it over to Ja'Quan Newton, but Larrañaga said he needs to improve his assist-to-turnover ratio. Newton averaged 10.5 points per game, but had a 1:1 ratio. "He needs to improve that to 2:1 or 3:1," Larrañaga said. Other candidates: Vasiljevic, Brown and 6-7 forward Anthony Lawrence Jr., who handled the ball in high school (and put up a 2:1 ratio in 12 minutes per game as a freshman last year).

– Shooting guard Rashad Muhammad is a bit of a mystery. The former San Jose State leading scorer arrived at Miami rail-thin and with questionable defensive ability.

Larrañaga: "He's a terrific three-point shooter. He also has some terrific layups. But he came in here weighing 157 pounds. He's now up to 170. We're hoping we can get him up to 180 or 185 by next season."

Asked if Muhammad is ready to take over for Sheldon McClellan as Miami's top option, Larrañaga said "he can really shoot the ball" but needs to improve his defense and rebounding:

"When [McClellan] became a defender is when we became a much better basketball team."

– Larrañaga – and many recruiting analysts – are high on freshman combo guard Bruce Brown, who will arrive at UM after a year of prep at Vermont Academy. He's 19, has a college-ready frame (6-4, 200) and plays a physical style.

Larrañaga described Brown as "a combination of [former Hurricane] Durand Scott, Sheldon McClellan and [Villanova leading scorer] Josh Hart. That's the type of body type, athlete. You see how high Sheldon McClellan can jump. I don't know if Bruce can jump quite that high, but it's close. He's in the ballpark. Durand Scott was great at driving to the basket and making some very creative layups. I would say Bruce Brown has that same skillset. Josh Hart can guard multiple positions – he can guard a two, a three, a four, and I think Bruce Brown will be able to do the same thing.

"Will he be able to do it as a freshman? We hope so. We think so. But you don't know that until you actually get him in a college environment" where the game is more nuanced and highly scouted (not to mention faster and much more skilled).

– Was Larrañaga surprised that James Palmer transferred?

"No," he said.

Larrañaga said most transfers – "and in James' case" in particular – "they come into college expecting a lot. ... He's a good kid. He was a very nice contributor for two years and I'm sure he'll be a very good player at his next stop." Palmer, from Washington, D.C., told CBS Sports he will visit Nebraska, Temple, Washington, California and Cincinnati.

– Rodriguez and Tonye Jekiri will compete in the Portsmouth Invitational Tournament, which begins Wednesday. McClellan has been invited to the NBA Combine, May 11-15 in Chicago.

Frontcourt

– Huell suggested in recent interviews he considers himself a one-and-done candidate. That doesn't worry Larrañaga.

"I really like senior leadership. But more than that, I like really good players," he said. "Dewan is a very talented young man."

As a Virginia assistant in the early 1980s, Larrañaga coached 7-4 Ralph Sampson, whom he said could have been the first player chosen after his freshman, sophomore or junior seasons. He went No. 1 overall after his senior year. "This is a different generation now," Larrañaga said.

"If Dewan wants to be one-and-done, what he has to understand – what everybody has to understand – it's about your development."

Larrañaga wouldn't reveal much of what he thinks about Huell, who is pegged by recruiting analysts as a spring-loaded 6-9 four-man who brings high-energy defense and a developing offensive game. "We haven't put him through a practice yet," Larrañaga said.

– What does Larrañaga want to see from forwards Kamari Murphy and Ebuka Izundu, who will play the 4 and 5?

"I want them to gain 15 pounds," he said. "Buka, 20."

Murphy (6-8, 218) may not get there – and is strong, anyway – but Izundu (6-10, 210) might. Since Miami doesn't have much bulk in the middle, both will need both to be more stout to make up for the loss of Jekiri (7-0, 250). Izundu, who arrived at 201 pounds, is on a similar curve as Jekiri. "He could be 230 next year. If he is, he will be a major factor," Larrañaga said.

– Miller, whom Larrañaga said is 7-foot and 250 pounds, though recruiting websites list him an inch shorter and between 10 and 20 pounds lighter, will be the largest player on the roster. Asked if he'll be relied on earlier, Larrañaga said he couldn't answer that, but noted that big men normally lag behind guards in strength and conditioning and skill development.

– Miami's only commit for 2017 is 6-6 three-star D.J. Russell, from Jacksonville-Ribault. He committed in July 2013. UM has some 25 offers out, according to VerbalCommits.

Point guard to be issue for Miami basketball team

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
April 7, 2016

University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga wore a pair of brightly colored zigzag socks to his postseason news conference on Thursday afternoon — a gift from assistant coach Adam Fisher.

Larrañaga was in a jovial mood and chatted about everything from Villanova's championship run to the future of his team. The Hurricanes, who reached the Sweet 16, lose senior starters Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri.

"We're not done recruiting; we have two scholarships to give, so to project us now is impossible," he said. "We're very happy with the three kids we signed and hopeful we'll sign another one next Wednesday."

The signees are McDonald's All-American Dewan Huell, Bruce Brown and Rodney Miller. Dejan Vasiljevic, a guard on Australia's youth national team, is expected to sign next week. He picked UM over Stanford and Louisville, among others.

Larrañaga is also scouring the transfer market, where up to 700 players are expected to be available, and looking at fifth-year graduates who could contribute right away.

His biggest concern is at point guard. Asked who will replace Rodriguez, Larrañaga replied: "Are you available?"

He then said "it's going to be a challenge" and explained that the plan is to "turn the reins over" to Ja'Quan Newton, but he said Newton needs to cut down on

turnovers. "He can score and he can pass, but his assist- to-turnover ratio is 1 to 1. If he's really going to be the kind of point guard that can lead our team, he needs to improve to 2 to 1 or 3 to 1."

Other options include Anthony Lawrence, who played the point in high school and had a 2-to-1 assist-to-turnover ratio as a UM freshman, Brown and Vasiljevic.

As to whether he's concerned Huell could leave for the NBA after one season, Larrañaga said: "I really like senior leadership, but more than that, I like really good players."

Dewan is a very talented young man. If you ask me, 'Would you rather have a Dewan Huell or someone who's staying four years for sure 'cause he ain't that good,' I want Dewan."

UM women's coach Katie Meier has also been busy, having player exit meetings after a loss to South Dakota State in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. Although she hoped to go deeper, Meier said her first words to her staff in their postseason meeting were: "Thank you. It was a true, pure, absolute joy working with you every single day."

She showed her team a video montage of male and female players hurting after losses. "We needed to feel the pain," she said.

The Canes lose only one senior, Michelle Woods, and gain FAU transfer Shaneese Bailey. Bailey, a 6-1 combo guard, was FAU's leading scorer as a sophomore and made first-team All-Conference USA. She was a celebrated high jumper in high school and is the cousin of 12-time NFL Pro Bowler Champ Bailey.

"She is a ridiculously talented young lady,

very explosive, a game-changer," Meier said of Bailey, comparing her to former UM star Riquana "Bay Bay" Williams.

The Canes are also expected to sign 6-1 guard Sarah Mortenson of Long Island (New York) Lutheran. She is a native of Denmark.

Dishin' with DJ - "Exciting Times are Ahead"

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Feb. 1, 2016

The Miami Hurricanes added to their best ever recruiting class with the commitment of combo guard Dejan Vasiljevic in mid-January. We caught up with the Australian superstar to find out about his visit to the U, how he made his decision, and where things go from here.

Our CanesHoops Consigliere, Josh Frank (@JoshDaCane) was able to get an exclusive interview with Dejan Vasiljevic back in November and we are fortunate once again that Dejan granted him another Q&A for State Of The U!

Many observers point to globalization and the rapid advancement of technology as major shifts in the world in recent decades. On a much smaller scale, this influence is felt on the increasingly competitive world of college basketball recruiting. No longer are a handful of "rich" or resourceful programs looking to find a gem hidden away from their competitors, hoping that a player they've heard about or seen only once is more stud than stiff when he arrives in the States. Now, major competitions are scouted as heavily as domestic AAU and high school tournaments, and streamed worldwide for those who aren't able to attend in person.

Dejan Vasiljevic broke out in a big way at the biggest competitions - leading Australia to a silver medal at the 2014 FIBA 17U World Championships and earning All-Tournament honors, and as the country's leading scorer playing up an age group in the 2015 FIBA 19U World Championships. With his reputation established, the 6'2" guard fielded offers from schools such as LSU, Louisville and Texas, and ultimately visited Stanford and St. Mary's before choosing Miami last month.

The new Hurricanes commit again graciously agreed to an email interview with us - this time from western Australia, where he has temporarily joined the Perth Wildcats, one of Australia's most successful professional basketball franchises, as a developmental player after graduating from high school at the Centre of Excellence in December. Again, his answers were so comprehensive that we've to run the entire exchange, lightly edited and annotated [in bracketed italics] for clarity and context, and any mistakes are ours.

SOTU: First, please tell us about your visit. Who was your host? Besides attending the FSU game and a practice, what else did you do and see as part of the official visit? What were your favorite parts of the trip, from both a basketball and non-basketball perspective?

DV: The overall experience with the visit was just incredible; however, it was extremely busy due to a number of meetings and tour of campus in the space of allowed 48 hours. The entire coaching staff was my host at certain times and they were really approachable considering that was in the middle of their preparation for a very important game. I should mention one of the managers, Viraj Kulhari, who was our host during the game. The real question is what didn't I get to see! I saw the entire campus, was provided with an opportunity to meet the academic advisor, faculty and program advisors and many other people who would assist me during my time at the University. My favorite part from a basketball perspective was the game day routine and what it included in the preparation for every game. From a non-basketball perspective, what really stood out was friendly and encouraging environment which included the players, the coaching and the support staff. Mrs. L [Coach Larranaga's wife, Liz] was really special ensuring first that we were looked after and then second that no breaches of the NCAA rules were committed. An outstanding personality!

SOTU: What was your feeling stepping into the arena for an ACC rivalry game? How did the environment compare to what you'd seen on TV, or any games and tournaments you have played in?

DV: I have attended professional games in the past, including the NBA All-Star [when he was part of the 2015 Basketball Without Borders Global Camp], but I have never experienced such an excitement stepping into the arena against FSU. The coaches were genuinely concerned with the crowd since it was an off-school game [school was in winter break, with classes starting the following Monday]; on the contrary the students turned up in a large number and what they created gave me goose bumps. Dick Vitale was great dancing with cheerleaders, and the atmosphere was simply crazy and it made me want to step on the court and take part in action. I really appreciated the experience, with the players approaching the game with such professionalism and the crowd being so electrifying. I believe the organization should be very proud of ensuring such a support; basically the arena is completely sold out for this season.

SOTU: Could you please tell us what it was like to meet Coach L and the other coaches and players after being recruited from a distance for so long (having only met Coach Fisher,

correct)?

DV: From the first moment, Coach L was there - he greeted us at the airport, made sure he could pronounce our names properly, which can be very challenging, and then every spare moment of his time, he would either spend with me or with my family. He is simply an unbelievable person, such a great coach with a great experience in college basketball. It was really interesting to see how the whole coaching team operated considering that almost everyone was half the age of Coach L. Many wonder about success this program has or has had, but they should meet the coaching staff to understand the way they approach all tasks and their overall intentions, which all has started transferring into a successful recruiting campaign. Their ability to convey their vision and immerse me into their enthusiasm was really great and was one of the reasons for my decision. I will definitely do my best to contribute in achieving overall, team and personal goals.

SOTU: As an international prospect, you took visits together rather than over a series of individual weekends, and you brought your family with you. Who came on your visit with you? During the unofficial downtime - in Miami, in California, or elsewhere, what else did you have a chance to see and visit?

DV: While really draining, taking visits together had its advantages. First, due to the NCAA requirements there is no real downtime so I was able to 'compare notes' easy - I did not have to remind myself all the time and simply asked the same questions. My whole family, mum, dad and my little sister, accompanied me during the visits, which really worked as a charm - if I forgot to ask something, someone would step in to direct me properly - mum was more concerned with the environment (weather, distances, availability of facilities), while my dad was more into academia and basketball. I think my sister was more interested in asking questions that would help her decide on a college than assisting me in my decision, but she was really happy to be part of the experience.

Many people don't realize that actually there is no downtime during these visits. As per the NCAA rules, these visits should be finalized within 48 hours, so a little time could have been allocated for sightseeing. I did not see much in Miami, so I can't really say that the South Beach played any role in my decision. Due to last minute itinerary changes, we visited St. Mary's College unofficially, which allowed me to ask questions relevant to transitioning from high school to college environment. Coaches [Randy] Bennett and [Marty] Clarke were exceptional allocating their time to assist me with my questions. I also had an opportunity to meet my former teammates and current Gaels players [Dane] Pineau, [Kyle] Clark, [Jordan] Hunter and [Tanner] Krebs, and ask them about their experience with transition. It was also great to compare the campuses on these three locations. We did not have much time for anything else since on our way back from Moraga we got stuck in traffic.

SOTU: You returned home for a week before announcing your decision. When did you know that you were going to choose Miami? Ultimately, why did you choose Miami?

DV: I believe my decision surprised some since they may have seen me as part of the Stanford program due to their outstanding academic standing and reputation. But from the start, I was outright open with everyone involved in recruiting me that I was interested in both aspects of this experience - basketball and education. So when I returned home, I had to really assess properly which college would provide me with the best support to achieve my short and long term goals. I had to do additional research on the standing of undergraduate programs and current curricula and made additional inquiry with contacts in the US and Australia to provide me with some additional insights into these basketball programs and the conferences. On top of all this, I had to have a serious discussion with my family and get their impressions of the colleges involved. At the start of the process, which was almost 2 years ago, my dad asked me to be really honest of my intentions and keep everyone informed, which really worked well on most occasions. In the final stage of the decision making this paid off, since I have developed really good relationships with many coaches and scouts, not directly linked to these programs but with a really good understanding where these programs were heading. And they gave me their objective inputs.

So in the end it was Miami that was the best fit to my plans. It certainly provided me with the required balance between basketball and academics to allow me for a proper development in both areas. The business program at UM was broad enough to provide me with a good foundation for the future since I plan on continuing with a graduate school after basketball. I also felt a part of the basketball vision. The coaching staff was really open and outright honest telling me that I was not the only one good at research - they did research on me, basically dissecting me fully to show my strengths and weaknesses. They showed how they could utilize my strengths immediately and what I need to improve

to be a key factor on their future team.

SOTU: Did being part of what many are calling Miami's best recruiting class ever (it is ranked in the top 10 by several analysts, prior to your commitment) mean anything to you? Did you have the opportunity to meet Dewan Huell on your visit or to talk to either of the other commits before you made your decision?

DV: To be honest, I am still puzzled with rankings since personally these mean very little to me. What really matters is the performance on the court. Personally, I like the way current players have been replaced by newcomers, which will ensure that the Canes will remain very competitive in years to come. I hope we all will contribute our best to be successful and hopefully bring that maiden NCAA championship to Coral Gables. I had an opportunity to meet Dewan Huell after the game against FSU and chat with him about his impressions. I can say that I am very excited and looking forward to playing with Dewan and the other commits (Bruce Brown and Rodney Miller).

SOTU: What have the coaches told you about what they perceive your role to be next year, and moving forward, as the current class features four players who could all see the floor at the same time?

DV: With departure of Angel Rodriguez, I am left with huge shoes to fill. As a freshman, I can certainly make an immediate impact with the toughness and scoring ability but also the experience of playing at two World Championships. However, as I mentioned before there are several areas of my game that I need to improve to be able to compete at the next stage. Looking at 2016 commit list with remaining team members, I would say that exciting times are ahead.

SOTU: What is the plan going forward? What do you do to prepare for making that sort of move and adjustment? When do you plan to arrive and do you intend to participate in summer school?

DV: The plan is to join the program early to give me a head start in school and in preparation for the new season, so I will arrive mid-May. Until then my calendar is full of events. At the moment, I am part of the Perth Wildcats squad. The Wildcats are a professional team here in Australia with several imports, including Casey Prather, who was a member of the Gators during their successful NCAA run in 2014, and Jermaine Beal, a former Vanderbilt player and graduate. Matching up against these former college talents is invaluable experience especially with their first-hand knowledge of the collegiate competitions. I am also committed to the State preparations for the upcoming U20 National Championships in Ipswich, and to Diamond Valley BigV Championship Men team with the season starting in March. There is also an opportunity to be invited to the Nike Hoop Summit at the beginning of April, where I would play along with the best athletes from around the world against the best 10-12 US athletes. So the schedule is full on.

SOTU: I saw that we are recruiting your national teammate, Deng Gak, who is now in school in the United States. Do you know of any other Australians or COE teammates who we are recruiting for future classes, in either men's or women's hoops?

DV: One thing is for sure - Deng Gak is a great basketball player and even better guy off the court. Definitely he is a person I would love to play with in the future and hopefully he commits to the Canes next recruiting year! It will be interesting to see how the next generation performs in the Worlds and the State championships since these are the places Australian talents can be fully identified. At the moment I am not aware of any current interests but I will instruct coaches to watch the U17 Worlds, which take place in June/July this year. These games are streamed live and provide an excellent opportunity for everyone to see what is available internationally. One of the names frequently mentioned is younger brother of Harry Froling's, Sam, who appears more versatile than his brother. As for women's prospects, again plenty of talents in Australia and my sister also showed keen interest into the women's program at the U.

SOTU: Thanks again for taking the time - is there anything else you want to Miami fans to know now that you're on board?

DV: No worries, I am a guy that loves to chill and relax, but when it comes to business whether in the gym or school, I am a workhorse giving it all. I'd like to thank you for your keen interest and invite all our fans to come out and support us in future years. Exciting times ahead!

Recruiting Class Could Anchor Miami in ACC Top Tier

ACCSports.com

Craig Handel

March 31, 2016

The University of Miami men's basketball program has accomplished things under coach Jim Larrañaga that never have been done before. Two Sweet 16 trips in four years. Conference regular-season and tournament championships. A winning record against Duke and North Carolina. Larrañaga also has half of the Hurricanes' eight NCAA tournament wins.

Can he sustain the success? After finishing third in the ACC, Miami became one of six schools from the conference to win its first two games in the NCAAs and advance into the Sweet 16. A dominant, hot-shooting night from Villanova ended Miami's season, 92-69. The Hurricanes now will have to rebuild without point guard Angel Rodriguez, guard Sheldon McClellan and center Tonye Jekiri. The last time Miami lost this much talent, it went two years without returning to the NCAAs.

Will that happen again? An answer of either yes or no wouldn't be surprising on either end.

The case for Miami does return versatile guard Davon Reed (11.1 points, 4.1 rebounds per game), and guard Ja'Quan Newton (10.5 points) was considered by many to be one of the best sixth men in the country. The Hurricanes also will welcome back forward Kamari Murphy, a transfer from Oklahoma State who made 28 starts, and guard Anthony Lawrence, who received more minutes later in the season.

Once again, Larrañaga dipped into the transfer ranks to bring in San Jose State

transfer Rashad Muhammad, who led his former school in scoring in two straight seasons as a freshman and sophomore. He sat out this past season but will give Miami five experienced players heading into next season.

Guard James Palmer would've been a sixth, but he'll transfer.

Those players will be pushed by what may be the Hurricanes' best recruiting class ever.

Ja'Quan Newton holds the key to Miami's future

State of the U
David Perez
March 27, 2016

On March 21, 2014 Neumann-Goretti High School hit the floor for the Pennsylvania State Championship Basketball game. Up to this point, the Philadelphia powerhouse had a great year and breezed through the playoffs. But on a Friday night in spring, fans experienced something unforgettable.

The Saints were led by ESPN 100 recruit Ja'Quan Newton, who had dominated throughout his high school career, and was playing in the state championship game again. Fans prepared for a show, and a day after the tragic loss of his mother to cancer, Newton delivered to the tune of 33 points and 8 rebounds. The performance was awe-inspiring to those in attendance, and one of his teammates described him as "probably the best player to ever play for us."

The night clearly demonstrated that Newton was special, and in his first two years at The University of Miami Newton has not disappointed. The 6-2 guard averaged 10 points during his sophomore season, and was referred to as "the best sixth man in the country" by broadcasting legend Dick Vitale. Newton has stepped up in a lot of big moments throughout his Hurricanes career thus far, but now, in the aftermath of a sweet 16 run, Ja'Quan will face his greatest challenge yet; stepping up as a leader.

Newton experienced a learning curve throughout his freshman season, but a stellar sophomore season has those around the program confident in him moving forward.

"I knew the talent was there, but I didn't know when it was going to show," Point guard Angel Rodriguez said to Comcast Sports Net midway through the season. The graduating senior went on to say that "for him it just took a year."

And for the 20 year old sophomore, the time to learn under a veteran's shadow is over. Entering his junior year, Newton is expected to be the starting point guard and should be playing with a young backcourt. Anthony Lawrence Jr. is set to be a sophomore, and ESPN top 40 guard Bruce Brown will enter campus as a freshman this fall. That lineup is a big change from that of 2015-16, which saw two seniors start at point guard and shooting guard.

"We don't have a prototypical point guard," Head Coach Jim Laranaga said in an interview earlier this year. "Even Ja'Quan is not just a pure point guard. He is a scorer as well."

Newton may not be the prototypical point guard Miami has had in a Shane Larkin and Angel Rodriguez, but the 185 pound guard will have to be a versatile player for the 'Canes in 2016-17.

Newton has been a versatile player over the course of his career, and has drilled "daggers" in close games. One of the biggest shots of Newton's career came in a road game against Georgia Tech. With less than two minutes remaining Newton hung a three over his defender to make it a six point game. After that, the Yellow Jackets never got closer than 4 points to Miami. Newton led the way in that game along with guard Sheldon McClellan, but McClellan will not be in Coral Gables any longer. Ja'Quan will still have the help of veterans such as Davon Reed, but moving forward his potential is vital to Miami's future.

This season Oklahoma guard Buddy Hield showed us just how important a superstar can be to a team. While Hield is expected to be a first round pick this summer, his college resume proves the point that with a star guard anything is possible. Moving forward Newton will have to continue his development as that star guard for Miami. Newton isn't the whole team, but his leadership over the next two years may mean the difference between a trip to the Sweet 16 and national championship contention.

Next season's Hurricanes will look lot different than Sweet 16 team

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 26, 2016

No matter how far the Hurricanes go next year, they will look a lot different getting there.

Four seniors graduate and six players return from the squad that lost Thursday in the Sweet 16, including starting guard Davon Reed, forward Kamari Murphy and key backup Ja'Quan Newton. While Miami has enough talent to remain near the front of the pack in the ACC, Jim Larrañaga's roster comes with plenty of question marks.

Next season's Hurricanes will look lot different than Sweet 16 team photo Miami signees Dewan Huell (left) and Bruce Brown. (247Sports)

After a two-week break, Miami will return to work with those three assuming leadership roles, instead of program bedrocks Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri. Reed and Murphy showed plenty of maturity as juniors. Newton's case is a little different, given that he was suspended for the final three games of the regular season for a violation of team rules.

"I have a lot of faith in Davon and Kamari," associate head coach Chris Caputo said. "I hope that Ja'Quan can look at his year and feel that he had a very good year, but there are so many things he'll have to do to put himself in a position to be considered one of the good players in the [ACC]. You've got to go perform, and do it not just as the sixth man."

Caputo said Newton is not the only player – or coach – who needs to self-evaluate.

Next season's Hurricanes will look lot different than Sweet 16 team photo

"I think everybody's going to look at themselves now and think about how they can improve," he said. "It's attitudes. It's strength. It's development in their offensive game and defensive abilities. I'm not a big believer in, 'Hey we have these guys back, let's pencil them in for these type of performances' because it's a year later. Everybody's got to look at themselves collectively."

In the year following Miami's last Sweet 16 appearance, Larrañaga was forced to play zone defense and slow down his offense. Despite a lack of size and experience up front, next year's team appears to be more capable than that group, which went 17-16 and missed the postseason.

A large reason for that: Larrañaga will welcome a top-10 recruiting class, the highest-rated group in school history. McDonald's All-American forward Dewan Huell and guard Bruce Brown likely will play key roles right away. Center Rodney Miller may be relied on for backup minutes, but UM can afford to be more patient with Australian guard Dejan Vasiljevic. Additionally, UM has one open scholarship and could use it on a ready-to-play graduate transfer.

Here's a breakdown of the Hurricanes at each position:

Point guard: Newton (6-foot-2, 180 pounds) can get into the lane, distribute the ball and score, but can he raise his teammates' games if he's having an off night? Can he lead them as Rodriguez did? Regardless, he'll play major minutes, and Miami will need him – there's no true point guard backing him up.

Shooting guard: Rail-thin Rashad Muhammad (6-6, 160), who is eligible

this year after transferring, was a two-time leading scorer for San Jose State and will need to make up for some of McClellan's production. James Palmer (6-5, 202) will have to hold off incoming freshmen combo guards Brown (6-4, 200), a rugged defender, and Vasiljevic (6-2, 195), a standout player in international tournaments.

Small forward: Reed (6-6, 205) will be in the starting lineup somewhere, and could handle the ball if Newton's on the bench. Anthony Lawrence Jr. (6-7, 210) could be Miami's Swiss-army knife, able to play and guard 1-through-4. Larrañaga will have flexibility at the 2 and 3.

Power forward: Murphy (6-8, 218) started here last year, but without Jekiri (7-0, 250) patrolling the middle, his role may change. The scouting report on Huell (6-9, 220) is that he's a high-energy rebounder and shot blocker who can drive, has a good feel for post play and can finish at the rim. NBA scouts will be watching him. Larrañaga could play both at the same time, but that lineup wouldn't work against every opponent.

Center: The weight room will be the summer home of sophomore Ebuka Izundu (6-10, 210), who needs to add considerable size and strength in order to contribute regularly. Miller, who is listed at 6-11 and various weights up to 250, is a more traditional big man. ESPN's scouting report criticized him for his lack of conditioning and "motor." However, he's a four-star recruit from a top prep program (Oak Hill Academy in Virginia).

Projecting 2016-17 Miami lineup no easy task

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
March 25, 2016

No matter how far the Hurricanes go next year, they will look a lot different in getting there.

Guard Davon Reed and forward Kamari Murphy are the returning starters the squad that lost Thursday in the Sweet 16, and while it appears Ja'Quan Newton will be ready to take over at the point, Miami has question marks up and down a roster that should remain near the front of the pack in the ACC.

About two weeks from now, Miami will be back at work with those three assuming leadership roles, instead of guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan and center Tonye Jekiri as program bedrocks. Reed and Murphy showed plenty of maturity as juniors. Newton's case is a little different, given that he was suspended for the final three games of the regular season for a violation of team rules.

"I have a lot of faith in Davon and Kamari," associate head coach Chris Caputo said. "I hope that Ja'Quan can look at his year and feel that he had a very good year, but there are so many things he'll have to do to put himself in a position to be considered one of the good players in the [ACC]. You've got to go perform, and do it not just as the sixth man."

That will take some introspection on his part, and he won't be alone in that self-analysis. Caputo brought up the example of McClellan, who transferred from Texas and sat out the 2013-14 season. Soon after arriving, he opened up to the coaching staff about his perceived shortcomings as a player. He continued to listen as he worked. He is now considered a potential NBA draft pick.

"I think everybody's going to look at themselves now and think about how they can improve," Caputo said. "It's attitudes. It's strength. It's development in their offensive game and defensive abilities. I'm not a big believer in, 'Hey we have these guys back, let's pencil them in for these type of performances' because it's a year later. Everybody's got to look at themselves collectively."

Miami's opening-night lineup will likely include Newton, a junior-to-be, at point guard and Reed at small forward. Whether Murphy plays power forward or center depends on matchups and the development of other players, but he will start.

Unlike the year following Miami's last Sweet 16 run, when Jim Larrañaga used zone defense and slowed things down on offense, he has

more talent. There is a top-10 recruiting class on the way that includes highly regarded forward Dewan Huell and guard Bruce Brown. For that reason, a drastic a drop-off is unlikely.

"I think that's fair to say," Caputo said. "Hopefully the guys we have coming can have an appreciation for what we're doing and assimilate quickly. Hopefully the returning guys will have learned from their experiences. Some of the success we enjoyed, they know what went into it."

How they'll play will be interesting. Miami's heaviest returning players — before any offseason weight-room work — are about 220 pounds. No one is shorter than 6-foot-2. There is little bulk in the middle and lots of size on the wings.

Also keep in mind: Miami has one open scholarship and could use it on a ready-to-play graduate transfer.

Another thing: what will the ACC look like, with everyone now able to test the NBA Draft waters and return to school if they're too chilly? Fascinating offseason ahead.

Going position-by-position on the Canes, plenty of questions pop up:

Point guard: Newton (6-2, 180) dominates on the ball, gets into the lane and can score, but can he raise his teammates' games if he's having an off night? Can he be a leader? Regardless, he'll play major minutes, and Miami will need him. Who is his backup? UM doesn't have a true point guard. Brown (6-4, 200) is a combo guard and has a college-ready frame, but can he run an offense? Can Dejan Vasiljevic (6-2, 195), who is a scorer and a shooter now but projects as a future point guard? Would Miami run a forward here, like Reed (6-6, 205), who did it as a freshman?

Shooting guard: The rail-thin Rashad Muhammad (6-6, 160) was a two-time leading scorer for San Jose State and is a shooter. Is there more to his game, like defensive ability? James Palmer (6-5, 202) is beloved by his teammates — several say he is the funniest guy on the team — but he wasn't able to earn consistent minutes as a sophomore. He's still young for his class, having arrived on campus as a 17-year-old, and could make a leap. He'll have to hold off Brown, an aggressive defender and scorer, and Vasiljevic, who has been a standout player in international tournaments.

Small forward: Reed seems like the starter here, unless he's playing elsewhere. Anthony Lawrence Jr. (6-7, 210) could be Miami's swiss-army knife, able to play and guard 1-through-4. Palmer can play here, too. The Hurricanes' wings are largely

interchangeable. It would be no surprise to see Muhammad here if Brown is in the game as a rugged 2-guard.

Power forward: Murphy is a natural 4, but there's no Jekiri at the 5. The scouting report on Huell (6-9, 220) is that he's a high-energy rebounder and shot blocker who can drive, has a feel in the post and can finish at the rim. He's talented enough to play early and NBA scouts will be watching him plenty. Can he play here and Murphy plays the five, giving Miami a pair of springy big men? Would Lawrence bulk up and play here? If Miami can't get a ready-made starter at this or another position, is there a big-bodied transfer out there who can provide defense and fouls off the bench?

A thought from Murphy:

"I'm not satisfied. I will say I'm grateful to be on this team, though. We had a great year. Our goal was not to get to the Sweet 16 and lose, so I'm definitely not satisfied with that. We have a lot of guys leaving and a lot of new guys coming in. My job is to preach the same principles to the new guys so we can have the same kind of team next year."

Center: The weight room needs to be the summer home for Ebuka Izundu (6-10, 210). If he puts on about 20 pounds, he appears to be a starter — with a Jekiri-like development curve but much more offensive game. Miami has a more traditional big man in freshman Rodney Miller, who is listed at 6-11 and various weights up to 250, but ESPN's scouting report of him criticized him for his lack of conditioning and "motor." Good news: Miami's coaching staff has proven it can help players improve their physical and mental strength.

Caputo, talking about the importance of strength gains, brought up Izundu as an example. "He can be a very good player in this program," Caputo said. "He's got to get stronger. He can't be the weight he is today and give us the opportunity to beat teams like we played tonight. But he's got some abilities, and he knows physically where he needs to be. Our freshmen will be in that same boat."



**University of Miami
Men's Basketball Clips**

Program Highlights

Larrañaga: Old-school coach with new-world approach

CBS Sports.com

Gary Parrish

Feb. 13, 2013

Less than 24 hours after five players combined to make 15 3-pointers in a blowout win over North Carolina that kept Miami perfect in the ACC, Jim Larrañaga was sitting on the patio of an Italian restaurant called Villagio, enjoying the weather, ordering salmon, discussing where his Hurricanes might land in the Associated Press Poll that would be released the next day.

I told him the top five seemed likely.

"Really?" he said.

At which point, I asked what he thought.

"Honestly, I never think about it," Larrañaga answered. "The only rankings that are important to me are the rankings of the KenPom.com stats in all of the categories that determine success or failure."

This struck me as interesting because, just a day earlier, I'd sat with two dozen other reporters and listened to Larrañaga detail his affection for advanced statistics. Now this 63-year-old supposed old-school coach was doing it again, in a different setting, while his wife, Liz, picked at a bowl of lentil soup. He was bucking stereotypes.

"I value those statistics," Larrañaga said. "I value them for motivation."

Jim Larrañaga has 20 winning seasons as a Division I head coach, a trip to the 2006 Final Four on his resume and the reputation of a highly-skilled tactician. His credibility has long been established. But when he arrived at Miami in April 2011 after 14 seasons at George Mason, this son of a Floridian and grandson of a Cuban immigrant didn't rely on past achievements to grab the attention of his new players. Instead, Larrañaga asked them questions about them, confident the answers would probably come as a surprise.

"When I took the job at Miami, I met with the team and the very first thing I asked is, 'How good do you guys want to be?'" Larrañaga said. "They were like, 'We want to get to the Final Four! We want to win a national championship!' I said, 'OK. Well, here are some categories that are important.'"

Larrañaga mentioned defensive 3-point field goal percentage.

He asked his players where they thought they ranked.

"They said, 'Oh, we're pretty good,'" Larrañaga said. "So I asked, 'What is pretty good? There are 345 Division I teams. One is the best. The worst is 345. Where do you rank?'"

They told him they were in the top 100.

Larrañaga told them they were actually 224th.

"Then I told them, 'OK, turnovers are important,'" Larrañaga said. "'One is the best. The worst is 345. Where do you rank?'"

They told him around 100.

He told them they were actually 218th.

"The first thing I needed them to know is where they needed to improve, and those numbers showed them because they are totally objective numbers," Larrañaga said. "You can't argue with them. They show you what you need to work on. And, as a coach, if you don't know what you need to work on, then you're just practicing ... stuff. Yes, I want to practice what we're good at. But what I really want to practice is what we have to improve on to be really good, and I want my players to understand why we're doing it."

Those numbers forced Larrañaga's players to understand.

So they got to work immediately.

Now the Hurricanes are 37th nationally in defensive 3-point field-goal percentage, 17th nationally in offensive turnover percentage, and those are just two of the reasons why they're 19-3 overall and 10-0 in the ACC heading into Wednesday

night's game at Florida State. Larrañaga and his staff took over, used advanced statistics to identify problems and then worked meticulously and relentlessly at solving those problems. That approach, combined with an experienced and talented roster, helped create one of college basketball's best stories and reinforce one of Larrañaga's favorite expressions.

Think like a gardener; work like a carpenter.

"What does a gardener do?" Larrañaga asked. "He plants seeds. And then he nurtures those seeds, but it takes a while. And a carpenter? He's very precise. If he makes a chair, one leg can't be longer than the other three. He has to be precise. So when we're working with our players, we're constantly planting seeds but each day working on things that are very, very specific. Those things might not come to fruition in a week or a month. It might take years. But when we planted those seeds like gardeners, we knew that, if we worked like carpenters, we could get here."

Here is on top of the ACC at a school that had never been ranked higher than eighth before this week and has advanced in the NCAA tournament just once since the 2001-02 season. Miami has long been considered such a tough job that Missouri hardly cared that Frank Haith never finished better than tied for fifth in seven years in the ACC. Missouri hired Haith anyway because, the administrators figured, who could do better than fifth in the ACC at Miami?

Answer: Jim Larrañaga.

He took Haith's players, added point guard Shane Larkin, planted a bunch of seeds and started working like a carpenter -- on everything, but especially hard on the things that these same players struggled with before his arrival. Now Larrañaga has a team that's pretty good at guarding beyond the arc, really good at taking care of the ball and two games ahead of everybody else in a league typi-

Déjà U

Sports Illustrated

Luke Winn

March 10, 2013

I want you to do something. Before you put your head to the pillow tonight, I want you to sit on your bed, close your eyes and visualize yourself in tomorrow's game. Visualize it deeply and specifically, so you can feel yourself there. You're running through the plays in the scouting report. You're guarding the man you're going to guard. You're getting back and getting stops.

At Miami, there is practice and then there is mental practice. There is a coach and a stathead and a psychologist, and they are all the same person: 63-year-old Jim Larrañaga, the former orchestrator of mid-major magic at George Mason, gone south for a last hurrah in ACC basketball's tropical outpost. The psychologist in him believes that this is an essential part of preparation. In your mind you are making big plays.

Kenny Kadji, a 6'11" fifth-year senior who is the Hurricanes' starting power forward, is a believer. He has closed his eyes and won the jump ball, run pick-and-pop sets and knocked down threes. Sophomore point guard Shane Larkin uses it too. The 5'11" son of Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin has made big steals and reacted to defensive schemes for stopping him off ball screens. From a hotel bed in Raleigh in early February, he hit a game-winning shot at N.C. State. In real life he missed the last-second jumper and center Reggie Johnson tipped it in before the buzzer, but the scenario was eerily close to coming true. Durand Scott, the 6'5" senior combo guard who is the team's heart and soul, is not too cool for this practice, either. He has visualized the experience of winning, of students storming the court at BankUnited Center and his surfing atop the crowd.

You could say that Miami has not been here before, and that would be true. The Hurricanes are in the running for a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament, yet no one on their grizzled roster—the average age of their top six rotation players is 22.5—has ever appeared in the Big Dance. They are 14--2 in the ACC and have clinched a share of the school's first-ever ACC title. They routed No. 1 Duke by 27 points in Coral Gables on Jan. 23, after which their students stormed the floor, and they were one shot shy of taking the Blue Devils to overtime last Saturday at Cameron Indoor Stadium in a 79--76 loss. Larrañaga had never beaten a No. 1, or coached a team ranked this high (No. 6 after the loss at Duke), or presided over regular-season games with this much national attention.

But he has been making use of a concept a good friend wrote about in a 1996 book called *Golf Is Not a Game of Perfect*:

A golfer can mentally simulate the experience of reaching his goal.... If he does it vividly enough, he can in effect fool the mind and body into thinking that the experience actually happened. Later, when he actually comes close to that goal on the golf course, he will not experience discomfort or disorientation, he will instead have a sense of déjà vu, a comforting and calming feeling that he has been in this situation before and handled it successfully.

The Hurricanes have not been here before, but they're playing as if they have. You could say that they've fooled themselves into becoming college basketball's most surprising team.

Larrañaga's belief in visualization dates back 23 years to a tennis court at Boar's Head Resort Sports Club in Charlottesville, Va. Then an assistant under Terry Holland at Virginia, Larrañaga was distracted from his match because of what he heard from a kids' lesson on an adjacent court. That coach was telling his charges to picture their strokes—to see their racket in slow motion, catching and throwing a topspin forehand back over the net—and Larrañaga was so fascinated that he walked over and introduced himself.

The coach was Bob Rotella, then an assistant professor of psychology at Virginia. He would soon start helping the Cavaliers' basketball team at Larrañaga's behest, and later gain fame as the author of best-selling golf books and as an adviser to some of the biggest names on the PGA Tour, from Tom Kite to Davis Love III to Rory McIlroy. Rotella is a believer in having goals, which to him are synonymous with dreams. Without dreams, he has written, athletes lack the emotional fuel to thrive.

Rotella witnessed the genesis of George Mason's dream: On Oct. 30, 2005, he stood before the Patriots and told them to close their eyes, bow their heads and imagine what they wanted to happen that season. Senior guard Lamar Butler was encouraged to share his thoughts with the room. "I dreamt that we went to the Final Four," he said. Rotella asked the rest of the players if they could get on board. The answer

was affirmative. He then told them that instead of watching powerhouses—the Dukes and Carolinas and UConn—on TV from a fan's perspective, they needed to start sizing them up as future opponents. Five months later, as a No. 11 seed in the NCAA tournament, the Pats reached the season's final weekend in one of the most inspiring performances in tournament history.

But only an infinitesimal share of sports dreams get George Masoned. The rest go unrealized or are deferred for so long that they risk abandonment. Which is what happened to this one: In the spring of 1986, just after Larrañaga left Virginia to take his first head-coaching job, at Bowling Green, he took out the small leather-bound notebook he always kept in his back pocket, for recording everything from recruiting details to favorite quotes, and wrote: One day, I want to be an ACC coach.

It was a reasonable goal for a charismatic, well-respected former assistant on two ACC Final Four teams. But 11 seasons went by at Bowling Green, then 14 more at George Mason. Had Larrañaga been 46 when he took the Patriots on their dream run, doors would have opened—"Any job he wanted," longtime assistant Chris Caputo figures. But Larrañaga was 56, and after passing on an offer from Providence, his alma mater, in 2008, it looked as if he might remain in Fairfax, Va., until he retired and they put his name on the court. The offer from Miami, which came as a surprise after Frank Haith left for Missouri in April 2011, was likely to be Larrañaga's last chance.

When you realize a dream you need a new one. Or many new ones. Each off-season, Larrañaga makes a long list of goals in neat cursive. He did 20 for 2012--13, and on a late February afternoon in his office, he revisited them with a reporter:

1. Have a great recruiting class.
2. Win the ACC regular season.
3. Win the ACC tournament.
4. Win the NCAA tournament.
5. Develop a stronger defensive team....

Had Larrañaga gone public with those goals last November, he might have elicited eye rolls. His first Miami team, in 2011--12, went to the NIT after coping with injuries, suspensions and the specter of the NCAA's investigation into booster Nevin Shapiro, in which Haith was implicated. Many felt the Canes were a sleeper in '12--13, until they lost a home exhibition to Division II Saint Leo and their second real game to Florida Gulf Coast. But Larrañaga chooses not to reflect on those moments. Recently he called Johnson in for a meeting, the chief purpose of which was to remind him how special it was that he had two game-winners this season (against N.C. State and Virginia). "If I talk about it, he dwells on it, and he starts thinking good thoughts," Larrañaga explains. "That's how you get a guy's mind right."

Before this story goes completely mental, know that the Larrañaga Method is binary. To focus only on his positive psychology would be to ignore his equally important obsession with analytics. "Some people stay in one realm," says longtime assistant Eric Konkol, "but the fascinating thing about Coach is that he uses both the right brain and the left."

Larrañaga was an economics major at Providence, and began the practice of hand-charting points per possession in the 1970s. He cares more about kenpom.com efficiency rankings than poll rankings. Caputo, whom he entrusts with opposition scouting, relies heavily on advanced stats from kenpom and Synergy Sports Technology. "Coach, and all of us, believe that numbers tell a story," Caputo says. "They don't lie."

Larrañaga can tell his own story through numbers. Five was what mattered when he was at Archbishop Molloy High in Queens: He needed to make the starting five to get recruited because he couldn't afford college without a scholarship. Fifty cents is what he had for lunch, and he bought the same thing every day: 10 Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, which somehow helped him grow into a 6'4½" forward. Two is the division that Bob Cousy, the coach of Larrañaga's dream school, Boston College, had suggested he play in after coming to scout him at Molloy as a senior. Thirty-nine and 28 are what he scored for Providence as a freshman and sophomore, respectively, in his first two wins over B.C., prompting Cousy to admit he'd made a mistake. Numbers, Larrañaga says, "were how I evaluated and judged myself."

When he convened what he called a "board meeting" with his players last April in Miami's conference room, he wrote in a column on a whiteboard: 9, 4, 2, 1. They were the adjusted defensive efficiency rankings, respectively, of Kentucky, Kansas, Ohio State and Louisville, the teams that made it to the Final Four. Miami had been 73rd. The message was clear: "You need to be in the top 10 to have a shot at a national championship next year."

Tenth was the Hurricanes' rank at week's end. They have locked down the interior, led by 6'10" sixth-year senior Julian Gamble, who was No. 1 in the ACC in block percentage at

10.0. Larkin, meanwhile, is their master of anticipation on the perimeter, ranking fourth in the conference in steal percentage (3.42). For all this talk of visualization, the one thing even Larkin could not see coming was a reunion with Larrañaga, who had recruited him at George Mason before Larkin signed with DePaul. But Larkin chose to leave Chicago before his freshman year started, citing a family medical issue. He did a last-minute search for a school closer to his Orlando home. He called up Larrañaga a few days before classes began at Miami in August 2011 and asked two things: "Do you have a scholarship available, and do you need a point guard?" The coach said yes to both. That was how he landed the three-star recruit who through Sunday was averaging 13.8 points and 4.3 assists and will likely be the ACC Player of the Year.

Larrañaga is playing tennis again. Dual hip-replacement surgeries allowed him to pick the game back up after a 10-year hiatus, and he gets in a quick match at Riviera Country Club before meeting his wife, Liz, for a dinner date in the clubhouse. "How'd it go?" Liz says. Jim shrugs. He is not offering up numbers. "I broke a good sweat."

Their route to a table is accompanied by smatterings of applause from club members. The Riviera is a two-minute drive from the Hurricanes' campus, and alumni appreciate that basketball is thriving at the U during a dark time for football. The Canes had beaten Virginia 54--50 in a thriller the previous night, and the NCAA's notice of allegations in the Shapiro scandal dropped this morning. A Miami alum older than Larrañaga compliments the coach for handing out doughnuts to students waiting in line for tickets. When Larrañaga asks how the man is, he replies, "Well, we're both here, and that's the most important thing, right?"

The dinner conversation centers on how, exactly, Larrañaga got here. The Michael Jordan fantasy camps he worked in Las Vegas following Mason's Final Four run created connections. In Vegas his Cuban ancestry had helped him strike up a friendship with Jose and Jorge Mas, two Cuban-American millionaires from Miami who participated in the camp. Jose would later put in pro-Larrañaga calls to members of Miami's board. And at the camp he co-coached a team with Doc Rivers, who vouched for him during the hiring process.

Larrañaga also explains what loosened his ties to George Mason. In March 2011, his friend Alan Merten, the school's long-time president, announced plans to retire, and Larrañaga told his wife that it "might be a sign that we should look around too." He had been petitioning athletic director Tom O'Connor for a better deal—Larrañaga believed his assistants were "grossly underpaid," and Shaka Smart's new, \$1.2 million-per-year deal at league-rival VCU dwarfed Larrañaga's \$525,000 base salary. The Hurricanes interviewed Larrañaga on April 11 and made their offer 10 days later: a contract reported to be worth \$1.3 million per year for five years. Mason didn't formally counter until Larrañaga was in the airport that night, ready to board his flight to Miami. By then, his mind was made up.

I ask what would have happened had Mason offered a better deal, more quickly. He ponders the question and says, "It would have been like, Do I want to stay [at George Mason] with a great contract ... or hope that I might get an offer in a week from Miami? I'm a pretty conservative guy, so...."

Liz stops him there. "That's too hypothetical," she says. "Anyway, it worked out for the best."

This is true. The assistants got paid. Miami is having a dream season. Liz played golf today, and she finally got Jim to Florida. They owned a vacation house in Sarasota, which she loved to use while he was at Mason, but ... "I could never get him down there. He never had the time."

As a kid in the '50s, he had the time. The annual Larrañaga family vacation, as he tells it, was a long-haul drive from the Bronx. They would stop in Kissimmee to visit his mother's sister, then continue on to Key West, where his father, the son of a Cuban immigrant, had been born and raised. They would take the old Route 1 through Miami, and one time, about 18 miles south of the university's campus, they stopped at a strange attraction called the Coral Castle. The legend was that a 5-foot Latvian immigrant, defying laws of physics, had sculpted the structure out of blocks of limestone, many weighing several tons, as a tribute to an unrequited love. He put a hand-carved sign outside that read, YOU WILL BE SEEING UNUSUAL ACCOMPLISHMENT.

This is Jim Larrañaga's return trip. After dinner he and Liz walk out into the twilight, on a path alongside the golf course. Small children are rolling down an embankment near the putting green, letting out small whoops of joy. Near the driving range, grade schoolers play pickup soccer, darting around divots and through pools of lamplight. "Could you imagine," Liz asks, "having this as a kid?" The setting is an idyll, like something they closed their eyes, visualized and tricked

Obsession with stats drives Miami's Larrañaga

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 11, 2013

Jim Larrañaga is a self-described numbers nerd. Always has been. He loved arithmetic in grade school and majored in math and economics at Providence College, where he was the basketball team's leading scorer his sophomore and junior years.

If there was a stat or shooting percentage to be calculated, he was all over it. When he and his wife, Liz, go out to dinner with other couples, he figures out the tip.

It's no wonder, then, that the University of Miami men's basketball coach is obsessed with kenpom.com, a college basketball statistics website run by Ken Pomoroy, a Salt Lake City meteorologist who compiles a statistical archive that analyzes all 345 Division I teams on a possession-by-possession basis. There isn't a news conference that goes by in which Larrañaga doesn't refer to kenpom.com. He even has the site's mobile app on his iPhone for whenever he gets the urge to check his favorite stat: points per possession.

Larrañaga, 63, also was one of the first college coaches to use Synergy Sports, an Internet-based video-scouting index that logs every possession of every game, allowing coaches to zero in on team and player tendencies. You want to compare a player's spot-up shooting percentage with a dribble and without a dribble? No problem. Percentages going left? Going right? It's all there.

The coach leaves nothing to chance. He writes everything down. His entire life over the past 20 years - every appointment, practice, personal goal - is chronicled in his Franklin-Covey daily planners. His bible is Stephen R. Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Larrañaga's organizational skills, which he also requires from his staff, helped the Hurricanes (24-6, 15-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) go from afterthought to major player this season.

They were No. 2 in The Associated Press poll, the highest ranking in school history. They knocked off then-No. 1 Duke by 27 points, the first time a UM team had beaten a No. 1. They became the first team since the ACC's inception in 1953 to beat Duke and North Carolina by 25 points in the same season. They drew a record five sellout home crowds. And, they are the No. 1 seed in the ACC tournament after winning the regular-season conference title Saturday with a 62-49 win over Clemson.

Larrañaga's staff is atypical. Most teams have an assistant who coaches guards, an assistant who coaches big men, and they rotate the scouting duties. Larrañaga takes a page from football. Eric Konkol is his offensive coordinator. Michael Huger is the defensive coordinator. Chris Caputo is the master scout, fully responsible for the scouting reports for every game.

The idea, according to all three assistants, is uniformity in terminology and message. They have found that players like routine and familiarity. Rather than have every third scouting report written by a different coach, they are all in Caputo's language.

All three coaches followed Larrañaga to Miami

from George Mason. "We moved the store south," Konkol said.

The Miami Herald took a peek at how Larrañaga's staff prepares for a game. Answer: Details, details, details.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

It is Tuesday afternoon, March 5, and the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets are coming to town to play the Hurricanes the next day. The team has gathered at BankUnited Center for a 3 p.m. practice.

In case any of the players are wondering, this is "Practice #82." They can find that out on the upper-right corner of their Daily Practice Plan, a typed down-to-the-minute practice schedule listed in Roman numeral format:

I. Meet/Video.

II. Stretch (10).

III. Thought of the Day (2). "Get low. Stay low on defense."

IV. Fundamentals. 1. 2-Line Full Court Passing (2), 2. Celtic drill (2), 3. Rebound-war on the boards (5).

V. Defense. Shell drill. Defend Georgia Tech.

VI. Offense. Fast ball movement. Man movement. Pass to Post.

VII. Scrimmage.

VIII. Shoot 3's (15).

IX. Stretch.

DeQuan Jones, who played for Miami last season and is now with the Orlando Magic, is in town for a game against the Heat. He shows up at Hurricanes practice with Magic teammates Kyle O'Quinn and Mo Harkless. They watch and remark on the intensity and organization of the workout.

"Coach L and his staff are super organized and strategic," Jones said. "Everything is calculated down to a T and broken down. We'd spend a block of time on each fundamental. They'd break down details like, 'This guy shoots from the right 70 percent of the time,' stuff like that. As a player, that paints a picture of what you're guarding, what to expect. Almost to the point you know what the offensive player's going to do before they even do it. It made the games easy. That's one thing I noticed. Practice was always the hardest thing.

"They slowed the game down and broke down the Xs and Os. This coaching staff made me a better player, made me respect the game."

Larrañaga's practices are spirited. Caputo is crouched on the sideline, yelling instructions to the "Green" scout team. Konkol stands at mid-court, coaching the "White" team starters. Huger, 42 but still a lethal scorer, often plays guard with the scout team. He has experience from his days playing under Coach L at Bowling Green. Larrañaga, wearing a heating pad strapped to his back, whistles, claps a lot and encourages his players.

"Trey, I like how you accelerated past that screen!" "Jules, real good!"

When he has to, Larrañaga gets tough. After Kenny Kadji missed a mid range jumper in a scrimmage, Larrañaga yelled: "You take difficult shots and you don't have to. You don't need to dribble. It doesn't prove anything. You missed the shot. Keep it simple!"

The scrimmage goes to five points. On this day, the scout team beats the starters 5-1 - an omen of

the 71-69 loss to come the next night.

As the practice is wrapping up, Larrañaga says someone has to hit a half-court shot before they can leave. The players laugh and begin heaving shots from mid-court. Durand Scott makes it. Practice over.

After practice, the players receive one of Caputo's famously meticulous full-color, 17-page scouting reports. Players are instructed to study the report before they go to sleep that night. The first two pages are personnel reports.

The scouting report on Duke's Ryan Kelly before he lit up Miami for a career-high 36 points read: "We expect him to play and be excited about it. MUST MATCH HIS INTENSITY! Excellent on offensive boards. Make him a dribbler. Prefers left shoulder in paint."

The report on Michigan State's Keith Appling before their game Nov. 28, 2012: "Left to basket, Right for either pull-up or rim. Gambler on D, MUST BE BALL TOUGH. Push in transition. MUST STOP THE BALL NO HEAD OF STEAM!"

The report then includes summaries of the opposing offense and defense.

BREAKING IT ALL DOWN

On the Spartans' defense: "MSU Defense is #8 in the NCAA in Points Per Possession. They are very much a pack defensive team with the exception of Dawson running through passing lanes for dunks. They do a very good job guarding the ball and beating screens. We must be patient and wait for our screens to be set."

Next is a sheet with team stats, best and worst free-throw shooters, best three-point shooters and best offensive rebounders. There is a list of the team's top 15 to 20 offensive plays. Then, 10 pages of those plays diagrammed.

"The players don't have to know all the stats and information, but we do as coaches," said Caputo, who attended Archbishop Molloy High School in New York, the same school as Larrañaga. "My job is to condense it all. I want to give them an edge, a few hints of what to expect."

The game preparation typically takes two days. Caputo spends 12 hours watching tape of the opponent, and then with the help of the staff videographer Jaime Vathielil, puts together a 20-minute "long edit" for Larrañaga and a 12-minute shorter version for the players.

On March 4, the staff met at 9:30 a.m., watched tape and started to strategize. They could tell from the tape that Georgia Tech's freshmen were playing better now than the last time they played. At 3 p.m., the players got a three-minute "Sneak Peek" video of Georgia Tech. "We just want them to see the team's identity. Are they great offensive rebounders? Do they press? Are they a transition team?" Konkol explained.

"The key," Caputo said, "is making the players feel comfortable and confident. We try to keep the same routine for every game. We set up the chairs the same way, do everything at exactly the same time. The calmer we can make them, the better they will perform when the lights come on."

Larrañaga finds he's still fashionable in Miami

Washington Post
Mark Giannotto
Feb. 28, 2013

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Challenging transition

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

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

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

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

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

To manufacture excitement at Miami, where even the school's high-profile football team can struggle to draw crowds amid a plethora of pro sports and entertainment options, Larrañaga took a familiar "door-to-door" approach.

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

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

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

'He can relate to anybody'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larrañaga inherited a veteran team that features six seniors this season and signed point guard Shane Larkin, the son of baseball Hall of Famer Barry Larkin, just before last season began. The Orlando native is now an ACC player of the year candidate as a sophomore.

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

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

Parallel successes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larrañaga's use of analytics gives Miami secret weapon

USA TODAY

Nicole Auerbach

March 1, 2013

Jim Larrañaga is a storyteller.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The use of such tools has propelled Miami

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miami is ranked sixth in the country in defensive efficiency, 39th in offensive efficiency and 26th in turnover rate — all significant

improvements from two seasons ago.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Crunch time

ESPN The Magazine

Peter Keating

August 13, 2012

Terms you'll need to know for this story

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY

For a team: Points allowed per 100 possessions. For a player: Points his team allows per 100 possessions while he is on the floor.

EFFECTIVE HEIGHT

The combined height of a team's centers and power forwards. Measured in inches above or below the national average baseline.

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY

For a team: Points scored per 100 possessions. For a player: Points produced per 100 possessions.

PACE

Possessions per 40 minutes. Faster pace means more possessions in a game.

PLUS/MINUS

A team's point differential when a particular player is on the floor.

TEMPO-FREE STATS

Statistics adjusted for possessions to allow for accurate comparisons across teams.

ONCE IN HIS LIFE, in third grade, Jim Larrañaga asked his father for help with his math homework. The elder Larrañaga, a very private man who never talked at home about his work as an insurance adjuster, looked at the assignment and handed it back to the youngster. "You're going to have to learn that on your own," he said. Larrañaga, now 62, has been learning on his own ever since.

You probably know him as the gregarious hoops lifer who shot to national prominence during March Madness in 2006, when his George Mason Patriots made the Final Four as an 11 seed. A Bronx, N.Y., native with a receding hairline, lively eyes and a restless mind, Larrañaga has fully earned the kind of old-school plaudits that come a man's way over 29 years of successful head coaching: motivator, philosopher, occasional cutup. But there's something more to Larrañaga's approach, and it's nearly unique. The timeless lessons of basketball fundamentals aren't enough of a foundation for him; he has always wanted to ground his teachings in empirical data. "The better you can assess a situation and figure out how to improve it, the better you'll be against teams that don't have that ammunition," he says.

So Larrañaga, who majored in economics at Providence College and graduated in '71, started tracking what we would now call advanced metrics 30 years ago. And as new hoops stats have spread around the Internet, he has embraced, absorbed and applied them with the kind of zeal you'd expect from an enthusiast one-third his age. Larrañaga logs on to KenPom.com and RealTimeRPI.com and WarrenNolan.com. His assistants crunch updated numbers in real time during games. He quotes stats he cares about to reporters. He

posts them for his players to see and to focus their goals. "What your mind dwells upon, your body acts upon," he likes to say.

In short, no other college basketball coach uses statistical analysis more thoroughly to connect strategy to tactics. And this season, his first at the University of Miami, he is delivering what may be his greatest performance yet. With players he didn't recruit, facing a schedule he didn't set, Larrañaga has led a team plagued by injuries, scandal and death to a 15-9 record (through Feb. 17). Indeed, with their Feb. 5 win over Duke, the Hurricanes, who haven't been to the Big Dance since 2008, put themselves right on the NCAA bubble. "You can see the team morphing, kind of like watching Optimus Prime change in slow motion from a junky truck into his magnificent robotic form," says Josh Kaufman, a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Miami who co-runs Category 6, a blog covering all things Hurricanes. "And Coach Larrañaga is how this team plays."

IT WASN'T EASY for Larrañaga to leave George Mason, where he amassed 273 wins, three CAA championships and five NCAA tournament berths in his 14 years on the bench. GMU had grown to love him not just as a coach but as the kind of teacher you always remember. He's constantly reading and watching movies, quoting everything from Aristotle to Abraham Lincoln to the movie *Drumline* to Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*. He routinely posts a Thought of the Day for his team; this season's first: "Begin with the end in mind."

In 2008, Larrañaga turned down the chance to coach at Providence, his alma mater. But last year, George Mason president Alan Merten (and Larrañaga's best friend at the university) retired and Miami came at him offering \$1.3 million a year. Larrañaga, who always wanted to coach in the ACC, realized that the Canes had a solid core of talent in a great location with access to huge resources in a conference with just two dominant teams, and that Miami was just waiting to be resuscitated. In a word, the program was undervalued, just as so many of Larrañaga's George Mason recruits had been before they shocked the country with their stunning tournament run.

As soon as Larrañaga arrived at the U, his new team faced a wave of problems. Center Reggie Johnson hurt his knee and missed a month of the season. Big man Julian Gamble tore an ACL -- out for the year. Guard DeQuan Jones got caught up in Miami's booster scandal -- his family was accused of taking \$10,000 to commit to the U in 2008 -- and sat out the first 10 games. And in a different category entirely, guard Malcolm Grant's 36-year-old brother, Yatti, died of a heart attack in December. (Larrañaga missed his first practice in several years to go to the funeral.)

"It's all about the percentages. Ten turnovers in a 50-possession game is just as bad as 20 turnovers in a 100-possession game.

-- Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga

Still, Larrañaga pressed on; he would install

his hybrid system -- coaching integrated with metric analysis -- with whoever was able to play. Larrañaga's approach starts with basketball box scores. Points, rebounds and assists are hoops' version of batting average, home runs and RBI -- numbers that most of us reflexively value because news accounts have tracked them for so long. But simple counting statistics are hugely influenced by the pace at which a game is played, and to truly measure these stats' value at either end of the floor, you need to adjust for possessions. For example, this season, Wisconsin is giving up 50.3 points per game, the fewest of any team in the country. But the Badgers play at a crawl, averaging just 58.6 possessions per game. Ohio State is actually more efficient on defense, surrendering just 81.2 points per 100 possessions, versus 82.2 for Wisconsin. "It's all about the percentages," Larrañaga says. "Ten turnovers in a 50-possession game is just as bad as 20 turnovers in a 100-possession game."

Former UNC coach Dean Smith invented per-possession, or "tempo-free," stats, and stathead Ken Pomeroy popularized them on his website (KenPom.com). Once you learn about adjusting for pace, the concept seems obvious. But most college coaches aren't keeping up. In October, for example, the CAA Hoops blog surveyed conference coaches, who had to compete against Larrañaga for years, and was shocked to find most coaches pay very little attention to tempo-free stats. "I care about rebounds, turnovers, free throw percentage," Drexel's Bruiser Flint said. "All that other stuff is a little too much. My favorite is what a kid does over 40 minutes. Well, he doesn't play 40 minutes for a reason!" Flint's assertion makes as much sense as disliking on-base percentage because a player gets more than one plate appearance a year. But even that sentiment was light-years ahead of Georgia State's Ron Hunter, who said: "I don't look at stats. I don't read newspapers. People keep trying to tell me and I don't want to know." So the stats revolution hasn't quite arrived everywhere just yet.

Larrañaga, of course, applied it immediately to the Hurricanes. While Miami's slow pace last season obscured some of the team's issues, when the new coach looked at pace-adjusted stats, turnovers jumped off the page: Miami gave the ball away on nearly 21 percent of possessions in 2010-11, ranking 218th among 345 DI teams. Play had gotten so bad that the Canes had to run trick plays to inbound the ball. So at one of his very first practices, Larrañaga put the team through a drill called TOBE: turnover basketball elimination. It starts with Larrañaga putting 12 balls on a rack and letting his players scrimmage. Whenever anyone commits a turnover, he eliminates one ball. After the 12th ball is gone, the players run for the rest of practice, whether for half an hour or two and a half hours.

The Hurricanes started those earliest practices the way they played a year ago: sloppy. But as balls vanished from the rack, play got crisper, and hazardous passes disappeared.

Crunch time (cont.)

As the season neared, the Canes rarely had to run at all. "If you give players a reason, they'll change their own behavior and make better decisions," Larrañaga says. "I call it incentive thinking."

Now inbounds passes are accurate, and players have vanquished another Miami bugaboo: dribbling into a corner and hanging around until a double-team converges. This season, Miami has soared to 53rd in pace-adjusted turnover rankings, losing the ball on just 18.4 percent of possessions. Of course, that's good coaching and good execution, both driven by data that interpreted turnovers as a priority. "You start to learn any new language through vocabulary, word by word, and eventually the words flow together," Larrañaga says.

Larrañaga's next change was to go beyond adjusting box score stats to charting what's not in box scores at all. He's been working on this for three decades, since he was an assistant to Terry Holland at Virginia. "We had a guy named Kenton Edelin, who was not a good shooter, who was a terrible free throw shooter, who statistically didn't appear to be very good at all," Larrañaga says. "But when he was in the game, we did better. He was so tenacious defensively, rebounding and shot-blocking, and on offense he never took a shot. So defensively, we were better, and offensively, he was screening to our best shooters and getting them open so they could take the shots."

Eventually, Larrañaga started taking notes on how well his teams did when different players and combinations of players were on the floor. Which is to say, he embraced what statheads now call lineup plus/minus -- a stat that captures the cumulative impact of harassing opponents, inspiring teammates and other seemingly unquantifiable skills to the extent that they actually change the course of a game. It's helped clue Larrañaga in to the contributions of low-scoring but high-intensity defenders like Shane Larkin at Miami and Andre Cornelius at George Mason. "Everybody wants to look at his own stats, but while you were scoring 20, your team might have been outscored," Larrañaga explains. "And when you look at lineups, another player may have scored only four points, but the team was plus-12 when he was in the game."

Coaches use plus/minus and tempo-free stats to tailor their goals to their program. Tom Izzo at Michigan State and Blaine Taylor at Old Dominion believe in maximizing the number of their teams' possessions, and you'll see those schools post huge offensive rebounding percentages season after season. Larrañaga has studied the statistical profiles of teams that make the NCAA tournament and found that their field goal percentage allowed is typically first, second or third in their conference and that they're usually particularly efficient at stopping threes. So everything Larrañaga's players do at both ends of the floor is keyed to holding opponents to under 40 percent shooting and under 30 percent on

three-point attempts.

On offense, Larrañaga instructs his players to rotate the ball until they create a high-percentage shot; he'll often say things like, "What good is it if you're open if you miss eight of 10 from that spot?" He wants them to attempt no more than 17 to 18 three-pointers per game, or about one-third of their total shots, in part to limit long rebounds and fast breaks for opponents. And you won't find the Canes crashing the boards en masse. Larrañaga would rather have them get back after missed shots, again to clamp down on easy breaks for the other side.

Defensively, Larrañaga is known for a disruptive scheme he calls the Scramble -- a man-to-man scheme with trapping options designed to force opponents to consume time and make suboptimal decisions. If defenders anticipate and rotate well enough, they avoid getting caught in the kind of three-on-four and two-on-three breakaways that commonly puncture higher-risk defenses. And because it slows games down, you don't need great athletes to run it. Instead, it requires players with a keen sense of where the ball is headed.

Larrañaga is just starting to implement it at Miami, but already the scheme is giving the Hurricanes a hustling vibe very different from last year's zone defense. And the team is starting to meet Larrañaga's goal of compelling bad shots without gambling. In five consecutive ACC wins from late January through mid-February, Miami held opponents to just 37.8 percent shooting. Again, that's good coaching in a classical sense and good execution, but all focused on goals set by Larrañaga's statistical research. "Our players know our goals," he says. "If the other team shoots 42 percent, even if we win, we didn't meet our goals."

HE'S NOT DONE innovating. Larrañaga uses Synergy Sports' video-retrieval and indexing software to scan games to find opponents' strengths, weaknesses and tendencies. "[Assistant coach] Chris Caputo gets all the stats, on our opponents and ourselves, to see how we need to match up and at what tempo," Larrañaga says. "For example, a player may be dynamite going to his right, but influence him to go to his left and he might be 20 percent less effective." Another assistant, Michael Huger, fits together the best groups of players to exploit potential matchup advantages and helps monitor efficiency during games. "At halftime, he's able to tell me, 'These five guys were plus-6, and they were the only group that was effective,'" Larrañaga says. "We then ask whether that was because of their size, or who they were guarding, or how they were beating the other team's zones, or whatever. We try to figure that out and apply it."

Add it all up and you get a team with a distinctive statistical profile that's suddenly become hugely dangerous for this spring. With their trapping defense slowing the pace, the Canes average just 64.6 possessions a game, ranking 261st in the nation. But because the team protects the ball so well and takes good

shots, it scores 110 points per 100 possessions, the 45th-highest efficiency in the NCAA. And despite playing makeshift lineups, Miami has improved its three-point defense from 224th in the country last year to 112th while remaining stout inside. Overall, opponents score just 95 points per 100 possessions against the Hurricanes, ranking them 74th in defensive efficiency.

This is a team with numbers reminiscent of Larrañaga's George Mason squads. In fact, take Larrañaga's last 10 teams and shuffle their stat lines, and you won't be able to pick out which one was put up by this year's Hurricanes. In less than one season, he's imprinted on Miami the statistical templates that made George Mason a winner.

And there's more to come in the off-season. For one thing, Larrañaga has barely begun recruiting athletes to Coral Gables. At George Mason, he found players undervalued by other programs, and year after year, his teams won despite a lack of height. "His recruiting approach was Moneyball,?" says Peter Boettke, a professor of economics and philosophy at George Mason and a former AAU coach. "He got exceptionally talented players who were overlooked not for skill or accomplishment but because they were slightly off the expected body type for major-conference players. And most of them stayed all four years and bought completely into Coach L's system."

In contrast, Larrañaga is stepping into a program that has underachieved in recent years but never lacked for big men. This year, the Canes' effective height is 2.8 inches above average, giving them the 23rd-tallest inside presence in the country. Now he gets to see who else he can bring aboard, and letting Larrañaga pitch Miami is like giving Billy Beane the keys to the Yankees' vault.

Moreover, next season will be the first time Larrañaga helps choose Miami's nonconference opponents. Last May, at the first ACC meetings Larrañaga attended, Virginia Tech coach Seth Greenberg asked him how George Mason, coming out of the CAA, managed to gain so many at-large bids to the NCAA tournament. Larrañaga claims he hadn't planned on saying much, but he launched into an explanation of how he and his staff, led by assistant coach Eric Konkol, had conducted a mathematical study of NCAA invitations and RPI. "We found that bids are determined not just by who you beat but who you schedule," he explained. "As much as possible, we avoided scheduling the teams likely to end up in the lowest category of RPI." Further, he noted, his staff looked to face opponents who had the potential to be surprisingly good: "If we beat them and they ended up in the top 50 in the country, that would be a great win on our resume." So George Mason routinely played opponents from outside power conferences that nonetheless went on to post impressive seasons, like Harvard and Duquesne last year and Dayton and Creighton in 2009-10.

As Larrañaga spoke, his fellow ACC coaches listened intently. Their conference ranked

The leadership style of Jim Larrañaga

Washington Post
Jena McGregor
March 18, 2013

Selection Sunday is over, and the University of Miami ended the day with a No. 2 seed in the NCAA men's basketball tournament, which ties the record for highest seed in the Miami Hurricane's history. On Sunday, the school — known far more for its football team than its hoops squad — won its very first ACC championship. And as March Madness heats up this week, some bracketologists are betting the Canes could make the Final Four, which would be a first for the team.

What changed? The team has some key players, of course — point guard Shane Larkin being the most critical. But many are looking to the Hurricanes' 63-year-old coach, Jim Larrañaga, as the man behind the team's success. It's just the second season for Larrañaga, who formerly coached at George Mason University, and he inherited a Miami program that had its share of distractions. Yet with a mix of management changes, extreme organizational focus on details, and a belief in coaching the players he has, Larrañaga seems to have turned the team around.

One of the smartest things Larrañaga did when moving from George Mason, where he led the mid-market team to the Final Four in a surprising run, was to take his coaching staff with him. The move itself is not that unconventional, but the roles he gave them are. According to the Miami Herald, Larrañaga sets up his staff differently than other teams, which typically have assistants that each coach different positions and rotate through the scouting responsibilities.

Larrañaga, meanwhile, has an offensive coordinator, a defensive coordinator and a master scout, in order to keep com-

munication with players and messaging about potential recruits uniform. Such a setup also provides for a highly integrated coaching style that gives the team's leaders a greater view into the skills and weaknesses of more players.

The Bronx, N.Y. native is also a voracious consumer of management books. The New York Times writes he "would seem right at home at a TED conference, exchanging innovative management ideas." His favorite: Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," which he appears to quote from relentlessly. He's a devotee not only of the guru's ideas but of the FranklinCovey daily planners that bear his name. In his office, Larrañaga keeps two decades' worth of the binders carefully tracking every goal, every practice and every appointment.

That kind of meticulousness carries over into the way he coaches the team, relying heavily on numbers to guide his thinking. He uses stats-driven Internet sites to track each player down to each possession, using that data to help him coach. His defense-driven style instructs his players to limit opponents to 12 points per position. He breaks down practices into minute-by-minute increments that players say are so strategic and organized that they're able to guess what their opponents will do once it's time for the game.

But perhaps the biggest reason for Larrañaga's success is the confidence he has in the players on his team. He borrows the "train it and trust it" philosophy from golf, putting all his focus on practice and then letting his players execute on their own during the game, rather than trying to over-manage from the sidelines. Hit with recruiting challenges following an NCAA ethics investigation into events at

Miami that pre-dated his arrival, Larrañaga has chosen not to start over with a new recruiting class. Rather, he's focused on the players he's got, ten of whom are seniors or juniors. As senior Julian Gamble told the Washington Post's Mark Giannotto recently, "He has a lot of confidence in us. Probably more confidence than we have in ourselves sometimes."

Who knows if Miami could win it all — there are plenty of reasons that might not be in the cards this year. The quality of their coach, however, isn't likely to be one of them.

How Miami's Basketball Coach Is Bringing Back The Ñ

WLRN.org

Kenny Malone

March 28, 2013

The squiggly line seemed to show up out of nowhere.

It happened at the Greensboro Coliseum on Sunday, March 17th.

Confetti was falling. Hurricanes were celebrating. The University of Miami had made history by winning the first Atlantic Coast Conference tournament in school history. Jeannine Edwards, an ESPN reporter, was standing by with second-year UM coach Jim Larrañaga.

And then, the name graphic.

In what the television world refers to as a "lower third," ESPN had identified Miami's head coach with a baffling cultural flair: a tilde.

"JIM LARRAÑAGA," the ESPN graphic read.

Scott Michaux, a columnist for the Augusta Chronicle took note, tweeting: "Did moving to Miami automatically come with a tilde?"

The short answer: Yes.

The Long Answer

Jim Larrañaga is arguably most famous for ruining the country's collective March Madness bracket in 2006. He coached 11th-seeded George Mason University through upsets of perennial powerhouses like Michigan State, North Carolina and number-one-seeded Connecticut and eventually reached the Final Four before losing to Florida.

"We never used the tilde," George Mason's director of news media for men's basketball, Dan Reisig, wrote in an email. "In fact, no one at George Mason was aware of his Cuban lineage prior to his arrival at Miami."

That's because the lineage has been slowly whitewashed, piece-by-piece, over Larrañaga's life. "Americanized"

Jim Larrañaga is Bronx-born with an accent to prove it. He's 63, Caucasian, and throughout his life, people have assumed his last name was Italian. "Because it ended with a vowel," he laughed.

In reality, the name is Basque by way of Cuba.

According to Larrañaga, his grandfather was born in Cuba and was part of the Por Larrañaga cigar company. (That's pronounced LAW-ruh-NYAW-guh.)

Larrañaga's father wanted his kids to blend in, to be "Americanized." He pronounced his last name with an extra-nasally, American 'a' and left the ñ sound out completely (LAH-ruh-NAY-guh). He refused to let the kids speak Spanish even though Jim's grandmother was fluent.

But Jim Larrañaga liked the way his grandmother said the name, the deep vowels, the ñ. He adopted the Basque pronunciation.

And then he quickly dropped it.

On Larrañaga's first day at a Catholic kindergarten, a nun was going through the class roll. When she called Larrañaga's name, she put her own Americanized spin on it. "I try to correct her," Larrañaga said, "and she wouldn't be corrected...That was it. It stuck."

The Missing Tilde

There's a case to be made that Jim Larrañaga's time at George Mason University was as Americanized a stretch as he'll ever have.

The school -- in Fairfax, Va. -- is 25 miles from Washington D.C. The university's nickname is "The Patriots." And by the time Larrañaga had arrived at GMU his name's spelling was set in stone:

"L-A-R-R-A-N-A-G-A," recalled Bill Rohland, the radio play-by-play announcer for GMU basketball. "Yeah, there was never any accent on any of the let-

ters whatsoever, it was just straight across, that was it."

One major factor: Jim Larrañaga never fully understood that typing an ñ was even a possibility.

"Okay, hang on," Larrañaga said during a recent phone interview before UM's 2nd and 3rd round NCAA games from Austin, Texas. "I'm in front of my iPad, you're telling me that there's a way to do that?"

"Well, no-I mean yes. But it's a big pain," this reporter explained. "You have to change your keyboard to an international keyboard."

"Oh," Larrañaga replied, "I don't have that ability."

It's a safe bet that the "Larrañaga" spelling never got into any of Jim Larrañaga's resumes, cover letters or applications--including the most recent.

"When I applied for the Miami job, I copied and pasted my Wikipedia bio," said Larrañaga, "So whatever that had [as the spelling], that's the way it went."

Larrañaga added that one reason he never corrected anyone about the missing ñ is that he simply thought it couldn't be done.

The Autograph

In 1972, a 71-pound, four-foot-six, eight-year-old named Bobby Harbers went to basketball camp at Davidson College in North Carolina.

According to a report card that Harbers still has (he's now "Bob" not "Bobby"), the younger version of himself was "EXCELLENT" when it came to passing, free throws and boxing out. His crossover was just "GOOD" and his pivoting had shown "much improvement."

Each category on the Wildcat Camp report card was completed by a different coach. Jim Larrañaga would have been in just his second year as an assistant coach at Davidson, his first coaching job after playing at Providence.

The 24-year-old Larrañaga was responsible for grading Bob Harbers' "INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE" in the dribbling category.

Larrañaga placed a check mark in the "excellent" column and then signed his name. And if you're looking for it, there is unmistakably a line over the 'n.'

There's no reason to think Jim Larrañaga ever stopped signing his name with a tilde (granted the tilde is more line than curve). A number of alleged George Mason-era Larrañaga autographs have made their way through eBay in the last few weeks. All have included the line over the 'n.'

But there is a basic disconnect: How is it that no one seemed to have noticed that line in his signature until now? Or at least didn't notice enough to include in his Wikipedia entry, on his business cards or in media guides.

Larrañaga has a theory: "People didn't recognize [the tilde]."

He points out that signatures are generally hard to read. "So to see a line over the 'n', [people] just thought that was part of the way I signed my name. They didn't know that was actually the correct spelling."

"Mari" or why the tilde matters

Wednesday, January 23rd, 2013. Freshman Mariana Gaviria had been waiting in line outside the Bank United Center for that evening's game against Duke University for about an hour when the commotion started.

The Hurricanes wound up embarrassing the number-one-ranked Blue Devils 90-63. It was the first time in school history that Miami had beaten a top-ranked opponent. The entire sports world was finally forced to take the University of Miami men's basketball team seriously.

But at the moment, tipoff was still about six hours away, and Gaviria, 19, was waiting in line when she heard someone say: "Is that Larrañaga?"

Gaviria saw a group of very tall men piling out of a parked van - many carrying boxes of Krispy Kreme donuts.

It was a sugary expression of gratitude from Coach Jim Larrañaga and his players.

Larrañaga made a short speech to the students. At a football school, where the basketball team had never reached a national ranking higher than #8 (in 1960), the message was pretty simple: Thank you for waiting in line for a basketball game.

It was the first time Gaviria had seen her school's coach up close and personal. She didn't know about his Cuban grandfather, his Basque name, the tilde in his last name.

Nothing about seeing Larrañaga in person tipped her off.

"He doesn't really look Cuban. It's kind of bad to say," she admitted, "but he doesn't look it."

"He doesn't really look Cuban. It's kind of bad to say," she admitted, "but he doesn't look it."

Gaviria was born in Colombia, where "Mariana" is a fairly common name. Her parents moved to Kendall when she was four years old. Many of her elementary school teachers spoke no Spanish.

In her new home, Gaviria heard all variations of her name. Some people thought it was "Marina" or "Maria." Others would assume the name was actually the American equivalent of her name: "Mariana" (said like Maryann-a as opposed to Mari-AH-nuh).

It felt like a constant reminder that she was different and that Kendall wasn't Colombia.

Gaviria started going by "Mari."

"It upset me as a little kid because it wasn't what normal people would call me in my country," said Gaviria. "I understood why, but as a little kid you want to make it easier on people."

Gaviria, who is majoring in political science and international studies, is now fiercely proud of her Hispanic heritage and her name. When she learned from this reporter about Larrañaga's Cuban background, the nun who couldn't say his name and the tilde in his signature, she was delighted. "Something as small as an 'ñ' can make a big difference," she said.

The squiggly line that Larrañaga is pretty sure people simply didn't notice in his signature means the world to Gaviria.

"Everybody has their own story, especially when you're an immigrant and you go to a different country," said Gaviria. "And when you travel a little north, people have trouble saying the name, they just don't understand--understand the different processes that it takes to make it here. And even just a name can link people that way."

It's All About The ñ

Jim Larrañaga was as shocked as anyone when he got his University of Miami business cards: "Jim Larrañaga."

"I showed my wife. I said, 'hey, look at this. They were able to do it'"

And then again on ESPN: "That was the first time I'd seen it on TV."

How the tilde showed up again is a bit of a mystery. Larrañaga said he never asked anyone to do it, but he prefers the new, old spelling.

"It's always been there [in the signature]," he said. "That hasn't changed for me since I was a little boy."

And so the variable has been everything around Larrañaga -- a father who Americanized the family, a teacher who mispronounced his name, a part of the country where the line in his signature may

Larrañaga making himself at home in Miami

The Examiner
Kevin Dunleavy
March 9, 2013

As he entered Sports Grill in South Miami with an entourage of assistants, family and friends, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga received a standing ovation. His Hurricanes had just walloped then-No. 1 Duke by 27 points. Like a politician, the 63-year-old coach visited each table, holding court and pressing flesh.

The short trip from BankUnited Center down South Dixie Highway to the popular wings-and-beer joint has become a routine for Larrañaga and his coaches as they make new friends and draw fans to a program that has barely registered in South Florida.

It's the same outreach Larrañaga performed in 14 seasons at George Mason with Brion's Grille as his postgame headquarters. More than any other college program in the Washington area, the Patriots belonged as much to the community as to the school.

Now, 1,050 miles to the south, Larrañaga is lighting up Miami with his optimism, enthusiasm and self-help catechism. On cue, his team has arrived. After never finishing better than fifth in the ACC, Miami (23-6 entering Saturday) is ranked No. 6 and will open the conference tournament as the top seed this week in Greensboro.

"It's been quite a transition," Larrañaga said Friday. "It's 75 today. The sun is shining. It's absolutely beautiful. My wife is going to play golf in an hour and she is loving that."

In a city where the NBA champion Miami Heat overwhelm the sports conversation, the Hurricanes are carving a niche. For the first time ever, Miami sold out consecutive games, and for the first time since joining the ACC in 2004 the Hurricanes will not have the league's lowest attendance.

Students now line up for tickets, camping overnight between palm trees

on "Larrañaga's Lawn," some wearing T-shirts with the coach's face above the slogan "40 Minutes of L." The morning of the Duke game, Larrañaga and wife Liz stopped by Costco, picked 300 Krispy Kreme doughnuts and distributed them to the campers.

"We wanted to create a family atmosphere within the basketball program," Larrañaga said. "We wanted our students to also be part of our family -- to make them feel part of our success."

At Miami, Larrañaga has recreated his success in Fairfax. He's done it in a more competitive basketball conference, in an area less receptive to college basketball and at a school in need of an image makeover. Despite some raised eyebrows when Larrañaga took the job, no one was better suited for it.

"We built a grassroots network of people who support our program," Larrañaga said. "My staff and I have reached out to the local community to try to get young kids to follow our program. We had our first high school basketball game in the BankUnited Center. Those are the kind of people that want to become season ticket holders and fans."

As coach at Bowling Green from 1986 to 1997, Larrañaga saw how families involved in the basketball programs of his two sons were drawn to Falcons games. These days, Larrañaga goes to extremes to ensure his summer basketball camps are attractive to local youths. His players serve as instructors and role models in the summer, then as drawing cards in the winter. After games, children are invited to a designated area of the locker room for posters, photo opportunities and autographs.

To energize students, the Hurricanes conduct "dorm storms," with Larrañaga beckoning students to come outside and accept posters and T-shirts. It's reminiscent of his early days at George Mason when Larrañaga conducted karaoke nights.

The Canes are not only attracting families and students. The glamour set has taken note. Rapper Flo Rida and WWE star The Big Show have checked into BankUnited. After a Heat game in which All-Star Dwyane Wade threw a pass off the backboard to feed a teammate for a flashy fast-break dunk, he told reporters he was inspired by Hurricanes sophomore Shane Larkin, who did the same at a game Wade and LeBron James had attended.

Many of the school's illustrious football icons are showing up. At the Duke game, NFL Hall of Famer Warren Sapp was seated near the Miami bench and when the rout was assured, he urged Larkin to slap the floor, Duke-style, before a defensive possession. When all five players complied, Sapp and those nearby had a hearty laugh and an amusing snippet with which to remember a transformational night.

Later in the evening, the revelry was transported to Sports Grill where Larrañaga got down to business.

"He's the best at going to every table and saying hello," assistant Eric Konkol said. "Now people count on us being there, talking about the game."

Longwood head coach Mike Gillian, who served under Larrañaga at Bowling Green and George Mason, says his promotional efforts are as detail-oriented as his game plans.

"In college sports, a big portion of what you do is community, fans, media. Jim understands that better than anyone," Gillian said. "Trust me. It's on a list. It's planned out. It's organized."

Given his deep roots in the community, Larrañaga's departure from George Mason was anything but a routine step up the coaching ladder. After leading the Patriots to the Final Four in 2006, he had fended off offers from big-conference schools and appeared settled in Fairfax. Moving to another job and doing it his way would be a massive undertaking.

Larrañaga gets support from brother on Suncoast

ABC 7

Don Brennan

April 3, 2013

MANATEE COUNTY - The Final Four is set, and the University of Miami is not in it. But under head coach Jim Larrañaga, the Hurricanes won 29 games in their best season ever. And here on the Suncoast, his biggest supporters had a front row seat.

"If I go down there, I want to spend time with Jim. He's my brother before he's a coach, and so if I can't spend time with him, I have a better seat here, looking at a 52" TV," says John Larrañaga.

He and Jeannie are almost always camped out to watch the 'Canes games. They are always in the same spot, but not always in the same seat for each game. "I sit here, and Jeannie sits here, or vice versa. Souffle is in the middle between us."

The Larrañagas are a close family, and older brother John has watched Jim on the court from the time he was a child, through high school at Archbishop Molloy, through college at Providence, and now up to this 'Canes successful season. "Really exciting; I mean it gives me chills all the time. When he was growing up and played ball in high school, I saw virtually every game he played."

This season, the 'Canes beat a #1 ranked team for the first time ever, they went 29-7 overall, reached the Sweet Sixteen, and won the ACC. "Jim instilled man-to-man, not zone. He instilled defense; keep the other team scoring at 60 points or less. And it became a winning formula. He knows exactly what he wants, and he gets that from our father."

As the younger brother coaches, the two

older brothers sit, watch, and dissect.

"We got on the bus to go to the game. He turned around to say to Bob and I: 'I don't want you guys coaching me. You just watch, I'll do the coaching.' I said to Bob, okay we got the message."

Jim Larrañaga has a place near his brother in Lakewood Ranch, but he only gets up here a few times a year.

"We're really proud of him. Win or lose... he's always our brother. We are very proud that he has accomplished what he accomplished."

Feel the Love

Sports on Earth
Chuck Cluopper
March 28, 2013

AUSTIN, Texas -- Twenty-five years in the wacky practice of seeking quotations from athletes at their lockers, and somehow I happened upon my all-time favorite team when I wasn't looking.

It's not my alma mater. It's not a team from a place I have resided (although I wish I had). It's in either my fourth- or fifth-favorite sport to cover, depending on which week you ask. It's unforeseen, objective love, and it hit fast and hard with one night in Miami and February and four hours of access sprinkled across an Austin weekend.

I've seen umpteen teams with camaraderie, collaboration, cohesion, chemistry, heard untold "we-are-a-family" testimonies. Hell, I just got finished swooning three weeks ago as the Washington Nationals extolled their esprit de corps. But this finds a fresh level. In all my quote-scribbling years, I just never heard quotations quite like these.

Come to the Miami Hurricanes' basketball locker room. Feel the love.

Twenty-three-year-old senior big man Julian Gamble: "We love each other so much and that extends so far beyond basketball that it's really hard to put into words."

Twenty-two-year-old senior guard Trey McKinney Jones: "I can honestly say it's something like I've never experienced before. It's relationships we're going to have for the rest of our lives, and we understand that."

Twenty-three-year-old senior big-big man Reggie Johnson: "Now, from the standpoint of people saying, 'College is the best years of your life,' now I really understand what that means."

Twenty-one-year-old junior guard Rion Brown: "Man, this is the funnest thing I've ever been part of in my life."

They're uncommonly engaging. They're unusually aware. They're unquestionably ambassadors. They're bonded in a way you can feel in the air at a level previously unfelt even in all the years. They might

remind you why you ever liked sports.

When the starting five goes out for a tense second half against Illinois, somebody says something and they break into a laugh. When they have an on-court issue with each other, they tend to gather in a circle and say it like gentlemen, inaudible to opponents. Nobody feels insulted. When they have an off-court time and they go to wherever teams go after practices or games, they go together. "This morning, everybody just went to Kenny's room," Johnson said last Saturday, referring to the Cameroonian senior big man Kenny Kadji. "He put a beat on. Everyone was just freestyling."

He added: "There's no one who veers off. No one. Not one person. This team has no cliques. It's not Trey and me over here, this other clique over there ..."

They dance as a team, and sometimes 63-year-old head coach Jim Larrañaga dances in front of them, and when that happened after the second-round win over Illinois, their essence seemed to gush right out of the video snippet.

If they lose and this ends, they're going to feel sadness. If they win four more games and this ends, they're going to feel sadness. They want to win to advance, but not as much as they want to win to sustain this time.

Maybe it's simple. Maybe it's bracing because in college basketball anymore, some players stop by for such a short time that entire teams don't get this much time to grow acquainted. "I really think it's having six seniors," Larrañaga said. It also could be having six seniors plus a roster full of guys who weren't humongous recruits jaded with the humongous-recruit process. It also could be having six seniors plus their various travails with injuries such that Larrañaga lists them and says, "That's a lot of knees."

It also could be having six seniors plus a sophomore point guard who fits so agreeably into his gathering stardom.

View the general conditions of Shane Larkin's upbringing, and the forecast might call for entitlement: son of a famous athlete, lucky childhood, days at baseball spring training chasing balls and taking batting practice from stars, nickname

("SugaShane") bestowed by one Deion Sanders, even a story in which a Little League coach opined that whoever had taught Larkin to hit knew nothing about hitting, when that teacher happened to be Pete Rose.

That forecast, like many, would be wrong. Even as the son of the retired Cincinnati Reds' 12-time All-Star shortstop Barry Larkin came to be the kind of athlete who can make you gasp, who adored being chased at football until he broke his ankle at 14, and even as Larrañaga insists Shane could go right across to big-time baseball -- "tremendous lateral quickness," "tremendous anticipation," "great hand-to-eye coordination," "great speed" -- Shane also brought along his gracious father's tutelage.

"He was always, like, cool," Shane Larkin said of Barry Larkin. "He never showed out. He was a humble guy." The son reels off the advice, for dealing with media and teammates and sports: "Be friendly. Don't get on anybody's bad side. Always be willing to talk. Don't make predictions. Don't be a bad guy. Be humble." And: "Have fun. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. There's always going to be another game, going to be another season, the next play."

"No one was hating on him or not liking him or not trying to accept him," Johnson said. "The first year, we tried to get him to be more vocal, but he didn't want to step on any toes." He played behind former All-ACC point guard Malcolm Grant; he didn't start until late January 2012. "He was the same player last year," Johnson kept going, "and he was just falling back and not trying to step on toes. The fact [is] he didn't come in trying to say, 'I'm the big point guard here.'"

"I'm his big brother," Johnson said. "Most teams don't really have that. This is the first year Miami really has that."

Miami has something else, for sure. My objectively favorite team has something alluring. It's something that makes you picture these guys as older men, maybe at weddings, maybe in their forties, maybe in their fifties, still in each other's lives, still getting together, still talking about 2013, still sitting at tables you'd feel lucky to join.

Bronx-born Larrañaga has Miami flying high

New York Post
Steve Serby
March 27, 2013

On The bus that was about to take him from Coral Gables to the airport for the flight to Washington and a Sweet 16 showdown with Marquette and maybe beyond, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga wasn't only taking a fun bunch of driven college basketball players with him, he was taking the voice of the late Jack Curran, too, a legendary New York voice he will never stop hearing.

"The last time I spoke to him about the team was after the Duke game, I called him, we lost by three points at Duke," Larrañaga said. "He said, 'Larry, you didn't play any defense.' I said, 'Mr. Curran, Duke's pretty good.' He said, 'Didn't you tell your players [Ryan] Kelly can shoot? I was yelling at the TV, 'Kelly can shoot!' Kelly was killing you.' It was a great conversation. He had me laughing the whole time."

WELCOME BACK:

Miami coach Jim Larrañaga returns this week to Washington, where he orchestrated one of the most memorable Cinderella runs in NCAA Tournament history in 2007, leading George Mason to the Final Four.

Larrañaga is New York all the way, from 1501 Metropolitan Ave. in the Parkchester section of The Bronx, living out his dream of doing for others in basketball what Curran had done for him, all the way back to Archbishop Molloy High School. Seven years ago, Curran beamed with pride as Larrañaga wrote his Cinderella story, taking George Mason to the Final Four in 2006. "He would say, 'You guys are pretty smart,'" Larrañaga recalled. "I like smart teams. Smart teams can win."

Curran liked this Miami team, too. "He would love the competitiveness of our guards and he liked the size and versatility of our team," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga likes his team plenty, likes how

it has overcome injuries and adversity. "Life is 10 percent what happens to you," he tells you, "and 90 percent how you handle it."

So you ask him: Could this be a Team of Destiny?

"William Jennings Bryan says, 'Destiny is not a matter of chance. It's a matter of choice.' It's not something you wait to have happen. It's something you go out and earn."

They've earned this right to a magical journey and laughed every step of the way. I asked Larrañaga what his wife thought about his Ali Shuffle in the locker room after the 'Canes had survived Illinois.

"My wife watched it repeatedly," he said. "She absolutely loved the players' reaction. She said, 'They're jumping for joy. That's what it's all about.'"

The funniest thing he heard about it came from a grad assistant named Chris Alvarez, who asked Larrañaga: "Coach, did you know it went viral?"

"I said, 'What the hell does that mean?'" Larrañaga said.

"It's all over the Internet," he was told.

"I said, 'You're kidding,'" Larrañaga said. "If you can't find anything more entertaining than me doing the Ali Shuffle..."

Larrañaga, 63 years young, is as fierce a competitor now as he was back in the East Quadrant, where the best basketball could be found, where the opposition could have been Dean Meminger or John Roche or Dave Wohl or Gary Brokaw.

"Parkchester was divided into four quadrants — North, South, East and West," Larrañaga said. "Each one had its own park."

He looks for every edge, whether it be

through statistical analysis or seeking advice three times a week from renowned sports psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella. Every day brings a quote of the day the players have to memorize. What was yesterday's quote of the day?

"Defend the drive, block them out, rebound," Larrañaga said.

Asked why, he said, "Marquette is the No. 1 offensive rebounding team in the Big East."

These are heady times in Miami with the Heat and the Hurricanes. Larrañaga talked about getting texts from Pat Riley and Erik Spoelstra and a tweet from LeBron James after beating Illinois. And Larrañaga reflected back on a talk Chris Bosh gave the 'Canes two summers ago right after Larrañaga took over. Bosh had been working out with some of the team and told Larrañaga: "I'd never get a good workout when we scrimmaged."

So Bosh became the only person outside the program asked by Larrañaga to speak to the team. "He gave the best five-minute, 10-minute talk I ever heard," Larrañaga said. "He talked about how badly he wanted to win a championship, and the regrets he had playing the way he played in the sixth game against Dallas. He wasn't gonna let that happen again. He let it be known to these guys if they want their dreams to come true, they better start working a lot harder."

Larrañaga and his team have made school history and now they are shooting for more. Shooting for the Final Four.

Said Larrañaga, "It would be the culmination of a tremendous amount of hard work, coming together and creating memories that last a lifetime."

Jack Curran would be so proud.

Larrañaga delivering

Toledo Blade
Dave Hackenberg
Feb. 13, 2013

Serving on the staff of the Michael Jordan Fantasy Camp in Las Vegas was a tough ticket. It helped if you coached in the NBA or were in the Basketball Hall of Fame. Then there was the case of Jim Larrañaga and some others who had coached in an NCAA Final Four.

He made that magical trip, a mid-major miracle of sorts, with George Mason University at the end of the 2005-06 season and found himself coaching at Jordan's camp the following summer.

There, he met two Miami businessmen, Jose and Jorge Mas, well-known Cuban-Americans in south Florida. They became friends, especially after learning the ties went even deeper.

You might not guess it from his last name or his Bronx birthplace or his New York City/Eastern seaboard accent, but Larrañaga's paternal grandfather was Cuban and immigrated to Key West in the early 1900s. The coach's father was raised there.

So when the University of Miami coaching job opened in April of 2011, Larrañaga knew what phone numbers to dial. It became a hurry-up process. The George Mason coach was traveling and didn't have a resume at hand. So he cut-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and forwarded it to the selection committee. To make a long story short, including a hearty recommendation from Boston Celtics coach Doc Rivers, he got the job.

Before becoming head coach at Bowling Green State University in 1986, Larrañaga had been an assistant under Terry Holland at Virginia for seven seasons. In four of those years the Cavaliers had, at one time or another, been ranked No. 1 in the country, and twice they went to the Final Four.

From the day he left he had one burn-

ing desire — to return to the Atlantic Coast Conference as a head coach. A quarter of a century later, he owned 470 collegiate victories, had led George Mason to five NCAA tournaments, and in that regard was a hot prospect. He also had celebrated 61 birthdays and in that regard he was not.

For various reasons — storm clouds of an NCAA investigation that would envelop the entire Miami athletic department were brewing, minimal interest in a basketball program that had never been competitive in the ACC — big names weren't exactly lining up for the job. After Coach L used his connections to crack the door, he blew 'em away with an energetic interview. As the school's new athletic director said at the time, age went out the window. He couldn't imagine not hiring Larrañaga.

Today, the Miami Hurricanes will play at rival Florida State as the No. 3 ranked team in the nation. They are 19-3, 10-0 in the ACC, and have made a wild, almost unprecedented climb the last five weeks going from unranked to No. 25 to No. 14 to No. 8 to No. 3. Their power ranking, strength of schedule and RPI are off the charts. Once a ghost town at a football school in a pro-sports town, fans now line up for tickets at the beautiful but fairly small (7,972 seats) BankUnited Center on the campus in Coral Gables. The NCAA tournament is a foregone conclusion; the discussion now is over a No. 1 seed.

Larrañaga said Tuesday he is not the least bit surprised; if not for injuries and suspensions he felt as if last season's team, his first at Miami that won 20 games and posted a first-ever winning record in ACC play, might have done the same.

"It's been great," he said via telephone. "When I took the job people said, 'You're never going to draw fans; you'll never create any interest in the program.' They told me the same thing at Bowling Green

and George Mason. By the end, we were packing the place at both schools. This past Saturday, our North Carolina game (a blowout 87-61 win), we had LeBron and Dwyane Wade sitting courtside. I think people noticed that. I know recruits noticed. I think the nation is noticing now."

When the Miami job opened, coupled with coaching changes at other ACC schools, Larrañaga said he saw a league in transition with Miami sporting a veteran team while sitting in the midst of a fertile recruiting area.

"It's the ACC, the best basketball league in the country, and I saw an opportunity to succeed," he said. "The first meeting I had with players at George Mason in April of '97, I asked them who had the best programs, the role models. The first two places mentioned were Duke and North Carolina. And I tried to build the program at Mason in their image, that ACC image. I loved every minute of my 14 years there, but when [the Miami] opportunity came up I very much wanted to achieve this goal.

"I envisioned success."

Larrañaga has always had a vision, even if it wasn't clear to others. Maybe never fully appreciated at BG — he is the second winningest coach all-time at 170-144 while operating in an antiquated Anderson Arena, but never took the Falcons to the NAAs — many were surprised when he made what appeared to be a lateral mid-major move.

At George Mason Larrañaga saw a modern, 9,500-seat arena and a chance to make an impact at a school where no resources were siphoned off by football or hockey. Fans saw a lateral move to a fairly anonymous school in a similar, maybe then slightly better league; he saw potentially another Gonzaga or Butler. And, for the most part, he delivered.

Now, Larrañaga's latest vision is coming into focus. And he is delivering big

Larrañaga lands in dream job with Miami Hurricanes

Miami Herald

Greg Cote

Feb. 5, 2013

The University of Miami men's basketball team climbed as high as it ever has Monday — to a No. 8 national ranking in The Associated Press poll — and the man who made that magic ladder appear, Jim Larrañaga, had just heard the news when we spoke.

"It feels great. I'm excited," the coach said. "It represents a major step forward."

I asked Larrañaga if he planned to break the news to his team. He smiled.

"Those guys know everything before I do," he said. "By now someone has texted it, tweeted it, Facebooked it or instant messaged it."

Nothing stays a secret for long anymore, and so these Hurricanes haven't.

Less than a month ago they were off the national grid, and barely making South Florida pay attention. Now they are one of the sweet stories in all of college basketball, rocketing up in the polls from nowhere to 25th to 14th to eighth in three heady weeks.

A signature 90-63 pasting of No. 1 Duke on Jan. 23 in Coral Gables made America take notice. Reggie Johnson's miracle last-second tip-in to win at No. 19 North Carolina State on Saturday made you wonder if this team wasn't charmed.

Football is done now. You ready to pay attention to something besides the Heat?

This is your team. This is the time.

Larrañaga's guys have won nine in a row entering Tuesday night's home game vs. Boston College. They are 17-3. They are 8-0 in the mighty Atlantic Coast Conference — the first ACC team other than Duke or North Carolina to do that since 1981.

The only other time the UM men ranked No. 8 was in March 1960, even before Rick Barry arrived. The Canes have never finished a season ranked higher than 10th.

This year, though, you get the idea anything

is possible. You get the feeling March Madness will very much include this team as a major player.

A couple of weeks ago there was speculation about this being a Sweet 16 team. Then came the stunning whipping of Duke. Then came the top 10. Now if you're talking Sweet 16 you seem to under-selling UM's potential.

Elite Eight, anyone? Final Four, even?

This is Larrañaga's problem at the moment. Well, his challenge, at least. The excitement of possibility nourishing this program is all good, but it also raises the stakes on the coach making sure his players keep their focus.

"Our point of view is to get ready for Boston College," he said Monday. "At any time, circumstances can change. We are not looking two weeks or a month down the road. The only thing [being ranked No. 8] does is fire up your opponent. The whole reason we are enjoying success is that we have prepared one day at a time. We do not get too full of ourselves just because somebody else has decided we're good."

The even keel is easier because five of UM's top six scorers are seniors — Johnson, Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, Trey McKinney Jones and Julian Gamble — itself unusual (and pleasantly so) in the one-and-done NCAA.

That is also why this season figures to be Miami's best opportunity, although Larrañaga, 63, in his second season here, has earned the faith that he can recruit and win with his own guys, not just with the talent inherited.

This coach took a long time to get to his dream job, but he has arrived at it.

He is best known for coaching mid-major George Mason to the Final Four in 2006, but that was just part of the climb.

"I'm very goal-oriented. I was an assistant in the ACC at Virginia [1979-86], and when I left I wrote down that one of my goals was to become a head coach in the ACC," Larrañaga said. "So when the Miami job opened up I was very interested."

He did his research. He always loved the

talent pool in Florida, and he found more than half the teams in the ACC had changed coaches recently.

"I saw a league going through a transition period," he said. "If we were able to recruit well, we could do some damage in this conference. It seemed like an opportunity to come in and succeed very quickly."

Larrañaga had a very small inner circle of family and friends he consulted about the Miami job: his wife, two adult sons, Celtics coach Doc Rivers and sports psychologist Bob Rotella.

The conduit for Larrañaga coming here was Jose Mas, whom he had met while coaching at a Michael Jordan fantasy camp. Mas, the son of Jorge Mas Canosa, the former Miami business leader and Cuban exile fixture, called Larrañaga and invited him to forward his résumé to UM.

Larrañaga was traveling and had no access to his résumé so, at a son's suggestion, he copy-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and sent it to UM. An interview was set up. His hiring didn't take long thereafter.

(Speaking of Mas Canosa, it happens that Larrañaga is part Cuban. His father's father was Cuban, emigrating to Key West in the early 1900s.)

Larrañaga knew he was coming here to not just coach a team, but to grow a program in a city that hardly is a college hoops hotbed.

"I want everyone in this community to be dying to get a ticket to watch us play," he said. "At Bowling Green and George Mason everybody also told me we couldn't draw, but by the time I left the place was packed every night."

Coaching in the ACC had been Larrañaga's "ultimate goal to really test yourself." Now he is finding out the league isn't too big for him. He's big enough for the league.

I asked him if the satisfaction he feels is different now.

"Don't know yet. We are still in the process of competing," he said. Then he added something that should make Canes fans smile as

Larrañaga, Meier tour campus to rally support

CaneSport.com

Feb. 13, 2012

David Furones

Both the men's and women's basketball programs are hot right now. The women are No. 6 in the nation and have won 11 straight while the men are winners are five of their last six and are currently listed in Joe Lunardi's "last four in" to make the tournament. But neither team can seem to get warm bodies in the seats, especially in the student section.

On Monday night coaches Jim Larrañaga and Katie Meier, along with cheerleaders, Sebastian the Ibis and players from both teams, traveled to four different on-campus housing facilities meeting students and rallying support from the UM student body as part of the Buffalo Wild Wings Coaches Campus Tour.

The team's goal: get students to come out to men's home games Wednesday against No. 8 North Carolina and Saturday versus Wake Forest and the women's game against FSU Sunday.

"We're in the final push here and we just want to get the students out," Meier said. "When they do come, it makes a huge difference."

Members of the teams got on the residence halls' PA systems and called students out of their dorms and down to the lobbies to treat them to wings and pizza while pumping up the fans with a megaphone. They handed out towels and shirts to students who correctly answered trivia questions.

Larrañaga, who dropped by a flag football practice on the intramural fields to rally support, says this is an important event because it builds a bond between

the team and the students.

"Students might watch a game on TV, but won't go across campus because they don't know the players that well," Larrañaga said. "Our players are out here trying to talk to the students, get to know them and encourage them to come out and cheer them on."

Larrañaga wants the students to feel as if they're part of the team.

"The most fun you have in college is being a part of something," says Larrañaga. "And if you can be part of a winning program, a team that makes the NCAA Tournament, creates some national news—that's the best, not only for the players and coaches but for the students as well."

Senior guard Malcolm Grant, who busted out the pom-poms to lead cheers at Hecht Residential College, agrees.

"When they come out and they see the players in their dorm and they're trying to get them to come to the game, it makes them feel like they're wanted and that's the whole idea," Grant said. "We want them to come out, we want them to feel the support and understand that we need them to win."

Meier says building relationships with students is critical for support in the long run.

"You can invite a thousand strangers to a game, and they come one time and they don't understand why they're there," Meier said. "Or you can get the students to get real involved, build relationships with them and see the growth of the team."

So, after storming the campus dorms, what kind of a crowd does the men's

team expect for the home game against UNC?

"I'm hoping for a big crowd, the biggest crowd I've ever seen since I've been here," Grant says. "Usually it's always a good crowd when we play [North Carolina], but I want to see it packed, like every seat I want to see somebody in it cheering, going crazy."

Shenise Johnson, who leads a women's team that has won 38 consecutive home games, talked about how helpful it can be to have a hostile environment behind the team.

"It gives us that sixth man, that person off the bench," Johnson said. "It gets us excited and makes us play a lot harder when we have our peers supporting us."

Larrañaga says he will coach until at least 2019

Sun Sentinel
Jan. 27, 2012
Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES – Miami men’s basketball coach Jim Larrañaga will be 69 years old when his new three-year contract extension, signed Wednesday and announced today, expires on April 30, 2019.

Will he still be coaching then?

“You know, I talked to my son Jay last night and that question kind of was posed in the opposite,” Larrañaga recounted. “Jay basically said, ‘You’re a lifer. You’re going to coach until the day you die.’”

“That’s just what I love to do. So I expect to coach at least that long [2019], if not longer.”

At least that long?

“It just proves how much he loves the game and how much passion he has, how much he wants this school to become a great school,” freshman point guard Shane Larkin said with a smile. “I know Coach is very passionate, so I think he’ll definitely finish the deal, and if he can, he’ll sign another extension after that.”

Larrañaga joked that his wife, Liz, tells him “I don’t do anything else but coach,” adding he tries to coach her on driving while she’s behind the wheel and on the golf course, even though he knows “nothing about golf.”

“[Coaching] has been in my blood for a very long time, and I’ll expect I’ll be doing it as long as I can,” Larrañaga added.

This is, after all, a man who sees his mentor and former high school coach, Jack Curran, still coaching basketball and

baseball at 80 years old at Archbishop Molloy in Queens, N.Y.

The average age of NCAA men’s basketball coaches in 2010-11 was 49.65 years old.

The oldest active NCAA men’s basketball coach is Jackson State’s Tevester Anderson, who’ll turn 75 on Feb. 26. The next oldest, Miami (Ohio) coach Charlie Coles, will turn 70 on Feb. 6. Connecticut’s John Calhoun will also turn 70 in May. San Diego State’s Steve Fisher will be 67 in March, the same age as Syracuse’s Jim Boeheim. Florida Atlantic’s Mike Jarvis will turn 67 in April.

So Larrañaga finishing his new contract is quite possible. If he does stay at Miami through the 2018-19 season — there’s no reason to believe he’ll leave, considering his affinity for the ACC and ties in Florida — and doesn’t retire, he will not only turn the Hurricanes into a consistent winner, but more importantly an established program a high-profile coach would want to take over.

He knows the game as well as anyone, and he teaches it as well as anyone, which means players will develop — something that too often hasn’t been the case here.

Now, it will take time. This isn’t a one-year or two-year project, but rather a “long-term project,” Larrañaga acknowledged today, adding, “We want to build correctly.”

It’s hard to have patience if you’re a ‘Canes fan, considering that was the mantra during Frank Haith’s tenure the past seven seasons and the ‘Canes made the NCAA Tournament just once — 2007-08.

Unfortunately, it’s necessary.

“We want to help develop a brand that the community wants to follow,” Larrañaga said. “People tend to follow winners and we want to build a winning program that people will be excited about. It doesn’t happen overnight, but we did it at two other institutions.

UM athletic director Shawn Eichorst made a good move offering Larrañaga an extension and making a commitment to him.

The timing might seem peculiar, considering the ‘Canes are just 11-7, 2-3 in the ACC in Larrañaga’s first season, but with the injuries and off-field issues he’s encountered, he’s done an admirable job. And there are signs this team will continue to improve.

When Larrañaga was hired in April, I figured he would need five years to establish this program. Now he has eight years to work with. Retirement? It just got pushed back.

Even without rhythm, Larrañaga in tune with his players

Sun-Sentinel
January 6, 2012
by: Steve Gorten

The man lacks rhythm.

You might expect that from the 62-year-old, gray-haired New Yorker, who's unfamiliar with just about all of the hip-hop songs his players choose to play in the locker room before games.

Miami Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga sure tries, though.

"We're all sitting there and listening to the song, and out of nowhere, he'll just start clapping," forward DeQuan Jones said, grinning. "It's so off-beat to the point where we're just looking around, like..."

"Coach L is a funny guy," center Reggie Johnson said. "That right there lightens the mood."

Added Johnson, "I don't think he knows that he's totally off-beat, but I'll tell him one day."

Players laugh at Larrañaga's lack of rhythm, but are impressed by his effort. It was at George Mason that he started the tradition of having players pick one song to play in the locker room before each game.

"He says music is one of the great motivators," guard Shane Larkin said. "If you play an upbeat song, it can really get you going."

Just as he did in 14 seasons at George Mason, Larrañaga has found a way to relate to his new players.

He has amused them by his quirkiness, endeared himself to them with an act of compassion and intrigued them with his immense desire to teach all things basketball and life with a creative touch.

"I compare him to Phil Jackson," forward Kenny Kadji said of Larrañaga's approach.

"And even on the court, the way he handles himself on the bench," Kadji added. "He never yells. It's like he knows how the game's going to go before the game is even played. He has a lot of knowledge."

Like the Zen Master, Larrañaga is a philosopher. He quotes Confucius and Aris-

totle, and has used some of what he has learned in his coaching. During one of his first team meetings at UM, he shared a section from Malcolm Gladwell's book "Outliers."

"He does a lot of teaching," Johnson said. "We have meetings about personnel, and the next thing he's talking about bankruptcy or something like that."

When Miami traveled to play Charlotte [N.C.] last month, Larrañaga took the team to tour Red Ventures, a highly successful marketing services company.

The day after the Hurricanes played at Memphis in early December — on the way to the airport to fly to their next game at Purdue — he took the team to the Lorraine Motel, the historic site where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968.

Larrañaga has done most of his teaching at UM on the court. He always posts a "Thought of the Day," something he also did at George Mason, on a board in the locker room before practice.

The first one of this season: "Begin with the end in mind."

When the team gathers in a circle on the court, Larrañaga will ask a random player what the quote of the day was. If you don't remember it, you must run sprints.

The same goes for if you curse during practice. Larrañaga doesn't allow it. It's something he says he picked up from his mentor and high school coach at Archbishop (N.Y.) Molloy — Jack Curran.

Larrañaga will stop practice frequently to make a teaching point, something that wasn't the case as much under former coach Frank Haith the past seven seasons.

"Coach Haith would stop things, but I think Coach Haith, he had so much confidence in us that sometimes we'd make a mistake and he would let it go by because he knew we'd make up for it," guard Malcolm Grant said.

"But Coach L, he stops every little thing and he harps on it. He's been to the Final Four, he's been to the tournament almost every year, so he knows what it takes. I think he's trying to ingrain that into us."

"There's always a lot of teaching. The question is: is there a lot of learning?" Larrañaga quipped.

"My high school coach taught from the very first day of practice to the very last day of practice. We never stopped learning. He told me, 'If you ever stop trying to improve as a coach, you might as well quit.'"

Jones says players took to Larrañaga quickly, noting, "we did our research and his track record speaks for itself. He's a winner."

Added Jones, "It's easy to buy into someone who has a history of winning and being successful. Once we started practicing and he started showing us a lot of different things, it was, like, 'OK, this is our guy right here.'"

It took Johnson perhaps the longest to make the transition from Haith to Larrañaga. Johnson didn't attend Larrañaga's first meeting with UM players — he was home in Winston-Salem, N.C. for spring break. Larrañaga flew up there to meet with him personally.

"It took me a while honestly," Johnson said, noting Haith gave him a chance out of high school when other coaches didn't want to because of his weight issues. "So I was real close to him. It kind of hurt. I still miss him to this day, but Coach L is probably the best thing for us as a program right now."

Johnson, like his teammates, was especially touched by Larrañaga's decision to attend the funeral of Grant's older brother in New York the day before UM played Appalachian State at home Dec. 30. Larrañaga missed a practice for the first time in eight years to do so.

Grant said Larrañaga kept calling to check up on him and wanted to know when and where the funeral would be.

"Just him coming up shows the type of person he is — true class act," Grant said. "My whole family really appreciated it. ... You're at a funeral home, a sad time, and I look over and see my coach. It brightened me up a little bit just to see him there."

Sometimes, just making an effort can leave an impression. And if it makes your

Miami Hurricanes' Larrañaga a master motivator

Miami Herald

Nov. 7, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

Jim Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga 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 FedEx 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 Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga, 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 win-

ning, 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

Larrañaga 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."

After resurrecting GMU, Larrañaga faces new challenges

Washington Post
October 10, 2011
By Amy Shipley

Coral Gables, Fla. — Jim Larrañaga 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.

Larrañaga 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, Larrañaga admitted, complicated. Since Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga 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. Larrañaga, 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," Larrañaga 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. Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga 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, Larrañaga 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.

Larrañaga 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. Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga's own lawyer, but yet pushed the process of getting raises and contract extensions for Larrañaga — 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

Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga, 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."

Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga said. "Can we do it all again?"

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 Larrañaga, 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, Larrañaga 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.

Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga 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."

Larrañaga 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?" Larrañaga said.

So Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga and,

suddenly, there was a match few would have predicted.

"Every individual is on their own journey," said Larrañaga, 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," Larrañaga 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. Larrañaga, 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," Larrañaga 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."

Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga'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," Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga 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."

Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga'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," Larrañaga 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."

Larrañaga 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.

Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga 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."

Larrañaga ready to put UM on national map

CaneSport.com

April 22, 2011

Jim Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga 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."

Larrañaga 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."

Larrañaga 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."

Larrañaga 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, Larrañaga 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."

* Larrañaga 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?" Larrañaga 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."

* Larrañaga 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," Larrañaga 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 - Larrañaga said he remained home in North Carolina.

* Two of Larrañaga'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," Larrañaga said. "We want to develop the relationship with youth league coaches, high school coaches, AAU coaches."

* Larrañaga 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."

* Larrañaga's grandfather on his father's side was from Cuba, and Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga 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

Larrañaga. (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 Miami 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 Larrañaga a hug before it began.

* Of his basketball philosophy, Larrañaga 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

UM embraces new men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga

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 Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga certainly has plenty of personality.

During his question-and-answer session with reporters, Larrañaga 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, Larrañaga will do far more than act colorfully. In 14 seasons, Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga 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 coach-

ing," said Larrañaga, 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"

Larrañaga 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, Larrañaga 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."

Larrañaga, 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."

Larrañaga'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," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga's deal is for five seasons and will pay him \$1.3 million per season, according to The Washington Post. Last season, Larrañaga earned \$700,000, including incentives, on a contract that ran through the 2015-16 season.

Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga spoke on Wednesday and a deal was in place by Thursday evening.

Eichorst said he didn't allow Larrañaga'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."

Larrañaga'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

Chris Caputo Is Living His Hoop Dream

Westfield State Communications Office
Mickey Curtis
Dec. 20, 2012

It is a full court shot from Parenzo Hall Gym to the big time world of college basketball, but Westfield State alumnus Chris Caputo is living his dream as an assistant coach at the University of Miami.

Caputo, a 2002 Westfield State graduate and a four-year letterwinner as a reserve point guard for the Owls, has been in sunny south Florida for the past two years. Prior to that, he was a member of the George Mason University coaching staff in Fairfax, Va., for nine years. The 32-year-old Caputo already has many memorable moments in his short basketball odyssey: Miami's upset victory at Duke last season, George Mason's remarkable run to the NCAA Division I Final Four in 2006, and his four years at Westfield State.

"I've seen a lot of great places like Duke and North Carolina and I have been to the Final Four, but I wouldn't trade those for my time at Westfield; it was special and worthwhile," said Caputo the day before the Miami Hurricanes departed for a Christmas Tournament in Hawaii.

Caputo's passion for coaching began at an early age and continued at Westfield State. As a seldom-used point guard for the Owls, Caputo was a keen observer on the bench as a member of Westfield State head coach Rich Sutter's first recruiting class in 1998. In between classes he was a regular visitor to Sutter's office, peppering him with questions on coaching strategies. Caputo also watched a lot of game tape on Westfield opponents and gave Sutter detailed scouting reports. "I don't know if he used them," said Caputo with a chuckle.

Interestingly, Caputo stresses his academics at Westfield State also played a pivotal role in preparing him for the 24/7 world of big-time college basketball.

"My time at Westfield was really valuable," said Caputo. "It's a place where you cannot get lost because it is a smaller school and a lot of demands are put on you academically. I was a finance and economics major where I had to grind it out and fight through it studying, especially near the end of the semester. That's

helped me today."

Caputo's connections (he and Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga both graduated from Archbishop Malloy High School in New York City where they played for the legendary coach Jack Curran), coaching passion and work ethic landed him a job straight out of Westfield State as a volunteer assistant coach for Larrañaga at George Mason. The Elmhurst, N.Y. native toiled as an unpaid assistant for three years before becoming a full-time staff member at George Mason in 2005. He even turned down several full-time paid positions at other colleges to remain at George Mason because it was such a priceless training ground.

"Ten years ago there were not as many NCAA restrictions and I was able to do more things," said Caputo in explaining why he didn't take the money and run. "In addition to breaking down film, I could make calls to recruits, work camps and recruit off campus within 30 miles of the school. Plus coach Larrañaga is a great mentor and a veteran in the business."

Caputo's main duties at the University of Miami are recruiting and scouting opponents. He admits the pay and perks are good; his per diem is a lot more than the \$7.00 meal money he received at Westfield State. But the lifestyle isn't always glamorous and the pressure to win is enormous as Miami is a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"It's more than just two hours in suits coaching basketball," said Caputo. "There are late nights watching film, countless trips to see high school recruits that you are not going to get, and hours of sacrifice and family time missed. It is a tough profession and a very workmanlike job. But being at Miami has been great and the school has such a name brand – five football national titles and four baseball national titles. And the ACC is the best basketball conference in the country. Every night is a moment in this league. It's a great city with great weather and an exciting place to be."

Caputo's first "coaching moment" came when he was a sophomore in high school. In March of 1996, he and a friend went to the Hilton in midtown Manhattan, the headquarters for the NCAA Final Four. Caputo watched in awe as a who's

who of coaches roamed the lobby.

"I saw coaches like Mike Krzyzewski and Jerry Tarkanian and I said this is what I want to do, this is cool," said Caputo. "Then 10 years to the date I was living out my dream of walking around the lobby at the Final Four as a coach."

One day Caputo dreams of strolling the lobby and the sidelines as a Division I head coach. He is realistic that may not happen for some time, if at all, because head coaching positions are scarce and highly sought. But he does point out that that four of Larrañaga's former assistants during the past decade are currently head coaches. A content Caputo just bides his time, works hard, and continues to network and make new friends in the coaching profession. He frequently sends text messages to Erik Spoelstrag, the head coach of the 2012 NBA champion Miami Heat.

"Anyone who is in this business does it to become a head coach," said Caputo. "But if I become a head coach it has to be the right fit for me; I am big on that. I am also big on knowing what the commitment is from a school. But if nothing comes along I will also be happy to work with Coach Larrañaga."

Commitment and loyalty are constants for Caputo. He remains good friends with his

Westfield State teammates, in particular Phil Connors (Class of 2002). And two other Owl teammates – Kris Kachelmeyer (2001) and Jon Mazzone (2001) – visited with Caputo when Miami played at UMass Amherst in early December. Wherever Caputo's coaching odyssey takes him, Westfield State will be of big part of it.

"A lot of nice things happened to me at Westfield State and playing there was a great experience," said Caputo.

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 Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga'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 Larrañaga 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 (Larrañaga) 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 Larrañaga 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.”

Could Erik Swoope be another Jimmy Graham?

State of the U.com

Jerry Steinberg

Nov. 18, 2012

We caught up with Miami's talented 6'6 junior forward Erik Swoope and asked him about the current state of the team, his incredible athleticism, his potential to play another sport down the line, and much more.

Much like Jimmy Graham, Swoope is a high energy player who can guard multiple positions, and play above the rim. Swoope had an excellent performance in Miami's win over Jacksonville Friday night providing energy with 7 points, 2 thunderous dunks, and 2 steals. Additionally he is a very good interview.

Here is our full Q&A with Erik Swoope:

SOTU: We talked with Bishop Daniels a few weeks back and asked him who was faster between Shane and him, and your name came up. So among Shane, Bishop, and yourself, who is the fastest?

ES: Oh man, its very close. If we had a footrace Bishop would win by a very small margin and Shane and I would be tied. We did actually get timed earlier in the summer in three-quarter court sprints, and actually I had the fastest time at 2.99 seconds. Shane was right at 3 flat, and Bishop was at 3.01. I wouldn't mind seeing us do a 40 yard sprint and see.

SOTU: It would be cool to see the three of you on the break and see who gets the alley-oop.

ES: Yeah, exactly (laughs)

SOTU: This is a very difficult question, but

we have to ask. What has the team been doing to overcome the slow start? Are there any major adjustments or changes we can expect?

ES: I think we need to just learn what's best for us. We have some new guys in Tanye and Bishop and we're missing Durand as well. Right now we are just trying to build a stronger chemistry. Coach L is doing everything he can to help us understand how important the little things are like winning the free throw battle and boxing out. It is starting to slowly come together. I think between the new guys and all of the seniors we will come together.

SOTU: How do you see your role on this team?

ES: My role is mainly to come in and provide as much energy as possible. I may need to match up with guards, wings, bigs, so I make sure I am prepared to contribute offensively but also guard all 5 positions. I focus on offensive rebounds, and guarding the other team's best guy. Something like a Dennis Rodman,

SOTU: Can you tell fans a little about the mohawk?

ES: Yeah I had never done anything like that before, and I thought would be fun. My family also encouraged me to do something different. I actually just recently cut the mohawk, I'm looking to try some new styles.

SOTU: That's very cool and fits the Dennis Rodman mold just a bit?

ES: Yeah. (laughs).

SOTU: Considering your incredible ath-

leticism, ever consider pulling a Jimmy Graham, and giving football a shot?

ES: That would just depend on if the opportunity came up. That is something I have contemplated. I'd have to talk to my family, but I haven't had any formal communication with the football staff. But yeah, there's maybe a possibility.

SOTU: Hey maybe we can send a note to Al Golden on your behalf. Although Coach L would probably take care of that?

ES: Yeah I'm sure they would.

SOTU: Any final message for the fans?

ES: Come and support the team. It means a lot. We will do everything we can to give them a great show. Going back to last year, when we played Florida State. It was the first sell out of the year. And the team, and the coaches, we really fed off of it. When an opposing team comes in they feel the energy, and we'd like to get that every night.

Well there you have it Canes fans. Erik Swoope and the Miami Hurricanes are looking for you to come out and support them. We certainly appreciate Erik taking the time to do this Q&A with us, and wish him good luck during the season and in all of his endeavors.

Canes Bringing Style to the Court

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 1, 2013

When you watch the Miami Hurricanes basketball team play, there's one thing that stands out.

Their shoes.

As one of the nation's hottest teams at 16-3 and a perfect 7-0 in ACC competition, the 14th-ranked Hurricanes are also one of the most stylish teams.

Each player brings a unique style to the court with them as the UM coaching staff doesn't restrict the players from only wearing team shoes or even team colors.

Lately, two players—Shane Larkin and Durand Scott—have been rocking a bright neon yellow pair of shoes with Larkin in the Nike Air Zoom Huarache 2K4 and Scott in the Nike Zoom Hyperdunk 2011.

Larkin and Scott first broke out the pair of highlighters two weeks ago in their win over No. 1 Duke.

"I didn't even know coach was going to let them do it, but it looked good out there," McKinney-Jones said.

Larkin spotted his shoes at nearby Sole Fly, a sneaker boutique store specializing in unique shoes and the latest designs. The shoes immediately caught his eye and he took a picture of them to send to assistant coach Michael Huger, who has to approve each shoe. Huger gave the Larkin the go-ahead and Larkin got the bright pair of shoes.

"A lot of people like the bright shoe," Sole Fly store manager Tony Perez said. "So the guys have got them to wear in the games. There's a lot of stuff in here and the guys come in saying they need a shoe for game day." Not only did Larkin and Scott look good on the court, the backcourt duo combined for 43 points, 16 rebounds, and nine assists in Miami's first ever win over a No. 1 Duke as the Hurricanes blew out the Blue Devils, 90-63.

As Mars Blackmon would say, "It's gotta be the shoes."

Scott was planning on wearing his bright yellow shoes last season in a game against Memphis, but head coach Jim Larrañaga, who was in his first year at UM, wasn't comfortable with the idea so the staff had Scott change into a different pair before the game.

"We were coming from George Mason so we weren't used to that," Huger said.

Since then, Larrañaga put Huger in charge of which shoes can and cannot be worn. Huger receives plenty of requests and suggestions from the creative group of players looking to lead Miami to its first NCAA tournament appearance in five years.

"I use it as an incentive and say, 'Hey, if we win this game, you guys are allowed to wear the lime green shoe that's how they came into play (against Duke)," Huger said. "We were at Boston College and the guys weren't as sharp in our practice and shoot-around so I gave them a little extra motivation and said, 'Hey if we win this game you guys can wear those lime green shoes that you want to wear so badly. We wound up winning by one point."

Larkin and Scott had the brightest shoes on the court that day against Duke, but the other Hurricanes deserve high marks for their style as well.

Most notably, Julian Gamble. While the highlighter shoes might stand out the most, devoted sneakerheads will be proud of Gamble's shoes. Gamble has been wearing a special-edition Solefly x Jordan Spizike shoe. There are only about 60 pairs in the world of the impressive orange, green, black and grey shoe.

Trey McKinney-Jones wore the Air Jordan 11 "Cool Grey" and Kenny Kadji was in a pair of the Nike LeBron X id shoes to round out Miami's starting five against Duke. Then there's Rion Brown, who has been wearing a Nike Kevin Durant orange shoe throughout the season and Erik Swoope has had a unique mix including seen in Kobe's "Christmas" shoe although Huger wouldn't let him wear a "Gym Green" pair of Foamposites.

"Everybody has pretty good style," Larkin said.

McKinney-Jones led the shoe charge in

Miami's next game against Florida State wearing a pair of Nike KD 5 "DMV" shoes that pays tribute to Kevin Durant's hometown. McKinney-Jones scored game-high 15 points in the win over the Seminoles in his orange and blue colorways with a neon logo, which were released in December.

"Me, Shane and a few other guys on the team are real big shoe fanatics so we like to stay up on what is in with Jordans, Nikes, and switch it up for the games, especially the big games that are on TV," McKinney-Jones said. "We like to pull something nice out of our closets."

Larkin switched it up against Florida State as he put on a pair of Nike Air Foamposite One "Polarized Pink" shoes and had the socks to match.

"I like wearing shoes that nobody has and it catches my eye," Larkin said. "Hopefully I keep window shopping and I find some more crazy stuff."

For the majority of the season, Larkin has been wearing a pair of orange Chris Paul's CP3 VI shoes, but has been switching it up lately. He has a pair of highlighter orange shoes in his locker that he'd like to wear at some point, but says he needs time to break them in.

As far as other plans for the future, Larkin has ideas in mind.

"I have tricks up my sleeve that I already have," Larkin said. "I don't want to spoil the secret of the shoes I'm going to wear, but I'm definitely going to be pulling out some crazy stuff down the road."

The players are enjoying being able to show their creative side on the court.

"They're having a lot of fun," Huger said. "Winning solves everything and when you win, the team, coach L, everybody is happy about the program, the university, the students, and everyone is showing up to the games. We just have to continue winning and playing together, that's the key. And then the shoes speak on their personalities on the court and I want to continue with that. I give them some freedom with the shoes and colors. I won't let them go over-the-top, but when we win, I'll give them a little more freedom."

Miami basks in post-Duke glory, hoping for bright future

SportsIllustrated.com

Brian Hamilton

Jan. 25, 2013

First everyone had to wait for the stragglers, the Miami players bobbing in the flume of students on the court. Once they extracted themselves, these Hurricanes caught in the storm, the coach entered the locker room for a postgame chat that was anything but standard. The No. 1 team in the land had been reduced to cinders over the previous couple hours, and Jim Larrañaga told his club to enjoy it before turning their attention to the work ahead. Then he left. Then sophomore guard Shane Larkin arranged a circle of chairs, center Kenny Kadji ratcheted up his African music, and one by one they jumped in the middle to dance.

The celebration was just getting started. By Thursday morning, campus hummed with Miami's ascent to the top of the ACC and the program's newborn relevancy, underwritten by the previous night's mauling of Duke. Larkin walked to a 9:30 a.m. sports management class and fellow students stopped him, repeatedly, for chest bumps. As he made his way to his next class, Larkin estimated a group of 20 to 30 students followed along, talking about the game and asking for pictures all the way. The fans finally showed up. But that required Miami to arrive.

"Every program has to start somewhere," Larkin said. "People are saying it was the biggest game in school history and it could be a program-changing game. Hopefully, with what we did, it put us on the map."

Everything seems on the upswing for the basketball team with the best winning percentage in south Florida. One year after notching its first-ever winning record in ACC play, Miami is 5-0 in the league and thus two games clear of everyone else in the standings after its first victory over a No. 1 team in program history. And the Hurricanes are in position to defend that lead because the Hurricanes generally are in position to defend everything.

Duke scored 63 points on Wednesday night -- itself a manageable total -- and that was the most points Miami had allowed in a game since two days before Christmas. No one has scored 70 points on the Hurricanes since the season opener. Miami is eighth in the country in adjusted defensive efficiency (85.2 points per 100 possessions), one slot behind the Blue Devils team it just vanquished. Opponents shoot just 36.2 percent, the seventh best figure nationally and a "high-priority" number in the staff's mind. The effective field goal percentage defense of 42.4 is still bested by only 13 teams.

In Miami's first team meeting after the Final Four last April, Larrañaga asked his team a question: Where did all four participants' defenses rank nationally? Not shockingly, his players were clueless. So the coach who just finished his first year on the job gave them one: None of the four clubs finished lower than ninth.

"It's definitely the biggest reason why we've continued to play well," Larrañaga said. "We've gotten better at helping each other. We've gotten better at rebounding at the defensive end of the floor. We've gotten better at communicating, at talking to each other and switching when it's appropriate, showing when it's appropriate, trapping the ball screen when that's called for. Those subtle adjustments, to the common observer, don't really mean much. But to a coach and to a player, when you see the impact it has on your opponent, you recognize it as a key to the game."

Some of it was just a matter of time. Larrañaga arrived after directing George Mason to five NCAA tournaments, including the 2006 Final Four run, and found a group of players making what he called "a major adjustment" to their thinking, especially on the defensive end. The result was acceptable enough in 2011-12 -- 20 wins, that 9-7 finish in the ACC -- but the Hurricanes don't believe they came to grips fully with Larrañaga's philosophy until this year.

"Having another year under coach L has helped, just knowing exactly what he wants," said senior guard Durand Scott, the team's leading scorer. "When he came in, he came with a plan and a vision. He didn't come with the intent of just getting by. We did so-so our first year, and the second year, we came to an understanding of what he wants and what he needs us to do. We just put everything together."

The Hurricanes help each other now, but they are instinctive and aggressive enough to help themselves, too. Early in the second half, Larkin jumped on a simple Duke exchange after a made basket to produce a score that further buried the Blue Devils. He had taken note that, for most of the game, Duke's primary ball-handlers managed inbound duties. After this particular score, he saw point guard Quinn Cook inbound the ball to center Mason Plumlee -- and, in a fraction of a moment, deduced that Plumlee inevitably would return the pass to Cook. In a flash, Miami had the ball back, and after Larkin missed a three-pointer, the ball came back to him for a layup and a 30-point lead.

"I'm always watching, trying to catch a routine or a habit they're doing," Larkin said. "I just saw it, and I knew Mason Plumlee was

going to have to pass it back to Quinn. When I saw him catch it, I just made a run for it. And he threw a pretty soft bounce pass, and I was able to pick it up."

Every program needs a moment to compose itself. For Miami, that was Wednesday. The Hurricanes had cracked the top 25 and Warren Sapp and Jimmy Graham were among those in attendance for the showdown with Duke. Larrañaga even had 20 guests fly into town for the event. The win over the Blue Devils means little if the Hurricanes lose their sense of purpose and thus their place near the apex of the ACC ... but the point is they actually have that problem.

"Experiencing this together has given them a lot of confidence and quite frankly had given them a lot of joy," Larrañaga said. "To go through a winning streak like the one we're on right now to start conference play, for the first time in school's history, is very special to these players. They know they're blazing a trail that's never been blazed before."

The Hurricanes' second-year coach had dinner with his phalanx of friends and relatives as Wednesday's delirium became Thursday's, returning home after midnight. He had 96 text messages and 50 emails and responded to those until 1:30 a.m. He then re-watched the Duke game. He went to sleep at 3 a.m., then awoke 75 minutes later to drive his son to the airport.

In a matter of hours after what he deemed the biggest regular-season win of his coaching career, though, Larrañaga dispatched a text message to the team that arrived on Larkin's phone precisely at 7:41 a.m. It read: Great job last night. Enjoy the day, be ready for practice tomorrow. We must prepare for Florida State. Coach L.

"Right to the point," Larkin said.

Memo delivered, but it was impossible to ignore the deliverance that preceded it. Scott, the 6-foot-5-inch senior from the Bronx, was stopped for pictures as he walked to his car. He received congratulatory text messages, about 15 he guessed, from numbers he didn't recognize. He thanked them, then added: Who is this? After the senders identified themselves, Scott still didn't know who they were.

He pulled up for a late-night meal at The Cheesecake Factory and continued to hear echoes of applause dissolve into the late-night air. Cars stopped and honked their horns at him as he crossed the street. He was steps away from the restaurant when he passed by a police officer, sitting outside another eatery, who had but one question for him.

"How'd the 'Canes do tonight?" the officer asked, plainly oblivious. "Did they win?"

Former PDS star Reed overcomes injury to excel at Miami

The Trentonian
Nick Peruffo
April 1, 2015

Back in early September, former Princeton Day School and University of Miami forward Davon Reed thought his season could be over after undergoing surgery on his torn left meniscus.

Seven months later, the Ewing native has not only fully recovered, but has emerged as one of the main catalysts for a Hurricanes team that will meet Stanford in the NIT final Thursday night at Madison Square Garden.

“His work ethic is nothing like I’ve ever seen before,” said coach Jim Larrañaga, after Miami’s 60-57 semifinal win over Temple Tuesday night. “He was in that training room with the doctors, with the trainers, with our strength and conditioning coach. The doctors told me in November that it’s the fastest they’ve ever seen anybody recover.”

Though the sophomore scored just six points on 3-of-8 shooting against the Owls, he was still able to have a huge impact on the game with seven rebounds, four assists and three blocked shots in a team-high 37 minutes of action. Defensively, he was able to help the Hurricanes overcome the loss of 7-foot center Tonye Jekiri, who left the game with a concussion in the first half, by guarding nearly every position on the floor.

Temple finished the game shooting just 30.2 percent from the field, and 10.5 percent from beyond the 3-point arc.

“My dad (David Reed) always taught me growing up that it’s not about how tall you are or how big you are,” said Reed, who measures in at 6-foot-6 and 208 pounds. “It’s about the size of your fight. It doesn’t matter (guarding) one through five. Obviously sometimes you are outmatched, but if you have the heart and the will to do it, you can do it.”

Reed had a solid freshman season, averaging 6.6 points in primarily a bench role, but looked primed to make a major leap in his second year in Coral Gables. His defense in particular earned rave reviews during the Hurricanes’ summer trip to Europe.

“Davon had a sensational summer,” Larrañaga said. “We took the team to Spain and he was our best perimeter defender, our second-best rebounder. He was shooting the ball extremely well.”

Shortly after the team returned home, however, disaster struck.

“It’s strange,” Reed said, when asked to describe the injury. “I was actually in the training room. My leg was folded and it just locked up on me and I couldn’t straighten it. I went to the doctor and they said my meniscus had folded. It was a freak accident, but things like that happen”

The original prognosis was that he’d miss four to six months, making a redshirt year seem likely.

“It’s very hard to come back from that,” Larrañaga said. “In fact, I told him ‘if you are out for three months, it’s going to take you three months to get back.’ In the back of our minds, we thought, well, if he’s not able to do it, we’ll just redshirt him.”

By the time Reed made his return against Green Bay on Dec. 6 — just three months after surgery — his doctors had declared his left knee was stronger than it had been before the injury.

“We have an excellent training staff at the University of Miami and excellent facilities, so they did a good job of pushing me and I pushed them as well,” Reed said. “It has been a blessing in disguise.”

Reed moved into the starting lineup Jan. 17 at Notre Dame, and has averaged eight points and four rebounds in 29 games this year. He was recently named a team co-captain along with Jakiri,

Sheldon McClellan and the injured Angel Rodriguez.

“He’s shot the ball well, he’s passed the ball well, he’s defended, he’s rebounded, he’s played multiple positions, and late in the season I decided that we’d give him even more responsibility,” Larrañaga said.

Though the Hurricanes finished the regular season 21-12 with a 16-point win over Duke on their resume, they also had a pair of bad home losses to Green Bay and Eastern Kentucky and were ultimately left out of the NCAA Tournament. Reed acknowledged that the NIT represented a chance for his team to prove the selection committee wrong.

“We were definitely disappointed, but at the end of the day, we left it up to the committee instead of locking up a spot in the Dance because we had those two bad losses at home,” Reed said. “We set out a goal at the beginning of the NIT of ‘why not win this and show why we belong in the tournament?’ I think the team took heed of that, and every game we are coming more and more together.”

On a more personal level, reaching the NIT’s Final 4 also meant playing at Madison Square Garden, just a short New Jersey Transit ride away from Mercer County.

“I had a lot of family and friends here tonight, so it was great seeing them,” Reed said.

Considering what he’s already overcome this season, Reed may just give those familiar faces something even bigger to celebrate Thursday night.