



University of Miami
Men's Basketball Clips
2011-12

Grant struggles after death of brother

Miami Herald

Jan. 18, 2012

By Michelle Kaufman

Malcolm Grant, the unusually honest University of Miami guard, freely admits he hasn't been the same player since his 36-year-old brother, Yatti, died of a heart attack last month. The siblings were extremely close, and hard as he tries to regain his focus on the basketball court, Grant's mind keeps turning to his brother.

He scribbles messages to him on his sneakers and dedicates every shot in his memory. But in trying so hard to honor his brother, Grant said he lost his shooting touch. After scoring in double digits in eight of the first nine games, the team's leading scorer had eight points against UNC-Greensboro, eight at Virginia, and five at North Carolina. He is determined to turn things around Wednesday night as the Hurricanes (9-6) play Clemson (9-8) in their Atlantic Coast Conference home opener.

"The situation with my brother, it was a tough time," said Grant, who spent two weeks with his family after the tragedy. "When I came back, I was more focused than ever. I felt I had a lot to prove, a lot to do for him. A close friend from home kept telling me, 'Don't put pressure on yourself,' and I might have fallen into that trap, just trying to live for him and make him proud of every game.

"We all deal with death, but I've never had to deal with something so close. Every time I went to a funeral it was like an older uncle, but this is my brother. I still catch myself thinking about him. I cry here and there. But my family tells me when I think about him, have happy memories. I'm praying about it, getting better each and every day."

UM coach Jim Larranaga flew to Brooklyn for the funeral and has been acting as Grant's de-facto therapist ever since.

They have talked on the phone every single day, sometimes for more than an hour.

Larranaga even called Grant from a New Jersey turnpike rest stop during a recruiting trip last week.

"I'm like, 'Coach, you don't have to talk to me right now, I know you're busy,' and he said, 'Malcolm, I love you. I gotta talk to you.' We talked for a good hour. He told me to relax. We've been talking about basketball and life in general. I really enjoy his conversation. He's an extension of my father for me. We just have great talks, a lot of lessons I can learn from."

Grant has been spending extra time in the gym, trying to find his rhythm. He might have to play more at point guard against Clemson, as Shane Larkin has been sick with a stomach flu and Durand Scott pulled a groin in practice on Monday. Grant said he is up for the challenge.

"Sometimes, the off-court conversations help players relax," Larranaga said. "They need to know you trust them and have confidence in them. Shooters have to be relaxed to be in the zone, and right now, I just want Malcolm to relax."

Grant Playing With a Heavy Heart

Inside the U
Jan. 18, 2012
Chris Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Last Wednesday, Miami head coach Jim Larranaga was on the road recruiting and was on the New Jersey Turnpike.

When he got to Brooklyn, he thought about his senior guard, Malcolm Grant, a Brooklyn native.

Grant's older brother, Sayeed, died of a heart attack on Dec. 22. Grant has been mourning the loss of his brother and mired in a shooting slump when he returned to action after missing two games.

Larranaga pulled his car over and called Grant to talk.

"Coach you don't have to talk to me right now, I know you're busy," Grant told his coach.

"Malcolm, I love you," Larranaga responded. "I've got to talk to you."

The two talked for an hour that day. The next day Grant called Larranaga for a longer talk and at night the two talked again for a period of time.

"Sometimes it's the off the court stuff that helps a player relax," Larranaga said. "That he knows that you trust him and have confidence in him."

Grant has appreciated Larranaga's support through this difficult time.

"I really enjoy his conversation," Grant said. "He's an extension of my father. We just have great talks. He gives me a lot of lessons that I can learn from and I enjoy it."

Sayeed was 36 when he died and Malcolm had a close relationship with his brother. It's the closest person to him that has passed away.

"We all deal with death. It's a tragedy," Grant said. "I've never had to deal with someone so close. Me and my brother were extremely

close. Every time I had to go to a funeral it was for my older uncle or something. This is my brother and my first time dealing with it. It's really tough. I still catch myself thinking about him and I'll cry here and there. But I have a great supporting cast. My family has told me just try to be happy and every time you think about him, always have happy memories of him so that's what I've been doing. I'm getting better each and every day."

Grant was averaging a career-high 15.1 points in the 10 games prior to Sayeed's abrupt death. Since he's returned to action, he's averaged just 7.0 points and shooting 28 percent.

"With the situation with my brother it was a tough time for myself," Grant said. "When I came back I was more focused than ever. I felt like I had a lot to prove and a lot to do for him. I remember a close friend from back home told me not to put a lot of pressure on myself—I think I may have fallen in that trap and tried to play for him and make him proud every game. Coach L has done a great job and told me to relax and to play the way that I know how to play. I've been getting better, getting in the gym extra, so hopefully tomorrow (against Clemson) should be good."

Larranaga told Grant a story about one of his former players at George Mason—Lamar Butler—who was one of his top shooters. Butler, like Grant, was going through a slump and Larranaga helped him through it. He told Butler to remember all of the games—high school and college—that he was successful and apply those memories to present day.

Grant has taken that advice and has watched game film on a number of his past standout performances.

"Everything Coach L has told me, I've listened to and it's making me a better player and person," Grant said.

Miami has a 9-6 record and is 0-2 in the ACC. In order to get back on track, they'll need Grant on top of his game.

"Getting him back and playing at a high level

is one of our main priorities," Larranaga said.

Grant has put in extra time in the gym to help correct his recent struggles.

"I'm aware that I'm not shooting the ball really well," he said. "A whole bunch of things are going on in my life right now, but I'm still committed to this program and to the game of basketball so I'm still going to try to work my tail off every day."

Even with the two losses in the ACC—to Virginia and North Carolina—Grant says the team is focused on getting back on track.

"I'm extremely confident," Grant said. "After two losses teams tend to put a lot of pressure on themselves and start bickering. But coach has told us to relax. His team last year started 0-2 with away games, then they won 16 straight. I'm not saying we are going to win 16 straight, but there's no need to panic. We have a whole bunch of games left and I think we've improved every day we've had practice. We're going to take it one game at a time and go from there."

Having Grant leading the way would do wonders for this team.

"Malcolm is about as fine of a human being that you'll ever want to be around," Larranaga said. "And I hate to see him put pressure on himself. We want him to relax and we're going to do some things to help him relax."

Grant and the Hurricanes resume action Wednesday night as they host Clemson (9-8, 1-2).

"I believe from here on out, things should be well," Grant said.

Signee Drops 45 in Front of Coach L

Inside the U
Jan. 14, 2012

In a blowout victory over Upper Room Christian (NY) on Thursday, the 6-foot-3 shooting guard out of St. Benedict's (NJ) poured in 45 points in front of Jim Larranaga.

"It was nerve-racking," Johnson said. "You'd think it was like playing in the live period, but it was totally different when you've signed with the school, so I just wanted to play really well."

Johnson, who said he knew in advance that coach Larranaga would be at the game, said that this was the first time that a Miami coach has been up to Newark, N.J. to watch him in action.

"Yeah, they only have like three or four chances to come up so they wanted to do it middle or later season," Johnson explained.

Rather than discussing his performance, Johnson said that he and Larranaga talked about other topics.

"We didn't talk too much about the game," Johnson said. "We just talk about what's going on. He just keeps me updated on how the guys are doing in practices and games, just regular conversation."

So far this season, Johnson said that he is averaging 27 points per game for the Gray Bees, who sit at 13-1.

"I think I've been playing really well," Johnson said of how things have gone individually. "I [have] been playing to prove that I'm one of the premier players in my class. I think it's been going really well."

Johnson also discussed how things are going from a team standpoint through the season's first 14 games.

"We've been playing extremely well," Johnson said. "This is our first year together, there was a lot of doubts from people, but we've been doing really well."

Johnson is in his first year at St. Benedict's after transferring over when Rice (NY) High School closed its doors. He said that it has been a "big adjustment" at the Garden State prep powerhouse.

In addition to focusing on his team's season, Johnson has also been able to keep up with how things are going for his future team, Miami.

"Yeah, I've up date with all of them," Johnson said, going on to add that he has been able to watch some games, including the contests against Virginia, Florida Atlantic and North Carolina.

"They been having an up an up and down season and getting used to the new coaching staff," Johnson said. "I think they'll get it together. I think they'll be fine."

The sharpshooting senior guard said that UM assistant coach Michael Huger will be coming to see him on Sunday.

Johnson said that he has been in touch with both coach Larranaga and coach Huger. He noted that he gets to speak with UM coaches about twice a week and that he does "speak more with Mike Huger."

The future Hurricane has also been in contact with a couple of players who are currently donning the green and orange.

"Yeah, I talk to them, just see how they doing, Shane [Larkin] and DeQuan [Jones]. . . see what's new or whatever," Johnson said, adding that they talk more as friends than they do about UM or about basketball.

Johnson, who does not think he will be com-

ing down to Coral Gables, Fla. for an unofficial visit, talked about his fellow 2012 UM signee, Tonye Jekiri of Champagnat Catholic (FL).

"I haven't really talked to him a lot, but we're familiar with each other," he said. "I played against him on the circuit. I haven't really got a chance to talk to Tonye, but yeah, we know each other."

With his high school career wrapping up, Johnson talked about his goals for his senior season.

"Just keep my team together, just continue to win and I think everything will fall into place the more we win," Johnson said.

Asked if he has any goals for his college career yet, Johnson replied:

"I haven't really thought about that yet. Overall I just wanna have a successful college career at Miami, that's about it, and just win, win a lot of games."

Shannon saw toughness in UM hoops' Graham

Palm Beach Post
Jan. 13, 2012
Jorge Milian

CORAL GABLES — Randy Shannon doesn't get much love from University of Miami fans.

But even the toughest critics of the former Hurricanes coach must acknowledge one thing: Shannon discovered Jimmy Graham, the former two-sport athlete at UM who has turned into one of the NFL's best players as a tight end for the New Orleans Saints.

Graham was early into his basketball career at Miami when he first caught the attention of Shannon, a hoops aficionado and a regular at UM basketball games during his four-year run as head football coach.

Shannon was immediately intrigued with the toughness shown by the impressively-built Graham, a nice guy with a mean streak who served as the Hurricanes' power forward and 6-foot-7, 256-pound on-court policeman for four seasons.

But Shannon also loved the big guy's quickness and hands and began a hard-sell recruiting pitch.

"We tried to get him to come out for football," Shannon recalled last week, "but he wouldn't come out."

That changed after Graham played his last basketball game at UM, a 74-60 loss to Florida in a second-round NIT game in 2009.

Graham, who averaged 4.3 points at Miami, was weighing an offer to play pro basketball in Europe against giving football - a game he hadn't played since the ninth grade - another shot.

Shannon invited Graham to watch spring football practice that year and, when the towering red head showed up, Shannon never missed

the opportunity to lobby him.

"We knew he was tough enough because of what he did on the basketball court," Shannon said of Graham, eighth all-time at UM in personal fouls (290). "He did not shy away from contact, let's put it that way. And he was fast and he was big and he was athletic. That's why we wanted him."

So did the New England Patriots. According to Shannon, the Patriots worked out Graham that spring but did not pursue him any further.

Shannon never lost interest.

"I told Jimmy, 'We'll give you a scholarship and if you really do well, you could get picked in the fifth or sixth round by an NFL team and make a lot more money than you would playing basketball in Europe,'" Shannon said. "So I asked him, 'Why don't you give it a try.'"

Shannon knew he struck gold that summer when he looked out his office window at Hecht Athletic Center and saw Graham doing conditioning drills at noon instead of the early-morning workouts preferred by most football players.

Still there was some skepticism.

"A lot of football players were telling me Jimmy was not ready for what he was getting into, that football was a different game," said Reggie Johnson, a junior center on the Hurricanes' basketball team. "But Jimmy Graham is a different species."

It didn't take long for Graham to win over his new football teammates.

"I don't think I've ever seen a better athlete," said Tyler Horn, a first-team All-ACC center last season.

Graham caught 17 passes for 213 yards and five touchdowns in his one season in a UM

football uniform, but his campaign was most noted for a pair of critical drops against Virginia Tech that played large in the ninth-ranked Hurricanes' 31-7 loss.

Instead of moping or hiding, Graham made himself available at a post-game news conference and patiently answered repeated questions about the drops.

The next week, Graham caught an 18-yard touchdown pass that began a UM comeback in a 21-20 upset victory over No. 8 Oklahoma.

"You hate to say it, but bad things have to happen like that sometimes," Shannon said of Graham's dropped passes against the Hokies. "He showed he was a guy that wasn't going to shy away from adversity. He responded the right way and he ended up doing some great things."

Graham, selected in the third round of the 2010 draft, has enjoyed one of the greatest seasons ever by an NFL tight end this season. His 99 receptions entering Saturday's playoff game against the San Francisco 49ers is a New Orleans team record. His 1,310 receiving yards would be the most by a tight end in NFL history if not for New England's Rob Gronkowski, who has 1,327 yards.

Graham, selected to the Pro Bowl as an NFC starter, has also scored 11 touchdowns and punctuated each score by slam-dunking the football over the goalpost's crossbar.

"Physically, he's just a raw talent," Saints quarterback Drew Brees told reporters this week. "He can run like a deer. He can jump. He can catch. He's competitive. He's tough. All the things you want in a tight end, he's got."

That may be obvious now, but Shannon saw it first.

"I'm not surprised," Shannon said of Graham's success. "I thought he could do it."

UM forward Kenny Kadji makes impression in ACC

Sun Sentinel
January 12, 2012
By Steve Gorten

Florida transfer has blossomed into pivotal player for Hurricanes

North Carolina basketball coach Roy Williams admitted Monday he didn't know anything about Miami forward Kenny Kadji until he watched tape of him the day before.

When Williams did, he was impressed. The live version of Kadji on Tuesday night verified what the coach had seen.

Against UNC's vaunted frontcourt, the 6-foot-11, 251-pound redshirt sophomore made 7-of-11 shots from the field and finished with 16 points, the third consecutive game in which he led the Hurricanes in scoring.

Kadji had 14 points and 10 rebounds — his third career double-double — in the 'Canes' ACC opener at Virginia three nights earlier and a career-high 30 points and 12 rebounds at home against UNC Greensboro on Jan. 2.

With his performance in the first two conferences games, against arguably the nation's best defense (UVA) and one of the nation's best teams (UNC), Kadji has given credence to UNCG coach Wes Miller's claim after their game that Kadji is "as gifted a kid as there is in the ACC."

Miami coach Jim Larranaga didn't know what he was going to get with Kadji, who sat out last season because of NCAA transfer rules.

Larranaga hoped for an impact player, but was prepared for perhaps just a stopgap low-post player needed with Reggie Johnson recovering from offseason knee surgery and

Julian Gamble out for the season because of a knee injury.

As time progressed, Larranaga realized he had a versatile big man more comfortable playing facing the basket and shooting 15-foot jumpers.

With Johnson back, Kadji has slid from center to his natural position and "it's given a little freedom to Kenny to step out and shoot some perimeter shots," Larranaga said.

"He shoots it well, he's getting more and more comfortable and confident."

For Kadji, who's the 'Canes' third-leading scorer (11.2 ppg) and second-leading rebounder (5.4 rpg) while averaging 25.3 minutes and starting 12 of 15 games, the decision to transfer from Florida has worked out.

"It's not that I didn't think I got a chance, I just felt like I could have a bigger role," Kadji said.

"I wanted to go somewhere and start fresh and play the way I know I can play. I made the right choice coming here. I'm definitely being asked to do a lot, but that's what I wanted, a big role."

Kadji, who was a high school senior at IMG Basketball Academy in Bradenton was rated the nation's fifth-best center by Rivals.com and Scout.com in the 2008 class, averaged 4.4 points, 2.7 rebounds and 12.5 minutes per game in 34 games as a freshman at UF.

He had an even smaller role as a sophomore, when he played just eight games before back surgery. He then transferred.

"I think what ended up happening to him, he in his own mind felt like he had dug himself such a hole in terms of some days he'd work really hard and then other days," Florida coach Billy Donovan said earlier this week.

"He was young. He was immature. He had a lot of ups and downs, and he just figured, 'You know what? I've had too many ups and downs here. I don't have enough invested here. I just wanna go somewhere and start over.' And I think that's ultimately what happened."

With a new start, Kadji's developing into the player Donovan envisioned.

"I loved his talent," Donovan said of his first impressions of Kadji.

"I thought he had a great body. He could step away from the basket, shoot. He had a really, really good touch. Pretty skilled. Really, really good footwork. I really thought he had a chance to be an outstanding player."

Hurricanes need frontcourt at full strength

Fox Sports Carolinas
January 11, 2012
Andrew Jones

When Miami big man Reggie Johnson finally gets into full basketball shape, the ACC better beware.

The league already knows what kind of player Johnson has been, but as he wades through the process of getting in game shape after missing the first nine contests of the season healing a torn right knee, the Hurricanes learned to play without him.

As a result, 6-foot-11 sophomore Kenny Kadji has elevated his play several notches from where he was as a freshman at Florida in 2009. He played eight games with the Gators in the 2009-10 season before a back injury ended his season. He later transferred to Miami. Together, when Johnson finally steps onto the court feeling as he did last March, Miami should be a force.

Johnson and Kadji combined for 28 points and 11 rebounds in a 73-56 loss at No. 3 North Carolina on Tuesday night at the Dean Smith Center, but the outcome wasn't because of their mistakes.

Johnson certainly put up a few air balls, and at times just couldn't complete the spin or drop-step move he attempted. But in the mean time, Kadji, whose game extends to the 3-point line, though he's more comfortable from 14 feet and in, not only provides some of the offense Johnson did before the injury, but he lends the interior needed balance.

But this night offered just a small glimpse of what may become of the Hurricanes (9-6, 0-2 ACC). First-year head coach Jim Larranaga's team is a bit further behind because of Johnson's injury in addition to this being a new system.

"Our offensive chemistry is not what it needs to be," said Larranaga, who took Georgia Mason the Final Four in 2006. "Reggie has only been back less than a month, and those guys have really only played a handful of games together. We're trying to learn as a team with a new system how to take advantage of our big guys inside, but not turn our guard into being so passive."

Kadji had three double-doubles in the previous four games entering Tuesday's affair, and after averaging 4.4 points as a freshman in 2010, he's up to 11.1 points and 5.4 rebounds right now. He had 16 versus the Tar Heels, who respect his abilities.

"When I used to work out at IMG in the summers I'd see him down there," said UNC forward John Henson, who is from Tampa. "He's always been a great player, he's a load, and he scored on me tonight."

But the Canes need Johnson and they need him better conditioned.

"He's a load down there, he's a banger," Henson said about Johnson. "He gets as close to the rim and he puts it up and is hard to guard down there. We just had to double-down more and work harder to stop him."

Miami shot 39.9 percent in nine games without Johnson in the lineup but is at 51.7 percent with him. The Hurricanes were minus-2 every night in rebounding margin without him, but are plus-four with him. Opponents' field goal accuracy is also down two percentage points with Johnson on the floor.

Johnson's averaging 10 points and seven rebounds, but expect those figures to grow.

"Kenny's hard to guard. He's 6-11, can shoot the ball..." UNC coach Roy Williams said. "I thought that Kadji and Reggie were really good. They scored for them. Durand (Scott) is hard to keep in front of you, he really is hard

to keep in front of you.

"Durand and Malcolm (Grant), I still believe they make the engine go, but that's like our team, I think you have to have every part, and I think Miami's got some good parts."

And those parts should develop into a formidable club as Johnson's conditioning improves.

Larkin inspired by dad's historic day

Miami Herald

Jan. 10, 2012

Michelle Kaufman

Shane Larkin and the other University of Miami guards face a daunting task against the third-ranked North Carolina Tar Heels on Tuesday night in Chapel Hill, a task that requires their undivided attention. But Larkin will have to be forgiven for being a bit distracted Monday afternoon.

Upon returning to the team hotel from practice, he found out his father, former Cincinnati Reds shortstop Barry Larkin, was voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

"I'm so happy for my dad," said the younger Larkin, a freshman point guard. "He has always been a humble guy, and I'm so proud of him for earning this accomplishment. He deserves it.

"Everybody was saying this was definitely the year, so it was more of an anxious feeling for me."

Upon hearing the news, he immediately wrote on Twitter: "Just seeing all the love my dad is getting right now puts a huge smile on my face!"

A little while later, he added: "Y'all don't know how proud I am to be the son of a HOF'er! He worked so hard and now it's all paying off! Love you Dad! Congrats."

This was the elder Larkin's third year of eligibility for the Hall, and Shane said the last two years ESPN had cameras at their house, "and I know it was tough for him when he didn't get it. I know he had a big smile on his face this time around. My mom called me to let me know, because he was with the cameras."

The younger Larkin considers his father his sports role model.

"I learned a lot from my dad about how to approach games," Larkin said recently. "Being around him in clubhouse, before his games, a lot of teammates would be out there playing around, not focusing. My dad would be at his locker, silent, getting focused for games. That's how I am now. Before games, I am quiet, thinking what I need to get done before."

On Tuesday night, he and the Hurricanes (9-5) will need to corral the high-octane Tar Heels (14-2), led by Tyler Zeller, Harrison Barnes and Kendall Marshall.

Larkin will be extra motivated because he is coming off his only scoreless game this season. He missed his one shot attempt against Virginia on Saturday and played just 12 minutes off the bench after scoring a season-high 18 in the previous game against UNC-Greensboro.

"Shane took a knee to the thigh and was not 100 percent against Virginia," UM coach Jim Larranaga said Monday during the ACC coaches' conference call. "Mentally and physically, he was not at the top of his game."

Larranaga suspects Larkin will rise to the challenge Tuesday.

"This is a game more suited to Shane because at Virginia it was much more of a conservative half-court game, not a lot of fast-break opportunities," Larranaga said. "North Carolina plays much more up-tempo, with a lot more possessions, a much more high-scoring game. I think Shane is comfortable in that. Hopefully, his charley horse will be loose enough where he can go at top speed. We need him at his best. He really helps us coming off the bench and providing ball handling and scoring."

Larkin proud of Hall of Fame dad

Sun-Sentinel

January 9th, 2012

Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES — Legendary Cincinnati Reds shortstop Barry Larkin was elected to the Hall of Fame on Monday, receiving entrance in his third year of eligibility.

As you would expect, Hurricanes freshman guard Shane Larkin was proud of his dad.

"I'm so happy for my dad. He has always been a humble guy, and I'm so proud of him for earning this accomplishment. He deserves it," Shane Larkin said in a statement. "Everybody was saying this was definitely the year, so it was more of an anxious feeling for me. I couldn't wait for the announcement because I knew this was the year."

UM coach Jim Larranaga said hours before the Hall of Fame announcement that the entire basketball team was pulling for Barry Larkin, who has attended many of Shane's games in Coral Gables this season.

"Our guys know him and will be following very, very closely today," Larranaga said during the weekly ACC coaches' call. "Obviously, we're hoping he'll get that honor, which he deserves."

Larkin celebrates dad's election to baseball Hall of Fame

By Associated Press

Jan. 9, 2012

Steven Wine

MIAMI — Miami Hurricanes freshman guard Shane Larkin had just returned from basketball practice for Tuesday's game against No. 3 North Carolina when he turned on the TV in his hotel room for a family update.

The news was good: Shane's dad had just become a baseball Hall of Famer. Barry Larkin was elected in balloting announced Monday.

"I did a little dance in the room, because he finally got what he deserved," Shane Larkin said in a phone interview from Chapel Hill, N.C. "I know it's a big relief for him. It's something he has been waiting on."

The former Cincinnati Reds shortstop was chosen in his third year of eligibility. The past two years, Shane was home with his dad in Orlando, Fla., when the voting results were disclosed.

"Every year they've been at the house in the backyard with a TV camera, and as soon as it's announced, they've showed his face," Shane said. "This year his expression was what we were looking for."

Shane said he's never been to Cooperstown but will definitely attend the ceremony for his dad's induction.

Shane, who was around the Reds a lot as a kid when his dad still played, chose basketball over baseball in grade school. He became a prep star in Orlando, committed to DePaul in 2010 and transferred to Miami before this season.

The 5-foot-11 Larkin is averaging 8.2 points and 24 minutes a game for the Hurricanes,

who are 0-1 in the Atlantic Coast Conference but optimistic about their chances of upsetting the Tar Heels.

"If we can get that," Shane said, "that would be a big, big week for the Larkins."

Proud son: Larkin celebrates dad's election to Hall of Fame

Palm Beach Post

Jan. 9, 2012

by Jorge Milian

Shane Larkin is bothered by charley horse, but that didn't keep the Miami Hurricanes' freshman guard from doing a little jig after learning on Monday afternoon that his father, former Cincinnati Reds shortstop Barry Larkin, had been elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Basketball practice in Durham, N.C., finished Monday around 2:30, which allowed Larkin just enough time to get back to his hotel room for the announcement. The Hurricanes are in North Carolina for Tuesday night's game against the Tar Heels.

"As soon as I got to the hotel, I ran up to my room and turned on ESPN," said Larkin, who was accompanied by road roommate Durand Scott. "I saw, 'Breaking news - Barry Larkin elected to Baseball Hall of Fame.' I kind of did a dance. It's just a great feeling to know he accomplished a goal he set out to do when he started playing baseball."

The question of whether Shane, a lightning-fast point guard who ranks seventh in the ACC with 1.64 steals per game, would follow in his father's footsteps was answered when he was 7.

Shane was in a coach-pitch league in Orlando when his baseball career came to an abrupt end.

"I went up to bat and took a swing," Larkin recalls. "The coach told me, 'You're doing your stance wrong.' I'm thinking in my head, 'Tony Perez and Pete Rose taught me how to hit. How is that wrong?' After that, it killed my love for the game of baseball and I never went back."

But Shane followed his dad to spring training every year, shagging fly balls and taking

batting practice. He's never been to Cooperstown, N.Y., but said he intends on going for the first time when his dad is inducted on July 22.

Barry Larkin was eligible for the Hall of Fame the past two years, but fell short of election. Last year, he missed the cut by only 75 votes. There was some question whether Larkin would make it this year as well and Shane admits feeling "anxious" for his father today.

But there was no doubt in Shane's mind that his dad was deserving of the honor.

Virginia feels like home to Miami Larranaga

Roanoke Times
Jan. 7, 2012
By Doug Doughty

Miami's new coach cut his teeth at UVa and got coaching tips from Tony Bennett's dad.

Jim Larranaga coached George Mason to an NCAA Final Four appearance in 2006.

By the end of his 14th season at George Mason, men's basketball coach Jim Larranaga had taken the Patriots' program to a stage where they could schedule a home-and-home series with ACC member Virginia.

As expected, Larranaga is making an appearance at UVa's John Paul Jones Arena this year, but it won't be with George Mason.

Larranaga's success at George Mason, where he averaged more than 14 wins a season and went to the 2006 Final Four with the first of two 27-win teams, landed him a permanent ACC gig as the head coach at Miami.

His first Hurricanes' squad bring a 9-4 record into JPJ tonight for a 6 p.m. meeting with No. 21 Virginia (13-1).

It will mark the first time Larranaga has coached in UVa's 15,000-seat arena, which opened in the fall of 2006, but it won't be his first time on the opposing bench.

Larranaga, a UVa assistant from 1979-86, took his first George Mason team to University Hall in 1998.

"The game with UVa already had been scheduled by [former coaches] Paul Westhead and Jeff Jones," Larranaga said. "At George Mason, we were always trying to schedule ACC

games. We were looking for home-and-home games but the ACC teams were only interested in guaranteed games."

Larranaga's time on Virginia's staff coincided with the Cavaliers' two Final Four trips, an NIT championship and three consecutive seasons in which UVa was ranked No. 1 at some point.

"I've got a lot of fantastic memories from those seven years," Larranaga said.

The younger of his two sons, Jon, was born in Charlottesville in 1980.

"Since leaving there in 1986, I would say I've probably been back on campus a dozen times," Larranaga said.

Once he came down from Fairfax to join UVa athletic director and former assistant coach Craig Littlepage for a Rolling Stones concert at Scott Stadium.

"I went to football games a couple of times," he said. "I went down to have dinner with [sports psychologist] Bob Rotella."

Larranaga always has been interested in the psychological aspect of basketball and has been credited with loosening up UVa's 1984 Final Four team, whose late-season swoon almost cost it an NCAA bid.

It was Larranaga's idea to take the players to a Broadway play, "Brighton Beach Memoirs," on the eve of their NCAA opener.

They won their next four games.

Larranaga, whose first head-coaching gig was at Bowling Green, is familiar with UVa head coach Tony Bennett through Bennett's father, Dick, who was the head coach at Wisconsin-Green Bay.

"The way I got to know Dick is my Bowling Green team was scheduled to play them," Lar-

ranaga, 62, said. "They'd had a lot of success at Green Bay, so we started studying tapes on them.

"The more I observed their program and his coaching style, the more curious I became. So, I called him after our series was over and said, 'Can I come and sit down with you and address some of the issues I have with my own coaching?'"

Larranaga drove to Chicago, picked up then-Butler coach Barry Collier, and they both drove to Green Bay to meet with Bennett.

"We spent about a day and a half with Dick, drove home and both made some subtle adjustments to what we were doing," Larranaga said. "Barry was the true architect of the Butler program. He passed it along to Thad Matta, who took it to Xavier, and he passed it along to Todd Lickliter, who then went to Iowa."

Of course, Dick Bennett also passed along his system - famous for its "Pack-Line" pressure defense - to his son, Tony, now in his third year at UVa.

Larranaga said his team is still making the transition from previous coach Frank Haith, so the Hurricanes won't be Virginia's mirror image.

"Not in terms of D's," Larranaga said. "And, unfortunately, not in terms of X's either. The X's should be similar, but not right now, because we're still in the infant stages."

Canes defense a work in progress

Sun-Sentinel
January 7, 2012
by: Steve Gorten

When Miami coach Jim Larranaga looks at Virginia's defense, he sees what he'd eventually like his defense to be.

"The way they defend the 3, defend the post, and the way they rebound the ball – those three areas are where we would like to be, at that level of performance," Larranaga said. "The difference is we'd like to be able to do that at a much faster pace."

Entering the teams' matchup Saturday in Charlottesville, Va., the ACC opener for both teams, Virginia ranked second in the latest NCAA rankings in points allowed (50.3), eighth in 3-point percentage defense (26.7) and 18th in field-goal percentage defense (37.8).

Meanwhile, UM ranked 160 in points allowed (66.3), 199th in 3-point percentage defense (34.6) and 129th in field-goal percentage (41.4).

While Larranaga called UVA "conceivably the best defensive team in the country" on Thursday, he noted that his players have a ways to go defensively.

"I don't think they understand the concepts. It's not complicated but we all live based on our habits – the way you do things or the way you've done things in the past," Larranaga said. "We get very comfortable with doing things a certain way.

"And players who are at the college level have done things that way for a very long time. It's been a challenge for them to try to develop new habits and approach the game a little differently."

After playing zone defense under former coach Frank Haith, 'Canes players have ad-

justed to playing man-to-man under Larranaga.

"We're not where we need to be," Larranaga said.

"This year it's different playing man-to-man and getting used to his principles, but like I said before, it's our first year and we're going to continue to get better," guard Malcolm Grant said. "That's all we can do – listen to him, understand what he wants and try to execute it."

Larranaga built his reputation at George Mason based on his teams' defense. GMU ranked 37th nationally in scoring defense last season with 62.5 points per game allowed. He also became famous for his "scramble defense," which includes various traps.

It'll be a while before you'll see the scramble defense at UM, though.

"We're really, really in the early stages," Larranaga said. "We're so focused on trying to improve the man-to-man. It's going to be a really long time before we can scramble."

Here's what Larranaga envisions:

"What we'd love to be able to do is get back and set our defense every time. That means five guys beating their man down the floor, beating the ball down the floor, so as the ball is crossing the mid-court line, your five guys are back and ready. We haven't done that very well so far.

"We will have two to four guys get back. One guy doesn't get back. We have to help him because his man is close to the basket, and somebody else [on the opposing team] ends up with an easy shot because of it.

"The second thing is pressuring the man with the ball. You've got to have the speed and quickness and defensive skill level to keep a

very quick player with the ball out of the lane."

One UM player who has impressed Larranaga: guard Rion Brown.

"You've got one guy that has elevated his defensive effort first," the coach said. "We need more guys to put that kind of emphasis on defense."

Virginia's progression into a strong defensive team under coach Tony Bennett has taken time. Bennett's now in his third season at the school.

"Their players have grown to understand their defensive concepts," Larranaga said. "They play the pack defense. They really emphasize taking away anything inside of the 3-point line. You have one guy out there [on the perimeter] pressuring anybody who might shoot, but you have four guys helping him.

"And we have that same exact concept. But they've been at it for three years and their players are now...not even last year were [the Cavaliers] able to do it. Last year they were 200th in defending the 3. They were able to improve because their players, as they've gotten older, are more focused on how the defense works and how to execute it under game conditions."

He added, "They're one of the best teams in the country in defensive rebounding. We're just in the beginning stages of that."

Said Grant: "We watched them on film a little bit and they do the same thing that Coach L teaches, which is elbows and blocks, trying to stop penetration."

Larranaga said he anticipates it will take a couple of years for his defense to be fully installed and for his players to fully understand it. Virginia is an example of the defense you can one day expect from the 'Canes.

Even without rhythm, Larranaga 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 Larranaga 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 Larranaga'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, Larranaga 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 Larranaga'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, Larranaga is a philosopher. He quotes Confucius and Aristotle, 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, Larranaga 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.

Larranaga 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, Larranaga 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. Larranaga 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.

Larranaga 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 ques-

tion is: is there a lot of learning?" Larranaga 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 Larranaga 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 Larranaga. Johnson didn't attend Larranaga's first meeting with UM players — he was home in Winston-Salem, N.C. for spring break. Larranaga 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 Larranaga'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. Larranaga missed a practice for the first time in eight years to do so.

Grant said Larranaga 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 players laugh, even better.

Grant marks memory of brother on his shoes

Sun Sentinel

January 5, 2012

By Steve Gorten

Before his first game back on Monday night, Miami guard Malcolm Grant grabbed a gray marker and wrote on his black sneakers in tribute to his older brother, "Rest in peace Sayeed. I love you." He included Sayeed's old basketball number — 15.

"Every pair of sneakers I'm going to write something different on," Grant said. It's been a difficult two weeks for Grant, who left the team before their game at UNC Charlotte on Dec. 22 after learning his 36-year-old brother had died from a heart attack.

"When I first came back, the game I sat out [vs. Appalachian State], I cried a little bit walking out on the court because even though I wasn't playing, I knew I can't call him up or he can't call me and say he saw the game," Grant said.

"But I think last game against UNC Greensboro, I was more focused than ever. I just want to do everything he's taught me and everything he was telling me before he passed away. I'm more focused than ever."

Grant started Monday against UNCG and was 3-for-9 for eight points with two assists and played 19 minutes. Coach Jim Larranaga said he didn't play him more because the group in the game was in good rhythm.

Grant, who remains the Hurricanes' leading scorer with 14.5 points per game, said he "can't wait" for the start of ACC play Saturday against Virginia. The senior was named to the preseason All-ACC Team.

Miami a team in transition under Larranaga

Cavalier Insider
January 05, 2012
By: Whitelaw Reid

Earlier this week, when Miami coach Jim Larranaga was asked by a teleconference moderator to make a few opening comments about his "team," he had a frank response.

"Which team are you referring to?" asked Larranaga, rhetorically. "The one we started the season with or the one we have now?"

Larranaga's point was well taken. Miami has certainly been the proverbial "team in transition."

The Hurricanes (9-4), who visit John Paul Jones Arena on Saturday night to take on No. 21 Virginia, began the season with only seven scholarship players. But in their win over UNC Greensboro on Monday, Larranaga had 11 available.

The two key players Larranaga has welcomed back are Reggie Johnson and DeQuan Jones. Johnson, a 6-foot-10 junior center, missed the first month and a half with a knee injury. Jones, a 6-8 senior forward, was held out of the first 10 games by Miami while the NCAA completed its investigation into claims a booster had given an assistant coach \$10,000 to secure his commitment.

"Those guys are adding a lot at both ends of the court," said Larranaga, who is in his first year at Miami after spending 14 seasons at George Mason. "Reggie is giving us an inside presence, both offensively and defensively. DeQuan gives us a talented athlete who can guard different sized players.

"They give us some depth in our front court, which before we basically only had three front-court players total. Trying to practice that way and get ready for games was difficult. But now we have a full complement of players and are a little bit deeper than we

were."

Under Larranaga, Miami is similar to how Virginia was when coach Tony Bennett first took over. One of the main challenges for Hurricane players has been learning Larranaga's man-to-man defensive scheme. Under former coach Frank Haith, Miami was mainly a zone team.

"The strengths of a team in zone are different than man-to-man," Larranaga said. "The concepts that they were taught in the past are different than the concepts that they're being taught now.

"The defense and the rebounding have been a major priority and we're not anywhere near where we'd like to be."

Teaching his offensive system hasn't exactly been a walk in the park, either. Larranaga says he had to switch around some of the concepts that he had initially installed because his players weren't comfortable with them.

So far the Hurricanes have pretty much performed how you would expect. They have wins over the likes of Rutgers, Appalachian State and Greensboro and losses to Purdue, Memphis and West Virginia. Their best win, arguably, came at home on Dec. 3 against a Massachusetts team that is currently 11-3.

Larranaga, who served as an assistant coach at Virginia in the 1980s, is well aware of what his team will be going up against on Saturday. When he coached at Bowling Green, he got to know Bennett's father, Dick (then the coach at Wisconsin-Green Bay) quite well.

"[I] was so impressed with their defense and the way they shared the ball on offense — that I actually called Coach Bennett and asked him if he would spend time with me," Larranaga said. "I had been a head coach for about four or five years at that time and knew there were a lot of things that my program needed

to improve and thought that Coach Bennett could help us.

"He was very, very kind and generous enough to give me [some time]...we sat and talked basketball."

Larranaga, most well known for leading George Mason to the Final Four in 2006, says he has been very impressed with what Tony Bennett has done during his brief time at Virginia.

"He's very much like his dad," Larranaga said. "His teams are very defensive-oriented. They do a great job of sharing the ball on offense and he's built himself a top-25 team."

When Larranaga talks about the overall state of his team, he sounds a lot like Bennett did two years ago.

"We've challenged our players to develop a great work ethic and to become a better defensive team and that has been a real challenge for the players," he said. "I think they have a great attitude and want to do all the right things, but right now we are still very much a team in transition."

Miami Insider: Larranaga likes defensive effort

Fox Sports South - The Sports XChange
Jan. 3, 2012

Miami has been shooting the ball well over its last three games, but as the Hurricanes prepare for their ACC opener at Virginia on Jan. 7, coach Jim Larranaga wants his team to keep up its defensive effort.

Larranaga credited the Hurricanes with 35 minutes of consistent defensive play in their most lopsided win of the season, 84-54 over Appalachian State, in their last outing.

"Once we kicked it into a high level of intensity, we were able to maintain it for the whole game," said Larranaga, whose 'Canes have one more non-conference game to serve as a tune-up for league play. "That is far better than we have done.

"In the past, we have had one guy playing hard, maybe two guys, and tonight we ended up with seven, eight, nine guys playing hard."

Part of the problem is that for the first two months, Larranaga has not had a full roster to deal with.

Center Reggie Johnson, coming off a knee injury, didn't make his season debut until Dec. 17 against Florida Atlantic. Forward DaQuan Jones came on in the next game after the university reversed its decision to hold him out while the NCAA completed its investigation into claims a booster had given an assistant coach \$10,000 to secure Jones' commitment.

Guards Garrius Adams (injury), Malcolm Grant (death in the family), and Shane Larkin (not cleared to play until the second game) all have missed time.

With Grant rejoining the team, the upcoming game against UNC-Greensboro will be the first time this season Larranaga has had a full roster, though Adams isn't 100 percent. "What needs to happen now is the players

have to stay focused on what we need to do defensively to improve," Larranaga said. "If they do that, a lot of things will take care of themselves."

NOTES, QUOTES

The addition of C Reggie Johnson and athletic F DaQuan Jones in the lineup has boosted Miami's rebounding strength. The Hurricanes were outrebounded in eight of their first 10 games but have won the boards in their last two with Jones on the floor.

Johnson has 24 rebounds in his first three games, Jones 14 in two appearances.

Sophomore G Rion Brown came off the bench to score 15 points against Appalachian State for his third consecutive game in double figures. He has averaged 13.7 points a game over that span since going scoreless in the loss at West Virginia.

Miami had six players score in double figures in the 84-54 victory over Appalachian State on Dec. 30 with junior G Durand Scott leading with 17 points. The Hurricanes have seven players who are averaging at least eight points a game through 12 games. In addition to G Rion Brown's 15, they got 11 points off the bench from Jones.

BY THE NUMBERS: 3 -- Miami has shot better than 50 percent in each of its last three games after going 28-of-51 (54.9 percent) in the win over Appalachian State. The Hurricanes were 27-of-50 (54 percent) against Charlotte and 31-of-50 (62 percent) against Florida Atlantic.

QUOTE TO NOTE

"He really got our momentum going and got it started. So I give all credit to him." -- Junior G Durand Scott, on freshman PG Shane Larkin's play (11 points, three assists, three steals and three turnovers) in the win over Appalachian State.

Depth gives Miami and Larranaga options

Sun Sentinel

Jan. 1, 2012

By Steve Garten

When Jim Larranaga decided last spring to become the Hurricanes' coach, he envisioned a roster deep with talent and a playing rotation of up to 10 players built for his scramble defense.

He finally has that now.

For the first time Monday night, when the 'Canes take on UNC-Greensboro at BankUnited Center, they'll have their team intact — with the exception of center Julian Gamble, who they've known since summer would miss the entire season after knee surgery.

Friday provided a glimpse of the team Miami can be in the ACC. Six players scored in double figures — Durand Scott, Rion Brown, Shane Larkin, DeQuan Jones, Trey McKinney Jones and Reggie Johnson — and seven played at least 21 minutes. Brown has 41 points off the bench the past three games.

"It was all about offensive execution and just sharing the ball, buying into what Coach was saying about making our teammates better," said DeQuan Jones, who also had a career-high-tying eight rebounds.

They beat Appalachian State by 30 points, doing so without leading scorer Malcolm Grant, who will play today after missing the past two games in the wake of his brother's death.

The return of Johnson and DeQuan Jones gives Larranaga more options.

"What really helps us is having the balance. So Reggie gives us size and physicality, but DeQuan gives us speed and quickness," he said. UM will start to use Larranaga's scramble defense on a regular basis.

"We've been playing with seven or eight, nine

scholarship players with a smaller frontcourt, and getting those guys in foul trouble would just be devastating in particular games," assistant coach Eric Konkol said. "Now we've got more depth and confidence."

Jones speaks out

The Miami Herald

Dec. 30, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

Finally eligible after missing 11 games while under investigation, DeQuan Jones spoke Thursday about the pain of his absence.

On the surface, DeQuan Jones was taking his sentence the way he takes most things, with a positive attitude and a polite Southern smile. But the University of Miami senior forward admitted Thursday for the first time that having his eligibility revoked for something he insists he didn't do was gnawing at him more than he ever let on.

"I never really showed my frustration or my sadness, but it was tearing me up inside, sitting on the sidelines and not being able to help my team," said Jones, in his first public comments since his eligibility was restored Dec. 21. He retained an attorney to challenge the university's decision to keep him on the bench indefinitely.

"I'd call my parents every day and tell them I really wish I could play," he added. "My parents hinted that maybe we should fight it, and one thing led to another."

Jones was forced to miss the first 11 games of this season as part of the investigation of the Nevin Shapiro booster scandal. Shapiro, the incarcerated Ponzi schemer, claimed that four years ago, former UM assistant coach Jake Morton asked him for \$10,000 to secure Jones, then a hot recruit.

Jones and his family vehemently denied the allegation and offered to turn over whatever documents were necessary to clear their son's name. The NCAA continues to investigate and never declared Jones ineligible, but

UM took that step as a precaution so if he was later found guilty, the Hurricanes would not have to forfeit any games he might have played in.

On Dec. 21, after consultation with the NCAA, the university gave Jones the green light. The team had already left for a game in Charlotte, N.C., so Jones had to wait until the next morning to fly up. He said he couldn't sleep and was "like a kid on Christmas." He was so restless he went to the gym at 11 p.m. to practice his shooting.

He thought about the road trips he missed, those nights he sat alone with takeout food watching the Hurricanes on TV. His reunion with his teammates in the Charlotte hotel is something he will never forget.

"I wanted to surprise the guys, but coach [Jim Larranaga] had already told them, so when I got to Charlotte, I was bombarded with text messages asking, 'What room are you in?' The guys came to my room and jumped on me."

Despite "some butterflies," the 6-8 forward was thrilled to be back on the court, adding muscle to the frontcourt. His first points of the season came on a three-point play after he got fouled on a layup and made the free throw. He finished with seven points and six rebounds. His father drove six hours from Birmingham, Ala. to watch. His mother couldn't get off work on such short notice.

Jones said the ordeal helped him appreciate the game at a different level. All along, he was the consummate teammate.

"I figured if I can't play in the game," he said, "I might as well help my teammates be the best players they can be and push them in practice."

His attitude impressed the coaching staff.

"DeQuan has been the model of being posi-

tive," UM assistant Eric Konkol said. "He always has a smile. He is a guy that I'll refer to for as long as I'm coaching about how to handle a situation like that."

Johnson continuing to make progress since return

Sun Sentinel
Dec. 30, 2011
by Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES – Reggie Johnson, who assistant coach Eric Konkol refers to as “the anchor” of the team, has helped the Hurricanes markedly with rebounding since returning from knee surgery, and he’s relished the role of passing the ball out of the post.

But an equally important byproduct of having the big center back has been the redshirt junior’s leadership.

“Even though he’s been a great cheerleader [while missing the first nine games], your leadership is able to grow even more while you’re on the floor,” Konkol said of Johnson, who’ll play his third game of the season tonight against Appalachian State.

“One of the things I’ve noticed is, he’s really good at grabbing a guy before a timeout or after a timeout and just having a quick little message one-on-one. He’ll be vocal at times, but I think his value is so high in those moments, with the younger guys, even with guys of his age. He’s really supportive of his teammates.”

Meanwhile, his value in games figures to only increase as his surgically repaired right knee strengthens. Konkol said Thursday that Johnson has worked hard in the weight room to gain more mobility and strength in his knee and leg.

“He’s still a long ways from being 100 percent...he’s clearly just not quite as strong yet as with his other leg, but we’re working very quickly to do it,” Konkol said. “He’s really driven and has worked very hard to get better with that leg and is progressing nicely.”

Kokol said Johnson had some soreness in his knee after the FAU game, but since then “has been fully active and doing everything with the whole team.”

“I expected that, sitting out five months, to be a little bit sore, but after the Charlotte game [last Thursday] I was perfectly fine, so I guess that was a one-time thing,” Johnson said. He added later, “My leg feels fine. I’m back jumping like I normally would.”

Johnson said some of friends who underwent the same surgery as him, such as NBA players with Josh Howard, Maurice Peterson and Juwan Howard, encouraged him throughout the rehab process.

When the center had the procedure on June 30, the ‘Canes coaching staff initially was hopeful he’d return for the ACC opener Jan. 7 at Virginia. Instead, he made his season debut Dec. 17 against Florida Atlantic, playing 36 minutes after coaches thought he might go 12 to 15 minutes.

Johnson had 15 points, nine rebounds, five blocks and a career-high five assists against FAU. At Charlotte, he had 11 points, seven rebounds, three assists and two blocks while playing 26 minutes in his first start of the season.

“He very much had their attention,” Konkol said. “They double and triple-teamed him, tried to get the ball out of his hands. He scored 11, but he passed the ball extremely well. He’s done a great job of that.”

Noted Johnson, who now has eight assists in two games: “They sent a lot of guys at me, so coaches wanted me to be a playmaker more so that game. I feel I did a good job doing that.”

After a season in which the 6-foot-10, 300-pounder gained attention around the ACC with 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds per game – including 22 points and nine rebounds at Duke

in the conference opener – it’ll be interesting to see how ACC opponents play Johnson.

“I’m not sure what teams are going to do to me – I’m just going to adjust to it,” Johnson said. “Whatever we’ve got to do for me to get offensive and defensive rebounds. I still think I’ll be effective with that.”

Canes in Final Four State of Mind with New Hoops Coach

College Sports Madness
Dec. 30, 2011

Scott Brand

It's been more than five-years since former George Mason University Patriot's head basketball coach Jim Larrañaga's Cinderella team became the first mid-major college basketball program in 27-years to march to the Final Four. Now the University of Miami (UM) hoop fans hope Larrañaga - their freshly-minted first-year coach - repeats this feat.

That said, it seems dubious if Larrañaga can take the Canes to the NCAA Final Four in his first season, but the ACC tournament semi-finals is certainly within reach. Especially since the Canes were a preseason pick to finish fifth in the ACC, returned eight of their team's top 10 scorers, possess one of the ACC's most talented backcourts, and are playing in a top heavy conference that many experts believe to be mired in a down year.

"The ACC provides the nation's most exciting brand of basketball," said Larrañaga, who is informally known as Coach L by his inner circle. "This is why I came to Miami and I am enjoying the challenge it provides our program. This opportunity is very special to me."

So far Larrañaga's report card should be graded incomplete. At (7-4), the Canes are still searching for their first signature win. Despite their unspectacular start that has been sprinkled with flashes of promise, to be fair, Larrañaga had to operate without his star center, Reggie Johnson, for the first nine games of the season. Johnson, who is good for a double-double on most occasions, was recovering from knee surgery before returning from the injured reserve against FAU in mid-December. The Canes' line-up, sans Johnson, was devoid of the post presence they desperately needed, especially when facing teams with imposing front-lines.

The foundation behind Larrañaga's storied 26-year division-one head coaching career - spanning 12 NCAA appearances (8 since 2000) - can be pointed to his sophisticated two-pronged offensive and defensive schemes. The systems are headlined by his patented full-court "Scramble" pressure defense that is so intricate it can take up to two-years for his players to actually grasp.

The premise behind the Scramble is for the defense to exhibit great pressure, apply adjustments throughout the game, and ultimately disrupt the opponent's rhythm in an effort to catch them off guard. The Scramble's effectiveness was never more apparent than during the second round of the 2006 NCAA tournament when George Mason trailed third-seeded North Carolina 16-2 before storming back and actually holding on to win - after Larrañaga changed up his chameleon-like man-to-man defensive set to a hybrid Scramble zone. On the offensive front, Larrañaga's uber-efficient and disciplined formula centers around his players selecting and not just hoisting up high percentage shots that fall within the contours of their game. Larrañaga monitors the system by number crunching and baselining his team's statistics to metrics such as Points-Per-Possession to ensure his well oiled machine is operating at peak performance.

"The guys have given us a strong effort and have a great attitude," said Larrañaga. "Their minds are very open to this new way of looking at things. But it is going to take a lot of time before we can execute the new system under game conditions."

"If it takes (Larrañaga's) team a long-time to learn the Scramble, it takes his opponents even longer before they figure it out." Boston Celtics head coach, Glen "Doc" Rivers quipped.

Larrañaga's teams have been known to shoot intelligently, employ intensive defensive pressure and take care of the basketball, as evidenced by last season's George Mason team that ranked 41st in field-goal percentage, committed the 22nd fewest turnovers (this year ranked 27th) and had the 38th stingiest defense in the nation. Conversely, former Canes' head coach Frank Haith's UM team fell in at an anemic 277th in field-goal percentage, 205th in turnovers and 163rd in defense last season. For the Canes, who last reached the NCAA tournament in 2007, Larrañaga's attention to detail, and his ability to get to the NCAA, and actually win while he is there, is welcome news. In the past seven seasons under Haith, the Canes had not posted a winning record in the confines of the ultra-competitive ACC.

Despite Larrañaga's stellar resume, including the 2006 Clair Bee National Coach of the Year Award, at 62, some feel the Canes should have looked toward the future and hired someone younger, perhaps in the mold of his cohort, Al Golden, the 42-year-old first-year UM football coach. Apparently those naysayers simply do not know Larrañaga, who brings to the Canes an impressive 450 career coaching victories - 17th among active coaches. Even more significant, Larrañaga departed George Mason's basketball program with an impressive 273-164 career mark after 14 seasons, stockpiling three Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) titles, three NIT invitations and five NCAA appearances.

It was at the grandest of all stages, the 2006 NCAA tournament, during George Mason's Final Four epic crusade, where Larrañaga peaked as a coach. Larrañaga's George Mason team extinguished mega powers North Carolina, Michigan State, and Connecticut, as well as a talented fellow mid-major Wichita State team, with the precision and lethality of a drone attack.

Larrañaga, the most winning coach in CAA history, is a rare breed. While most coaches, seemingly in the twilight of their career and with AARP knocking on their door, are planning on settling down, Larrañaga is just warming up. Nevertheless, the mere decision to uproot his family and three trustworthy assistant coaches - who have

cumulatively been by his side for 23 years - was not only unexpected, but a downright gamble.

Larrañaga had a good thing going at the sprawling and bucolic Fairfax, Virginia based university, with a burgeoning enrollment now swelling to more than 31,000 students. The George Mason basketball team has the luxury of playing its home games to crowds averaging between 5,000 - 6,000 fans at the Patriot Center - a spacious, amphitheatre styled 10,000-seat on-campus arena. Larrañaga's choice for finishing out his 40-year and ticking career with George Mason appeared to be a foregone conclusion. After all, he just received a generous raise from the university, his team was returning virtually intact after a record tying 27-win season, the Patriots won a school best 16 games in a row, and to apply an exclamation point - upset Big East powerhouse Villanova (once ranked fifth in the nation during the season) in the NCAA tournament.

Larrañaga's seismic-like move appeared even foggier considering the fact that he succumbed to the allure of the ACC, where the Canes appear to be overmatched. UM has struggled, in what Larrañaga considers to be the nation's premier conference, where they are coming off a disappointing 6-10 campaign and hold a combined 43-69 record the past seven seasons under the Haith regime. A challenging week in the ACC entails the Canes facing back-to-back road games against perennial basketball powers North Carolina and Duke, the preseason Sports Illustrated first and fifth ranked teams respectively.

The Canes' basketball coaching position has been overshadowed by the monopolistic hold the football team has maintained on campus, however, as of late, The U's gridiron dominance has been compromised by the highly publicized billion dollar booster scandal that has drawn forth a NCAA investigation. It appears highly likely that some form of NCAA sanctions will be levied on the football team. The investigation has even breached the basketball team as Canes' senior forward DeQuan Jones was ruled ineligible earlier this season (only to be recently reinstated) due to an alleged \$10,000 recruiting violation involving a monetary exchange between undisclosed parties.

Larrañaga, whose George Mason basketball team ruled the campus unchanged, will also need to adjust to sharing the stage with the four-time NCAA champion UM baseball team, who surprisingly, draw comparable crowds to the basketball team. The Canes nationally ranked women's basketball team poses an additional distraction. When it comes to home-court advantage, the Canes are not beneficiaries. Their home games are about as crowded as a beach on a rainy day, unless North Carolina or Duke travels to Coral Gables. Only free Nike T-shirt giveaways have lured a critical mass to venture to the "stones throw away," on-campus BankUnited Center.

Last season the Canes drew on average, 4,713 fans, finishing in the ACC attendance cellar. This season, despite the arrival of a proven winning coach, a 5-1 home record, and an early season visit from the 22nd ranked Memphis Tigers; the Canes' attendance has mysteriously slipped 29 percent. One has to surmise, as winning typically breeds large crowds, the students will start attending games en masse - that is if Larrañaga is able to navigate his team to a more competitive standing in the shark infested waters of the ACC.

To start the season, Larrañaga's team was faced with key injuries to an already thin front-line. Johnson was joined by 6-10 senior forward Julian Gamble on the injured reserve, whose injury, a torn ACL, will keep him out for the entire season. The Canes' have sorely missed Johnson's 6-10, 285-frame that pulled down a team leading 9.6 rebounds. Johnson has already added a new dimension to the Canes' former guard-oriented attack since his return and UM will rely heavily on his interior game that also produced 11.9 points with 59 percent accuracy last season. The Canes' team is further depleted in the back-court, where sharpshooting freshman guard, Bishop Daniels, is out indefinitely, nursing a broken foot.

The Canes' survived Johnson's absence by inter-changing 6-11 University of Florida junior transfer Kenny Kadji and 6-10 sophomore Raphael Akpejori into the center slot. Both big men were repurposed from their more familiar power-forward position. At times, Larrañaga complimented the center slot by implementing a four guard attack headlined by a newcomer - Shane Larkin, a lightning-fast three-point sniping freshman guard.

As a body of work, the Canes are not exactly a reconstruction project. They returned eight players from a 21-15 team. The Canes' strength begins with its versatile New York City bred backcourt consisting of senior Malcolm Grant and junior Durand Scott, who share the point-guard duties and with Larkin in the mix - there is now a third option. Other supporting parts include senior DeQuan Jones, junior swingmen Garriss Adams and Trey McKinney Jones, and sophomores Rion Brown and Eric Swoope.

Larrañaga would have been entering his 15th season as the George Mason head coach if it wasn't for a chance encounter with brothers Jorge and Jose Mas at a Michael Jordan \$17,000 adult basketball camp. The Mas brothers are owners of MasTec, a \$52 billion, Miami headquartered, underground infrastructure company. Jorge and Jose Mas, who are also prominent UM alumni, purportedly had the ear of the influential basketball coaching selection committee. According to anonymous sources, it was their behind the scene efforts that contributed significantly to Larrañaga landing the Canes' lucrative coaching position.

In fact, prior to the Mas brothers lobbying efforts; Larrañaga was not even on the Canes' radar. Then, one day, Larrañaga received an urgent call from Jose Mas instructing him to send the Canes' coaching selection committee his resume immediately. Larrañaga, who

was traveling at the time, didn't have access to his resume at that moment, so he wisely cut and pasted his Wikipedia profile into an email and sent it out.

Larrañaga ratcheted up his pursuit of the Canes vacant coaching position by enlisting the services of friend "Doc" Rivers, who placed a recommendation phone call to Shawn Eichorst, the Canes newly-hired athletic director. Rivers, a former Marquette University basketball star and Eichorst, the just hired UM Athletic Director (AD) by way of the Wisconsin-Madison AD position, shared geographical ties.

One other development in Larrañaga's favor, involved the actual hiring of Eichorst in the middle of the coaching search, which ultimately reset the entire process. Coincidentally or intentionally, after Eichorst was named AD, Larrañaga, seemingly overnight, leaptfrogged over the original candidate shortlist to assume the leadership position - one in which he would not relinquish.

"There was another group of people that were searching for a coach before I was hired and they had identified some folks," Eichorst conceded. "From my perspective, I had a good idea what I was looking for and Jim's name quickly surfaced."

After a series of fruitful meetings and phone calls between Larrañaga and Eichorst, on April 22nd, 2011, Larrañaga was named the University of Miami's 12th head-basketball coach.

"He is a trailblazer not a caretaker," said Eichorst. "Jim has built two programs from the ground up that were not in easy environments to coach. We are confident he will attain the same level of success here that he accomplished at George Mason and Bowling Green. Miami is a community and institution worthy of having a championship caliber program."

At the end of the day, Larrañaga's economics major came in handy, as he converted a \$17,000 investment (MJ's basketball camp tuition) into a \$1.3 million capital gain (UM's annual basketball contract) essentially doubling down his existing salary at George Mason.

While UM's present looks promising, the future looks even brighter. Although Haith was known for his recruiting prowess, UM does not appear to have lost a step under Larrañaga. After he was hired at UM, right out of the gate, Larrañaga proceeded to reel in Shane Larkin, a Scout.com top 20 guard and 70th overall, by way of DePaul. Larkin transferred from DePaul due to a medical condition that is believed by some enquiring minds, to be based more on his desire to be closer to home as well as play for Larrañaga and less on a physical condition - other than a case of severe "home sickness."

"Jim has a great personality and a special rapport with the kids. They really enjoy playing for him," said Rivers. "He will do real well recruiting in Florida. Larkin would not be at UM if it wasn't for Larrañaga."

And who knows better than Rivers. Larkin was the 2011 GA Florida High School Player of the Year runner-up to none other than Austin Rivers. Doc's son, who is now starting at Duke.

In addition to Larkin, the son of Cincinnati Red's baseball great Barry Larkin, Larrañaga has received 2012 National Letter of Intent from Tonye Jekiri, a 6-11, 220 pound center from Miami-Hialeah and Melvin Johnson, a 6-3, 188 pound shooting guard from New Jersey. Jekiri will add much needed size to UM's front-line and was rated Scout.com's 13th best center. Johnson, will deepen the back-court and soften the blow when Grant graduates. Johnson is currently ranked ESPN's 44th-best shooting guard.

Larrañaga first became interested in the coaching profession when he was in tenth grade as a member of the vaunted Arch Bishop Molloy High School basketball team in the Bronx. Larrañaga developed a strong bond with his coach, mentor, and role model, the legendary Jack Curran, whose 913 and counting career wins are the most in New York State High School history.

Upon Larrañaga's graduation from Arch Bishop Molloy, he went on to star at Providence College, finishing as the schools fifth all-time leading scorer as well as an entrant into the college's Hall of Fame. After Providence, Larrañaga was selected in the 6th round of the NBA draft, but decided to embark on a coaching career instead.

His coaching tour would take him to such varied places as Davidson, American International, overseas in Belgium, and the University of Virginia (UVA). At UVA, as an assistant to Terry Holland, the Ralph Sampson led Cavaliers reached the Final Four in 1981 and also in 1984, against the Phi Slamma Jamma Houston Cougars, when a last second Hakeem Olajuwon deflection was the difference between a shot at the national championship or the latter - a sudden trip home.

Larrañaga first cut his teeth as a division one head coach with Bowling Green, where he spent 11-years and collected 170 wins - second most in school history, before venturing to George Mason. Now after putting the Patriots on the proverbial college basketball map, Larrañaga finds himself in his career's final stanza. Canes' fans got a glimpse of how Larrañaga does business when UM overcame a nine-point second-half Tennessee Tech lead with aplomb to defeat the Golden Eagles in game two of the Coach L era.

"Last year we would have lost this game to be honest with you. Coach L is a great leader, who is always positive the matter what the situation brings," said Grant. "We respect and admire that, so that's why we go out there and play hard for him."

Larrañaga has found himself coaching in much more austere conditions to put it mildly, where he took George Mason, then a nascent five-year old program, to college basketball's Mecca - the Final Four. Now in a more Target Rich Environment at UM and given Larrañaga's turnaround artist legacy, his imminent success seems to be not a question of if, but a matter of when.

Classy move by Larranaga impresses players

South Florida Sun Sentinel

Dec. 29, 2011

Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES – Miami assistant coach Eric Konkol has been on head coach Jim Larranaga's staff for eight years.

Thursday, or the first time during these eight years, Larranaga missed a practice.

He did so to fly to New York City to be with guard Malcolm Grant for the afternoon funeral service of Grant's older brother, Sayeed, who died tragically last week from an apparent heart attack.

"It was never even a question for him to go up there to be with Malcolm today," Konkol said.

Grant, who left the team before last week's game against Charlotte after learning of his brother's death, will fly back to South Florida on Friday. He's expected to return in time for the team's 7 p.m. game against Appalachian State and be on the bench, but likely won't play.

"It's going to be a gametime decision," Konkol said. "I would say we're not expecting him to contribute tomorrow."

Larranaga's decision to leave the team and join Grant in NYC tells you something about his character.

It also shows you why the 62-year-old related so well to his players at George Mason, and why his new players at UM have grown fond of him in the short time they've known him.

"I wouldn't expect that, for him to go up there," center Reggie Johnson said of Larranaga attending Grant's brother's funeral. "That speaks volumes about what kind of person he is. He really cares about his players."

"Coach, he's that type of guy. He really takes pride in his guys. He's really comfortable with us, and it's deeper than basketball," forward DeQuan Jones said. "He's really for us. He's really a players' coach."

Added guard Durand Scott: "Some people say things — that's one thing. When you actually do it, that means another. That sticks in your head and that lives forever. Him [going to New York], I know for me, it gives me a different perspective of this man. I love him for that."

A conversation with DeQuan Jones

South Florida Sun Sentinel

Dec. 29, 2011

Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES — Miami Hurricanes forward DeQuan Jones, who was initially ruled out for this season by the school because of the ongoing NCAA inquiry into his alleged involvement with former UM booster Nevin Shapiro, was cleared by the school after consultation with the NCAA and the senior made his season debut at Charlotte last Thursday.

Today, Jones spoke with reporters for the first time since being cleared, and during a near 20-minute session, talked about what it was like sitting out, why he decided to contest his status, his emotions when he learned he was eligible again and the experience of his season debut.

Here's the Q and A with Jones:

Q: What were your emotions while you were sitting out?

A: "I never really showed my frustration or my sadness...[but] it was tearing me up just sitting on the sideline and watching my teammates play and not be able to help, but my parents got that side of me. I'd call them every day and tell them I really wish I could play. My father hinted toward, 'Maybe we should fight it,' and one thing led to another."

Q: Why did you and your family finally choose to contest the season-long suspension by retaining an attorney and filing an appeal with UM to get your eligibility restored, and you do wish you had done it earlier? What sparked you to push for reinstatement?

A: "Sitting on the sidelines for home games and just watching the games here while my teammates were traveling, seeing how I could fit my personal game into the team, it kind of ate me up a little bit. I kind of had to make a decision and I think I made a right one."

Q: You've never gotten into any trouble at UM. Having your name associated with Nevin Shapiro kind of pulled your name through the mud. Getting cleared, how big was that for you in terms of your reputation?

A: "It was big. Coming from a small town like myself, everyone is close knit, everybody knows you according to your family, and my family, we've always kept a positive image amongst ourselves and we always give off a positive vibe. Everybody that knows me and has come into contact with me knows I'm not that type of guy."

Q: Was it important to you not only to get on the court, but to also clear your name?

A: "Absolutely. Even if I wasn't able to get on the court, one of my biggest frustrations was people looking at me in a certain sense assuming things."

Q: What reaction did you receive from others around campus and in the community?

A: "I more so received positive feedback than negativity. People showed their support. But then

also, people respect you enough to not comment on it, just for the simple fact that they feel you're already going through it."

Q: In your mind, what were the odds you'd be cleared to play sometime this season?

A: "It was more so wishful thinking. I kept it in the back of my mind that there is a shot I can play. Every day I practiced to push my teammates, make them better, and also I kind of had it in the back of my mind, if I was to play the next game, I had to practice twice as hard so I would be ready."

Q: What was it like for you the other night at Charlotte getting to play after thinking you'd perhaps sit out this entire season?

A: "It was surreal — going from just laying in my bed watching TV to getting a call saying I was eligible to play. Everything happened so fast. I just focused on going out and enjoying the experience. I didn't want to go out and try to score 40 points or nothing like that. I just wanted to get back into the groove of things."

Q: Were you nervous your first minute or two in your debut against Charlotte?

A: "Yeah, there were some butterflies in my stomach. But I just went back to all those times sitting on the bench, watching my teammates play, and being here watching them on TV [in road games], and I just figured every game I'm just going to take that with me and play as hard as I can to the best of my abilities."

Q: You had a quick three-point play for your first points. How did that feel?

A: "It was funny because we were at the free-throw line and Trey [McKinney Jones] came up to me and said, 'I know you're going to get this rebound.' I kind of smiled and laughed it off. And it actually happened that way. Everybody came and gave me a high-five and said, 'Welcome back.'"

Q: Where did you watch the road games while you were out?

A: "I was watching by myself. I love Chipotle, so I would go to Chipotle and get two or three bowls and sit and watch the game myself."

Q: Going back to when you were cleared: How did you find out you were eligible?

A: "I was laying down watching television and I got a phone call. It was [UM Senior Associate Athletic Director for Strategic Operations] Mr. [Steve] Waterfield. He told me I was eligible to play. My initial thought was, 'when can I get on a plane?'" I started packing my bags. I was throwing shirts and shoes and stuff."

Q: How long between the time your found out you were eligible and when you boarded the plane to head to Charlotte, where your teammates had arrived the day before?

A: "It was the next morning. I was like a kid on Christmas. I couldn't sleep [the night before]. I actually ended up coming back to the gym around 11 [p.m.] and just shooting. I just couldn't sleep. I was excited."

Q: What was the reaction like from your team-

mates when you showed up at the hotel?

A: "I wanted to surprise the guys, but Coach had already told them. So when I got there, I was just bombarded with text messages, like, 'Oh, what room are you in?' Everybody came to the room and jumped on me. It was cool. ...My mom couldn't get off work on short notice, but my dad drove like six hours from Birmingham to see me play."

Q: What was it like for you practicing with your teammates knowing you couldn't play in games?

A: "I credit that to the coaching staff and my teammates. I knew I wasn't going to be able to play this year. Sitting on the sidelines, you see the game in a whole new perspective. I saw it in a coach's sense. I took what I saw during the game and emulated that in practice."

"I figured if I can't play in a game I might as well help my teammates be the best players they can be and push them in practice."

Q: What would it mean to you to be able to have a strong senior season and leave on a high note?

A: "It's extremely big. Given all the publicity that the story has made, I'll always be in the public view. I just take it as a positive. I just want to go out and give my team my all and make sure I'm a defensive leader. That was the thing I noticed when I wasn't playing — the lack of an interior presence. And now that Reggie [Johnson] is back and myself, I feel I can help on the defensive end."

Q: You came to Miami rated the nation's 28th best recruit by ESPN.com. You were former coach Frank Haith's biggest recruit. The expectations were pretty heavy. Has that been a burden for you at times trying to live up to that?

A: "When I first got here, my freshman and sophomore year, it has, but as I've progressed on in my career, it really doesn't mean anything to me now. I just focus on bringing my all and everything I can do to my team. I don't really focus on it. It's not anything that eats at me or keeps me up at night."

Q: Do you think your freshman year you were trying to do too much and impress everybody too much?

A: "Yeah, that was my biggest downfall. Now, being with Coach [Jim Larranaga] for these couple of months, I've learned so much about toning my game down and being efficient as opposed to showing people what I'm not so good at. It's about hiding my weaknesses and utilizing my strengths."

Q: What part of your games have your really worked on since last season and improved?

A: "I would say jump shooting. Malcolm [Grant] and Durand [Scott], we talk once in a while, and they can see the steady progression in my jump shot. I don't find myself getting out of the control going to the basket. I can heavily rely on that jump shot now."

Jones talks about dealing with NCAA situation

Sun Sentinel
December 29, 2011
By Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES – DeQuan Jones says he never showed his frustration or sadness, but it was perpetually there for the Miami Hurricanes forward as he helplessly watched the season pass by without him.

"It was tearing me up just sitting on the sideline and watching my teammates play and not be able to help," Jones recalled Thursday on the eve of his second game since being cleared by UM and the NCAA to return.

He called his parents every day for support, and then about two weeks ago, his father suggested maybe the family should fight the university's season-long suspension of Jones – a decision that had been made as a precaution because of the NCAA's ongoing investigation into the player's alleged involvement with former booster Nevin Shapiro.

UM didn't want to risk further sanctions should it later come out that Jones was guilty and thus the Hurricanes had used an ineligible player.

Watching every home game from the team's bench, and road games by himself while chomping on food from Chipotle, "ate me up a little bit," Jones said.

So the senior finally contested the suspension to get his eligibility restored. On Dec. 20, UM announced that, after consulting with the NCAA, it had reinstated Jones.

It wasn't just important to Jones to return to the court, but also to clear his name.

"Absolutely. Even if I wasn't able to get on the court, one of my biggest frustrations was people looking at me in a certain sense, assuming things," Jones said.

Shapiro, a convicted Ponzi schemer, alleged in a Yahoo! Sports report in August that he gave former UM assistant coach Jake Morton \$10,000 in the summer of 2008 to secure the commitment of Jones after Morton told him a member of Jones' family required the payment. Shapiro told Yahoo! he believed Jones was unaware of the transaction.

Jones said it's "big" for him to cleanse his reputation.

"Coming from a small town [Stone Mountain, Ga.] like myself, everyone is close knit, everybody knows you according to your family," he said, "and my family, we've always kept a positive image amongst ourselves and we always give off a positive vibe. Everybody that knows me and has come into contact with me knows I'm not that type of guy."

Guard Durand Scott said Jones struggled to

cope with the allegations the first couple of days after the story linking him to Shapiro broke.

"That's not news anybody would like to hear. He was really down when he first heard that," Scott said. "Teammates and coaches, we picked him up. And he motivated himself as well, stuck it through and tried to push us and push himself to become better."

Said center Reggie Johnson: "I couldn't have put up with it. He's a very strong person for it."

Jones said he received more positive feedback than negativity from fellow students and others. He continued practicing with the team even after the school ruled him ineligible Nov. 10.

"Every day I practiced to push my teammates, make them better," Jones said. "And also I kind of had it in the back of my mind that if I was to play the next game, I had to practice twice as hard so I would be ready."

Said assistant coach Eric Konkol: "He has been the model of being positive. He always has a smile. There were days where he certainly wished that he'd be playing, but it never affected practice."

"He was on the scout team and he gave everything he had. He prepared extremely well. He's been a model and a guy I'll refer to as long as I'm coaching about how to handle a situation like that."

Jones was laying in bed watching TV last week when he received a phone call from a UM official telling him he was eligible and could play two nights later at Charlotte.

Jones started throwing shirts and shoes in a bag. He'd be heading to North Carolina the next morning to join his teammates. That night, he couldn't sleep. At 11 p.m., he went to the gym and shot baskets.

The next day, "I was like a kid on Christmas."

When he arrived at the Hurricanes' hotel in Charlotte, teammates were waiting for him. They rushed to his room and jumped on him in joy.

"The way it was looking, I didn't even think it was going to happen, but God works in mysterious ways," Johnson said.

"It was surreal...Everything happened so fast," Jones said of learning he had become eligible. "I just focused on going out and enjoying the experience. I didn't want to go out and try to score 40 points or nothing like that. I just wanted to get back into the groove of things."

Jones played 18 minutes off the bench against Charlotte and finished with seven points on 3-of-6 shooting, along with six rebounds and one block. His first points came on a three-point play after a rebound and putback.

"It was funny because we were at the free-throw line and Trey [McKinney Jones] came up to me and said, 'I know you're going to get this rebound,'" Jones said. "I kind of smiled and laughed it off. And it actually happened that way. Everybody

came and gave me a high-five and said, 'Welcome back.'"

Said Scott: "I was like, that's DeQuan right there. He's back. We've been needing that spark off the bench, just coming in, getting everybody hyped and motivated on both ends of the floor."

Later, Jones had a monstrous dunk.

"I went crazy on him," Johnson said. "I hadn't seen that all year from anybody on the team, but he got that and brung life back to the team."

The 6-foot-8, 221-pound Jones has always been renowned for his athleticism. He was a five-star prospect in high school and was rated the nation's 28th best recruit by ESPN.com. He was easily the most touted signee in former coach Frank Haith's seven seasons.

But Jones' career hasn't panned out as planned.

He averaged just 4.3 points and 2.1 rebounds the past three seasons, struggling at times with the burden of high expectations.

"When I first got here, my freshman and sophomore year, it was [a burden], but as I've progressed on in my career, it really doesn't mean anything to me now," Jones said. "I just focus on bringing my all and everything I can do to my team. I don't really focus on it. It's not anything that eats at me or keeps me up at night."

Jones said his "biggest downfall" as a freshman was trying to do too much and impress, but now he's focused on being an efficient player. He wants to ensure he's a defensive leader the rest of this season for the Hurricanes, who'll play Appalachian State at home Friday at 7 p.m. – one of two more non-conference games before the ACC opener Jan. 7 at Virginia.

"That was the thing I noticed when I wasn't playing – the lack of an interior presence," Jones said. "And now that Reggie [Johnson] is back and myself, I feel I can help on the defensive end."

Konkol said Jones is the type of player that's a must-have for teams with successful defenses: he has the strength to guard power forwards, as well as centers on switches, and he's quick enough to chase around small forwards with size on the perimeter. Offensively, Jones has worked to improve his jump shot, so that he's no longer barrels to the basket out of control and forces up a shot.

Regardless of what happens the rest of the season, Jones, and his teammates, are grateful he's back on the court.

"When it first happened," Scott said, "I thought after a couple of weeks he was going to be back, that it was nothing major, but then it kept getting longer. And I was like, they're taking so many games away from him, I don't think they're going to let him play now."

"When he got back, it was very shocking, but we were very happy because we knew he was a piece we definitely needed."

Jones goes from year-long suspension to helping Hurricanes

Palm Beach Post
Dec. 29, 2011
By Jorge Milian

CORAL GABLES — With his University of Miami teammates preparing for a game in Charlotte, N.C. last week, DeQuan Jones stared at the television in his apartment, watching his senior season slowly melt away.

Originally banned from playing this season after he was implicated in the Nevin Shapiro scandal, things changed on Dec. 20.

That afternoon, UM announced that Jones had been reinstated immediately to the basketball team. Jones jumped into action as if he had been called off Jim Larranaga's bench.

"It was surreal - going from just laying in my bed watching TV to getting a call saying I was eligible to play," Jones, a swingman, said. "I started packing my bags right there throwing shirts, shoes and stuff in a bag. I was ready to go."

The following night, Jones provided a powerful spark in a reserve role as UM (7-4) turned in one of its best performances of the season, a 76-61 rout of Charlotte that marked the Hurricanes' first road win.

As it turned out, Jones served a 10-game penalty merely for being caught up in Shapiro's allegations.

According to Shapiro, former Hurricanes' assistant Jake Morton asked him for \$10,000 to secure the commitment of then-recruit Jones in 2008. Shapiro, a former UM booster and convicted felon, told Yahoo! Sports that he did not think Jones was aware of the transaction.

Two days before the start of this season, UM announced that Jones would not play this year

as the school and NCAA continued their joint investigation into Shapiro's charges.

Jones was never ruled ineligible by UM or suspended for accepting impermissible benefits by the NCAA, as was the case with eight players on the Hurricanes' football team. Jones was allowed to continue practicing.

"It kind of ate me up a little bit," Jones said. "I never showed my sadness or my frustration [but] it was tearing me up just sitting on the sideline watching my teammates play and not being able to help."

At first resigned to sitting out the season and allowing the NCAA probe to play itself out, Jones decided to fight back. His family hired an attorney, who requested an internal appellate hearing at UM.

One day before the hearing, UM cleared Jones to play. The school has declined to release details of Jones' situation. Jones is expected to play Friday when UM hosts Appalachian State.

"DeQuan couldn't let his reputation suffer any further damage," said Jason Setchen, Jones' attorney. "Even though he did nothing wrong, he served a longer penalty than anybody. The implication is that he had done something worse than the others."

Before Jones' ban, the longest suspension to come out of the Shapiro scandal was for defensive end Olivier Vernon, who missed six football games.

Jones said just being mentioned in the scandal weighed heavy on him.

"Even if I wasn't able to get on the court, one of my biggest frustrations was people looking at me in a certain sense, assuming things," he said.

Even before Shapiro's allegations, Jones' collegiate career was somewhat disappointing.

He was a rarity at UM - a Top 50 recruit that could have gone virtually anywhere but chose the Hurricanes.

But Jones struggled to deliver on that promise. A chiseled 6-foot-7, 221-pound native of Stone Mountain, Ga., generally considered UM's most athletically-gifted player, Jones has never averaged more than 5.7 points or 2.5 rebounds.

Jones said being unable to live up to expectations weighed on him earlier in his career, but no longer.

"It's nothing that eats at me or keeps me up at night," Jones said.

What did keep Jones awake all night was the phone call telling him he'd been cleared to play.

Unable to sleep, Jones went to UM's practice facility where he shot baskets by himself before getting on a plane Wednesday morning for Charlotte.

That night, Jones entered the game with 14:53 remaining in the first half and UM trailing 9-7. Within 20 seconds, Jones grabbed an offensive rebound off a missed free throw and scored while being fouled. His three-point play put the Hurricanes ahead 10-9. They never trailed again.

"I haven't seen that all year from anybody on the team," center Reggie Johnson said of Jones, who finished with seven points and six rebounds against the 49ers. "He brought life back to the team."

Canes win with heavy hearts

College Chalktalk's "Secondary Break"
Dec. 23, 2011
Josh Carpenter

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — New Miami Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga learned a lot about his team in Thursday night's 76-61 win over the Charlotte 49ers inside Halton Arena. And he probably likes what he found out.

The Hurricanes were dealt a huge blow Thursday morning, learning that the brother of preseason All-ACC guard Malcolm Grant had passed away unexpectedly. Grant left the team immediately to be with his family, leaving the Canes without one of their senior leaders and leading scorer (15.1 ppg). But Larranaga couldn't have been happier with the way his squad responded.

"Our team is a very close knit group," Larranaga said after his team moved to 7-4. "One of the most impressive things about being a new coach is working with a group of guys that are so close off the court."

The Hurricanes were aided by the return of 6-10 big man Reggie Johnson, who was playing in just his second game back from a knee injury he suffered over the summer. Johnson shut down Chris Braswell, one of the A-10's top post players. Johnson, weighing in at 280 pounds, held the smaller Braswell (6-8, 235) to just 3-of-15 shooting from the floor (12 pts, 7 rebs).

"We've been very shorthanded up front and then today we had a bunch of front court players available," Larranaga said. "One of the things we have now is balance."

The Hurricanes also got a boost from 6-7 swing man DeQuan Jones (7 pts, 6 rebs), who

made his season debut after being caught up in the NCAA investigation of UM and former booster Nevin Shapiro.

"The guys genuinely care about Malcolm," Larranaga said. "He's one of the nicest human beings you'll want to be around."

Coach sees junior guard as defensive leader

Sun Sentinel

December 22, 2011

By Steve Garten

CORAL GABLES — Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga, who's been stressing the need for better defense, met individually with guard Durand Scott last Thursday about being a leader on that end of the floor.

Scott says Larranaga told him that before he took the job he had heard about the junior having the potential to be a great defensive player, one of the best in the ACC.

"He said I haven't been doing what he thought I would be capable of doing, that maybe I've been doing in the past, but I haven't been doing it now and he needs to see that," Scott said.

"He was basically delivering a message to me to step it up on the defensive end. I took it personal. I want to go out there and be able to lock up anybody in front of me from here on out."

Scott, who had a team-high 43 steals last season, had just five through 10 games this season.

Miami, which played at Charlotte on Thursday night, went into last Saturday's game against Florida Atlantic giving up 42.8 percent shooting (186th nationally out of 338 teams) and 65.6 points per game (152nd).

FAU shot 45.1 percent (51.7 from 3-point range) in UM's 93-90 double overtime win, but Larranaga afterward credited the Owls' shooting. UM had allowed 74.8 points per game the previous four games combined, leading to Larranaga's one-on-one with Scott, which Larranaga said he hoped would get the team going as a whole.

"What we see is there are times when our

defense is very solid and guys are guarding their men pretty well and helping each other pretty well," he said. "But a lot of defense is persistence and you've got to sustain not only your effort but your focus on what you're trying to accomplish."

Canes look for lift from key additions

ESPN.com
Dec. 21, 2011
Andy Katz

Miami coach Jim Larranaga sat in a Charlotte hotel room and found himself looking at his roster and game plans in a totally different light.

The Hurricanes face Charlotte on Thursday night and then play nonconference games against Appalachian State and UNC Greensboro before their ACC schedule begins. It gives Larranaga a chance for a fresh start in his first season in Miami.

He now has the availability of his best big man in 6-foot-10 junior Reggie Johnson and is expected to get recently eligible 6-7 senior DeQuan Jones back, too.

Larranaga won't get Julian Gamble back; he's out for the season with an ACL injury. But the additions of Johnson and Jones move the Hurricanes closer to a full roster for the rest of the season.

In an ACC so far devoid of any consistent teams outside of Duke, North Carolina and Virginia, the Canes could prove to be trouble for their opponents.

Guards Malcolm Grant and Durand Scott are averaging in double figures, but the team had no inside presence before Johnson. He returned from an offseason leg injury to play against Florida Atlantic on Saturday, finishing with 15 points and nine boards in 36 minutes.

With the high-flying Jones, Miami has depth and options. The school initially ruled that Jones was ineligible for the season. He was being investigated for an allegation that came out of an offseason Yahoo! Sports story that former Miami booster Nevin Shapiro gave someone associated with Jones \$10,000 for his commitment to Miami out of high school. It is a charge that Jones' family refuted. The

school then made a sudden announcement this week that Jones was reinstated. He had been practicing with the team after averaging 4.5 points per game and 2.5 boards last season.

But in his and -- more importantly -- Johnson's absence, the Canes lost at Ole Miss in overtime (no shame), at Purdue in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge (understandable), at home by 17 to C-USA favorite Memphis (disaster) and on the road at West Virginia by 11. None of those losses are "bad" by résumé standards. But Miami doesn't have a signature win to promote heading into the holidays.

Larranaga said Jones is eligible and the school is waiting for his grades to get posted. As soon as he is cleared, he can join the Canes, possibly for the Charlotte game, although he wasn't with the team Tuesday night. Miami spokesperson Chris Freet said Wednesday that Jones is expected to join the team in time for the game.

Jones attorney Jason Setchen told the Miami Herald that Jones is "ecstatic" that this case was re-evaluated and "there is insufficient evidence to support his suspension." Setchen said in the story that he had contended Jones never "violated any team rules and was not associated with the purported activities of Nevin Shapiro. We are very pleased that DeQuan has been given the opportunity to compete this year and that the University and the NCAA have made the decision they have. We hope that somehow this helps clear the air with respect to the allegations that have been made about DeQuan."

"Adding Reggie Johnson and DeQuan Jones to our roster means we all of a sudden have the team that we anticipated," said Larranaga, who left George Mason for Miami after Frank Haith was tapped for the Missouri job.

The Canes don't have Gamble. And Garrus Adams is out until after Christmas with a leg

injury. He was averaging 6.8 points in 24.9 minutes a game and missed the 93-90 win over FAU. He had scored 15 points in the loss at West Virginia. Freshman guard Bishop Daniels had not been practicing up until a week ago. He had a broken foot, but once Daniels is available, that gives the Canes another potential scorer/defender on the perimeter. "There was a time when we had eight scholarship players," Larranaga said. "That makes it very hard to prepare. Now with Reggie and DeQuan we can practice and prepare correctly. We can really prepare for opponents, and that will be a huge difference."

The schedule, though, isn't kind. If the Canes want to mount a campaign in the ACC, let alone any kind of postseason bid, they have to get through a tough opening week. Miami plays at Virginia, arguably the third-best team in the ACC, and at preseason favorite North Carolina in early January. Going 0-2 won't be a shock. But the next five ACC games are all certainly winnable -- Clemson, NC State, at Georgia Tech, at BC, Maryland -- if we're to take Miami seriously.

The problem for the Canes will be that they must knock off one of the big three -- UNC, Duke and Virginia -- to justify NCAA consideration in March. Miami plays UNC twice but Virginia and Duke just once and both are on the road.

"What we're going to do over the Christmas break is look at every decision we've made and see what worked for us and what didn't so we can shelve it," Larranaga said. "We were playing a lineup of four guards and one 6-5 forward. We no longer have to consider that as an option."

Miami is in a deep hole for an NCAA bid now. But it least has a shot to reconfigure itself going forward in the ACC. Part of that is becoming the top-five ACC team the Hurricanes were projected to be in the preseason.

Jones reinstated, can play immediately

The Miami Herald

Dec. 21, 2001

By Susan Miller Degnan

The University of Miami announced Tuesday evening that DeQuan Jones — previously ruled inactive for the season in connection to the NCAA investigation into UM and former booster Nevin Shapiro — has been reinstated to the team and “can return to competition immediately.”

UM sent out the following written statement: “The University of Miami, after consultation with the NCAA, has announced that senior basketball player DeQuan Jones can return to competition immediately. In order to protect the integrity of the ongoing joint inquiry, the University will not comment further at this time.”

Jones, a fourth-year senior, has been practicing all along with the Canes basketball team. UM’s next game is Thursday at Charlotte. The Canes (6-4) left for Charlotte by airplane Tuesday afternoon. Jones was not on the flight, but Chris Freet, UM’s associate athletic director for communications, said “UM is going to do everything to get him up there for the game.”

Shapiro claimed that former UM assistant coach Jake Morton asked him for \$10,000 to secure the commitment of then-recruit Jones, an allegation denied from the start by Jones and his mother, Irene Bell.

Jones’ attorney, Jason Setchen, had requested an internal appellate hearing, which Setchen told The Miami Herald had been scheduled for Wednesday. Obviously, that will no longer be needed.

“DeQuan and I are ecstatic that the University and NCAA have reevaluated this case and have come to the conclusion that there is insufficient evidence to support his suspension,”

Setchen told The Miami Herald. “We have said all along that DeQuan has not violated any team rules and was not in any way associated with the purported activities of Nevin Shapiro. We are very pleased that DeQuan has been given the opportunity to compete this year and that the University and NCAA have made the decision they have.

“We hope that somehow this helps clear the air with respect to the allegations that have been made about DeQuan.”

Setchen said that when he delivered the news, Jones was “overwhelmed with joy.

“He couldn’t wait to get reunited with the team,” the attorney said. “He looks forward to playing and taking a leadership role.”

Hurricanes hoop it up under Larranaga

Florida Today
Dec. 21, 2011
by David Jones

SUNRISE — They sat at a podium side by side, Miami's 6-foot-11 Kenny Kadji and 6-10 Reggie Johnson.

Together, the duo combined for 36 points, 12 rebounds and 8 blocks in a 93-90 double overtime win against Florida Atlantic on Saturday afternoon at the Orange Bowl Classic.

As first-year coach Jim Larranaga looked over at his two big men, he listened intently at what they had to say, almost seemingly curious. And it's understandable.

For the past several months, no one was really sure what Miami had in its front court — or its future. Kadji was a transfer from Florida who sat out last season and had back surgery while still in Gainesville. He averaged just 4.4 points in his one full season as a Gator after being rated the fifth-best center in the nation out of IMG Academy in Bradenton.

Who knows?

Johnson was an honorable mention All-SEC pick last season but the 285-pound junior hurt his knee during the summer after averaging 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds last season.

Who knew?

Larranaga spent 14 years as the George Mason coach and reached five NCAA tournaments — including a Final Four loss to Florida in 2006, getting massive publicity as the true Cinderella team that season. But how will he handle stepping up a notch to the ACC?

Lots of questions.

But now Miami is starting to finally get a few of the right answers. Johnson is back. Kadji is getting more and more comfortable and Larranaga can flat-out coach — his 273 wins the most in the Colonial Athletic Conference history. In '06, he became the first mid-major coach to take his team to the Final Four in 27 years. At George Mason, his first team won nine games. The second year, the Patriots were 19-11.

Here's how he operates. When UM played at Memphis, Larranaga took his team to the Lorraine Motel — where Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968. One of the players happens to be studying the incident in one of his classes — how's that for a field trip? Another player, Garrus Adams, noted he'd always heard about King but had never been able to really learn what he was all about. So he stood in the former hotel and read plaques with King's quotes on them and developed a better understanding.

Miami lost the game but came home with a lot more than an "L."

So it's finally looking like UM hoops will be exciting and educational — if not this season then down the road. Miami's win vs. FAU makes it 6-4 heading into Thursday's game at Charlotte. The 'Canes lost by three points in overtime at Ole Miss, by 11 at Purdue and West Virginia. Those are solid teams with postseason ambitions.

And UM did it without Johnson, who instantly makes the Hurricanes a different team for two reasons — taking pressure off Kadji and putting more stress on opposing big men.

"I didn't expect this coming in. I ended up playing 36 minutes and Coach said I was going to play six or seven," chuckled Johnson after the 15 points, nine rebounds and five assists vs. FAU in his first game of the season. "I proved that wrong. It was a great game, a great feeling to get back out there."

And also a pretty good test for the knee. He played so well under the basket. Kadji snuck outside and hit a trio of shots behind the arc.

"Because everybody is worried about Reggie, I am pretty much out there by myself," Kadji said. "I have six or seven seconds to make a shot, I can pretty much make it."

The back problems seemed to put any end to hopes Kadji would develop in Gainesville. But in Miami he seems to have found new life. He's had 15 points at West Virginia, added 13 at Rutgers and totaled a career-best 21 against FAU.

In preseason, Johnson kept encouraging Kadji to hang tough, that he'd be out there with him soon. Last Friday, Johnson's birthday, he finally got the good news.

"I know I'm not all the way back to last year but I'm close to getting back there," Johnson said. "Last year, my career high in assists was three and I told the guys all summer I was going to break that and I did my first game back (with five). So that's an accomplishment for me."

"I wanted to go choke my doctor and tell him to let me play. The West Virginia game, I wanted to play. The Memphis game, I wanted to play. But he told me just give it more time. I went to go see him (last) Wednesday and he told me more than likely I was going to play (against FAU)."

Finally, on Friday, he got clearance. It was a pretty big gift for Miami, which follows up the Charlotte game with contests against Appalachian State and North Carolina-Greensboro before the ACC season starts Jan. 7 at Virginia (ESPNU) followed by a Jan. 10 date at North Carolina. It's a quick answer where the Johnson-Kadji duo match up in the league.

But the two should get stronger together as the season grows long, two very formidable big men

that could make Miami an interesting team to watch. And the timing couldn't have been better, given all the stress the school has endured with its football program torn apart by controversy and needing time to rebuild.

Who could have anticipated a guy from George Mason and a couple of wounded big men could elevate the excitement in 'Canes sports once again?

"When someone hasn't played for six months and all you've done is 10 practices, you're still not comfortable with the offense, you haven't played with your teammates in a while," Larranaga said of Johnson.

Adding to the challenges is a new head coach and a lot of new teammates melting together. The Hurricanes also are playing more of an attacking defense that matches up and forces opponents to move the ball.

Another really interesting name to watch for? Keep an eye on Shane Larkin, the son of ex-major league baseball star Barry Larkin. The freshman, who played his senior prep season at Dr. Phillips in Orlando, is averaging close to 10 points already and shows flashes of what is to come.

So it's all new — players, system, coaches — but as Larranaga looked around the room and watched his two big men talk, he looked pleased. At the same time, Shane was out in the hallway getting encouragement from his dad, the former 12-time All-Star shortstop.

UM now has size, talent and a winning background of those behind it. And a coach who knows what to do with it all. Keep an eye on "The U." In about another year, this could be a team no opponent wants anything to do with.

Implicated Jones to rejoin Hurricanes

CORAL GABLES — Miami Hurricanes basketball player DeQuan Jones has received approval to return to competition after sitting out the season's first 10 games because of an NCAA investigation of allegations he was recruited with the help of \$10,000 in cash from a booster.

The school said Tuesday the decision was made in consultation with the NCAA. The school said it would have no further comment "in order to protect the integrity of the ongoing joint inquiry."

Jones, a 6-foot-7 senior, was implicated in a scandal that became public in August. While most of the allegations involved the football program, Yahoo Sports reported an ex-booster said he provided cash to Miami basketball coaches to recruit Jones. He was a part-time starter last season.

DeQuan Jones rejoins Miami Hurricanes

Associated Press
Dec. 20, 2011

MIAMI -- Miami Hurricanes basketball player DeQuan Jones received approval Tuesday to return to competition after he sat out the season's first 10 games because of an NCAA investigation into recruiting allegations.

The school issued a brief release saying the decision was made in consultation with the NCAA. The school said it would have no further comment "in order to protect the integrity of the ongoing joint inquiry."

Last month, the school said Jones would sit out the season. The reversal came one day before Jones was to appeal his case to a vice provost at the university.

"This is about DeQuan getting back on the court and his reputation being rehabilitated by the truth," said attorney Jason Setchen, who was retained by Jones' family to appeal the case. "Our position from day one has been that DeQuan and his family have done nothing wrong. I requested that if there was any proof, I would like to see it. It was my understanding at that time that there wasn't any. And we requested that his matter be re-evaluated."

Jones was implicated in a scandal that became public in August. While most of the allegations involved the football program, Yahoo! Sports reported an ex-booster said he provided \$10,000 cash to Miami basketball coaches to recruit Jones.

The 6-foot-7 senior, who has continued to practice with the Hurricanes, averaged 4.5 points and 2.5 rebounds last season as a part-time starter. Miami's next game is Thursday at Charlotte.

"It's my understanding he will travel to North Carolina and participate in that game," Setchen said.

NCAA clears DeQuan Jones to play this season

Sun Sentinel

December 20, 2011

By Anthony Chiang

CORAL GABLES— It looks like senior DeQuan Jones will play this season after all.

After initially being ruled out for the entire 2011-12 basketball season, the University of Miami announced Tuesday that, after consultation with the NCAA, Jones can "return to competition immediately."

And that's exactly what the Miami Hurricanes plan to do, as he is expected play his first game with the men's basketball squad this season on Thursday against the Charlotte 49ers. Even though he has missed Miami's first 10 games of the year, he hasn't stopped practicing with the team.

The 6-foot-8 swingman was among the UM athletes alleged to have received impermissible benefits from former booster Nevin Shapiro in a Yahoo! Sports report. Shapiro claimed in the report that he paid \$10,000 to help bring Jones to Miami when he was being recruited.

In order to avoid having to forfeit any games, the school decided to take a cautious approach, sitting Jones out until it felt the allegations weren't true.

Jones will join the Hurricanes on the heels of center Reggie Johnson's return from knee surgery.

The athletic forward will help Miami in an area it has struggled in — rebounding. The Hurricanes collect an average of 33.7 rebounds per game, which is ranked 246th best in the country.

Jones retains attorney, appeals suspension

Miami Herald

Dec. 18, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

The family of University of Miami basketball player DeQuan Jones has retained an attorney and filed an appeal asking the school to overturn its season-long suspension of the senior forward, who was named by Nevin Shapiro in the booster scandal.

Shapiro claimed that he was asked for \$10,000 by former UM assistant coach Jake Morton to secure the commitment of then-recruit Jones, an allegation Jones and his mother, Irene Bell, have vehemently denied. The NCAA investigation is ongoing and Jones is eligible to play under NCAA rules, but the university suspended him for the season as a precaution to protect the team from further sanctions if it were to come out later that Jones was guilty and the Hurricanes had used an ineligible player.

"UM has not shown us any evidence whatsoever that DeQuan has broken any rule or done anything wrong, and yet they suspended him for the entire season with no explanation," Coconut Grove-based attorney Jason Setchen said. "They hung this young man out to dry, and it is really wrong. We feel that is a very, very harsh and draconian penalty for someone who has not been proven guilty of anything. The school says they are playing it safe until the NCAA investigation is over, but in the meantime, DeQuan is missing his senior season and his reputation has been besmirched by allowing this to fester."

Shapiro has said that Jones was unaware of the transaction he alleged and that his contact was only with Morton.

Setchen said an internal appellate hearing, in which Jones will appeal his case, has been scheduled at UM on Wednesday.

"We will see what happens at that hearing, but if we are not satisfied, we will consider taking it to another level," Setchen said.

Brown breaks through with big game for Miami

Sun Sentinel

December 18, 2011

By Steve Garten

CORAL GABLES — When Rion Brown was struggling to make shots about three weeks ago, the Hurricanes guard started doing what Coach Jim Larranaga said every player should learn a lesson from.

Brown arrived an hour early every single day and hoisted up jumper after jumper “to get his stroke on rhythm and feel good about himself.”

And Saturday against Florida Atlantic, Brown looked like the shooter he did late last season, when he started the final five games — all in the postseason.

The 6-foot-6 sophomore, who had been 5-for-25 for the season, made 5-of-7 shots, including 4-of-5 from 3-point range against FAU and finished with a season-high 15 points in 27 minutes in the 93-90 double overtime win.

“Rion came in and gave us huge minutes,” center Reggie Johnson said. Brown played 23 minutes in the second half and overtimes. “In past games, Rion has been in a little funk, but he’s been in the gym every day after practice, knocking them down, shooting with me, just working.”

It had been a tough first nine games for Brown, who missed two games because of illness and hadn’t scored more than seven points. His playing time was down from last season — 13 minutes a game compared to 16.9 — and he had played just two minutes against West Virginia in the previous game before Saturday.

“Garrius Adams was playing so well that Rion didn’t get much time, but he still came in to the gym and worked all week so he was really ready to play,” Larranaga said. “It wasn’t just his shooting. His defense was critical.

“During the time they took the lead, I put him in and he corrected that because he made it tough on them to get it started several times.”

Kadji left UF for bigger role

Gatorsports.com
December 18, 2011
by Kevin Brockway

Former Florida big man Kenny Kadji said he has no regrets about his decision to transfer to Miami.

The 6-foot-10 center said playing time played into his decision to leave the Gators following his sophomore year. Kadji was hindered by back problems that sidelined him for most of his sophomore season. But he also didn't get project to get as much playing time as a junior at UF last season with the starting frontcourt of Alex Tyus, Chandler Parsons and Vernon Macklin returning.

Kadji met with Florida coach Billy Donovan in the summer of 2010 before deciding to leave.

"I just wanted to start new, have a bigger role," Kadji said. "I have no problem with (Donovan). He's a great coach, the teammates over there are great. I just wanted to be somewhere else."

In fact, Florida trainer Dave "Duke" Werner helped Kadji with his rehabilitation from back surgery even after he left campus for Miami. Kadji, who underwent surgery to repair discs in 2010, said he is fully healed.

Kadji has started seven of Miami's 10 games this season, averaging 8.7 ppg and 4.5 rpg. He had a breakout game in Miami's 93-90 overtime win over FAU, scoring 21 points to earn game MVP honors. Kadji displayed his extended shooting range for a big man, going 3-for-3 from 3-point range.

First-year Miami coach Jim Larranaga has given Kadji the green light to shoot from outside.

"What we've learned about Kenny is he's a very skilled guy and he can shoot," Larranaga said. "Now, he likes to put the ball on the ground some and we're trying to discourage that because when he just catches and shoots, he makes a very high percentage, from two and from three."

- Larranaga didn't sound too optimistic about renewing a Florida-Miami series in the future. The ACC announced this week it will extend to an 18-game league schedule next season, further limiting Miami's non-conference scheduling opportunities. "Certainly, you need to look at what is best for our team in terms of your schedule," Larranaga. "You've got to balance home and away and strength of opponents." Larranaga, though, does have a good friendship with Donovan. The two coaches faced each other in the 2006 Final Four, with Florida beating the Larranaga-coached George Mason Patriots.

Kadji eager to impress at Orange Bowl Classic tourney

The Miami Herald

Dec. 17, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

Long before Kenny Kadji wore a University of Miami basketball jersey, he had fond memories of the city, particularly a chance meeting 10 years ago with former Heat great Alonzo Mourning on a Coconut Grove sidewalk.

Kadji was 13 at the time. He and his mom were visiting from Jupiter, where they had moved from his native Cameroon. Kadji always traveled with a little autograph book in his pocket, and approached Mourning for a signature.

Mourning remarked on the kid's height and giant hand, and told Kadji's mother she should encourage her son to play basketball. A decade later, that soft-spoken kid is 6-11, 251 pounds and making his mark for the Hurricanes after transferring from the University of Florida.

He will be especially motivated to perform well Saturday in front of his former Gators coaches and teammates in the Orange Bowl Basketball Classic at the BankAtlantic Center in Sunrise. UM plays FAU at noon and No. 13 UF plays No. 22 Texas A&M at 2:30.

"I'm sure Zo doesn't remember that day, but it was a big deal for me," said Kadji. "It is one reason I started taking basketball more seriously."

After a two-year hiatus — medical redshirt at UF with back problems and transfer last year — Kadji has been thrown into a heavier role than he expected thus far this season because of the absence of injured centers Reggie Johnson and Julian Gamble. As one of the only healthy big men on the roster, Kadji was asked to play center rather than his natural position of power forward. The transition wasn't easy for the redshirt-sophomore.

"At his height, weight and skill, we thought he'd be an outstanding low post player," UM coach Jim Larranaga said. "We wanted to work with him on that, knowing we didn't have Reggie or Julian. But as we progressed, it became very clear to us that Kenny was more comfortable shooting 15-foot jumpers facing the basket than he was with his back to basket. Not that he's not capable, but it's not his comfort zone. We've made adjustments, and he's made himself comfortable making jump shots."

The past two games, after "we got killed on the boards," Larranaga switched from a small four-guard lineup to three guards and a two-man frontcourt. Kadji responded with 12 points against Memphis and 15 against West Virginia. And he could get an early Christmas present Saturday, as Johnson is expected to return for his first game since tearing the meniscus in his right knee in June.

With 6-10 and 285-pound Johnson clogging the paint, Kadji will be free to shoot his trusty jumper.

"I really can't wait to get Reggie back because I'll go back to my natural position," Kadji said. "I'm not saying I'm not comfortable in the block, but playing forward and facing the basket is what I've been doing since high school. It's where I feel better. Coach understands that and the last two games put me more in a situation to be successful."

"It's been tough. I haven't played in two years and then was thrown out there without Reggie, without Julian, I just had to produce. There was no time for me to get back into the game."

Kadji says the Hurricanes (5-4) will change "completely" with the addition of Johnson, even if he is not at 100 percent.

"He's such a big presence," Kadji said. "He doesn't even have to score or rebound. Just him being in the middle, people worry about

him. He's so big. We've been having problems inside, but I know that now guys will see two guys, me 6-11, him 6-10, and they'll think twice before coming into the paint."

When Kadji chose UF out of IMG Basketball Academy in Bradenton, he envisioned himself playing a major role with the Gators. It didn't happen. He played 42 games, averaged 4.4 points and 2.7 rebounds as a freshman and his sophomore season was cut short by the back injury.

"I wanted to go somewhere and start fresh and play the way I know I can play," he said. "I made the right choice coming here. I'm definitely being asked to do a lot, but that's what I wanted, a big role."

Midseason additions are a welcome holiday gift

CBSSports.com
December 16, 2011
By Jeff Borzello

The semester break is the closest thing college basketball has to the trade deadline.

It's when new players become eligible, whether because of a transfer or from academic ineligibility. Moreover, many injured players point to the semester break as the return point. Of course, lots of players come with hype and anticipation; last year, Josh Selby, Drew Gordon, Renardo Sidney, Jio Fontan and others all became eligible around the same time.

This year's crop of additions isn't as strong at the top, but there are still some impact players in the mix. Remember, though, not everyone lives up to the hype – there was a reason they left their former team or were suspended in the first place.

Reggie Johnson, Miami (Fl.): The injured big man should return in January for the Hurricanes. He's a double-double lock on a nightly basis.

Kevin Ware, Louisville: Academically ineligible for the first semester, Ware should step in and provide depth with his length and athleticism.

Ian Miller, Florida State: The Seminoles have lacked players who can create their own shot, but Miller (right) has shown the quickness to do that.

Gary Franklin, Baylor: Franklin (top) won't solve Baylor's turnover issues, but the Cal transfer gives Scott Drew another option to run the offense.

Tony Mitchell, North Texas: Could turn around the Sun Belt race for North Texas. He could be one of top 30 impact freshmen in the country.

Pe'Shon Howard and Alex Len, Maryland: Howard will return from injury, while Len from NCAA suspension. Maryland needs their help.

Kadeem Jack, Rutgers: Mike Rice told CBSSports.com that Jack would start practicing in January. Would give the Scarlet Knights an inside option.

Guy Landry, Gonzaga: Suspended by the NCAA for eight games for playing professionally in France, Landry could play against Arizona.

Drew Viney and Ashley Hamilton, Loyola Marymount: The Lions top two scorers should return from injury in January; Max Good has some firepower.

Reggie Smith, UNLV: The Marquette transfer made an impact with his defense in the Big East; the Runnin' Rebels could use the Chicagoan.

Matt Carlino, BYU: Carlino graduated high school a year early to play at UCLA, but he transferred last December. He'll provide perimeter offense.

Ferrakohn Hall, Memphis: The Seton Hall transfer will become eligible against Louisville on Saturday. He'll be a nice piece and provide some depth.

Brandon Mobley, Seton Hall: He injured his shoulder over the summer, and has yet to play. However, he was cleared and should help inside.

Devoe Joseph, Oregon: He's played the last two games for the Ducks, averaging 15.5 points and 5.0 assists in two wins. Big boost for Dana Altman.

Ty Walker, Wake Forest: Walker was suspended for the first semester by the school, but returned last week against Seton Hall.

Twany Beckham, Kentucky: The Mississippi

State transfer isn't a stud, but he should be able to provide some backup point guard minutes.

Mike McFadden, Robert Morris: The Iona transfer hopes to provide some perimeter help for the Colonials, alongside Velton Jones.

Johnson could make season debut Saturday for Canes

South Florida Sun Sentinel

Dec. 16, 2011

Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES – Miami's men's basketball team is on the verge of getting a big boost.

Reggie Johnson, who has rehabbing from knee surgery this summer, might make his season debut as early as Saturday against Florida Atlantic, coach Jim Larranaga said Thursday.

He has been practicing for two weeks and had fluid drained from his knee Wednesday. He still lacks some flexibility, and is surgically repaired leg isn't nearly as strong as the other, Larranaga noted, but it'll be nice to have a big man who rebounds at both ends of the court and is an effective passer out of the low post.

The 6-foot-10 center, a bruising force at 300 pounds last season who's now listed at a svelte 284, will provide the size the Hurricanes desperately need in the post.

Guard Malcolm Grant grinned wide.

"It's just that presence, his size. [Opposing players] are kind of scared to go in there and see him," Grant said. "We're all excited and we're waiting for him."

"It will make everybody else's job a lot easier. We've showed great flashes without him, but with him back, hopefully we can really start getting this thing rolling and start showing consistency and be a great team."

Johnson was UM's leading rebounder (9.6) and third-leading scorer (11.9) as a sophomore last season, and shot 59 percent from the field – the third highest percentage in school history.

In Johnson's absence, Kenny Kadji has tried

admirably to fill the void inside, but the 6-foot-11, 251-pounder is naturally power forward who's more comfortable shooting 15-foot jumpers while facing the basket.

Johnson plays with his back to the basket. Kadji said going up against him in practice last season was "like having someone run over you every day."

Added Kadji: "With him he doesn't even have to score, he doesn't have to rebound. Just being in the middle, people worry about him. He's so big. He can just affect the game in so many ways."

Johnson could return this weekend

CaneSport.com

Dec. 16, 2011

Matt Shodell

It's been a grueling rehab process coming off knee surgery for Hurricane center Reggie Johnson.

But now he's set to make his return to the court.

"He's been practicing for the last two weeks now since our Purdue game, and he's making a lot of progress," coach Jim Larranaga said Thursday. "We hope to have him available very soon. I'm not sure (how soon).we'll find out today and tomorrow. He had his knee drained yesterday. What we want to do is bring him back at his pace so he feels comfortable and confident on the court, in competition."

Johnson averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds a year ago.

Asked his status for Saturday's game, Larranaga said, "I wouldn't rule it out."

Larranaga added that "He just needs to tell me. He just needs to give me the go-ahead he's going to be dressed and in uniform. We just have to be very aware that he's not at 100 percent, that in terms of the leg strength he can curl 75 pounds with his strong leg but only 30 with his surgically repaired leg. So there's a little bit of imbalance there. He practiced very well yesterday and at the end of practice he said he felt very good."

How big a deal would it be for this team to get Johnson back?

"From my observations of Reggie, the first thing is he rebounds the ball at both ends of the court," Larranaga said. "He's certainly a huge physical presence on both sides of the basketball. On offense he's a very good passer out of the low post. And his teammates have a great deal of confidence in him."

Players are excited to get Johnson back on the court.

"He's just a big presence," Kenny Kadji said. "He doesn't have to score, doesn't have to rebound - just him being in the middle, people worry about him. He's so big, he can affect the game in so many different ways. I can't wait (to get him back). We've been having problems rebounding, with defense in the paint and things like that. I know guys will see two guys 6-11 and 6-10 with me and him, they'll think twice before coming in the paint."

Malcolm Grant added that "It's going to be a huge plus for us. We're all excited. He's been looking great in practice. We're just going to have another guy on the inside presence. We all can see that's where we're struggling. With Reggie Johnson you have a guy that's a double-double easy. He understands the game, is not a selfish player, and that opens it up for everyone else."

Of the team's depth issues, Larranaga said if Johnson doesn't return on Saturday the team will have only eight players available.

"We will not have Garrius Adams this weekend [he is out with injury]," Larranaga said. "We'll have our starting lineup that we had the other night - Durand (Scott), Malcolm, (Trey) McKinney Jones, (Erik) Swoope, Kadji."

Looking ahead to having Johnson and Kadji on the floor together down the road, Larranaga said "from a defensive standpoint before we were a little too short in guarding the four man. Now Kenny and Reggie are very, very big and some of the teams we're getting ready to play have undersized four men. Whether or not we can make the adjustment to guarding a smaller guy, that we don't know."

*Despite four losses in the last five games Larranaga said "Our spirit is very good. We've been evaluating ourselves offensively and

defensively, have made some adjustments to what we're going to emphasize offensively. Hopefully that will really benefit us. We've been playing with four perimeter players and one post; now we'll go three perimeter and two post players."

* Larranaga said the team "is getting killed on the boards."

He also pointed to defensive lapses as being a problem. "There are times when our defense is very solid. But a lot of defense is persistence and you have to sustain not only your effort but your focus on what you're trying to accomplish. We haven't been able to sustain it for 40 minutes of any game. We've done it well for portions; we have to get much better at it."

* Larranaga met with Durand Scott today to talk to him about his role as a defensive leader on the floor.

"He wants to lead us in the right direction," Larranaga said. "If he's improving his defense we'll be improving our defense."

* Larranaga said Adams is out "till after Christmas."

"It's a lower extremity, something that's been bothering him," Larranaga said.

*Of the team's slow start, Larranaga said, "It's not about the won-loss record right now. It's really about performance. And right now we need to improve at both ends of the court. ... yesterday for the first time this season we showed some things that hopefully we can build on. But we have a lot of work ahead of us; no doubt about that."

* Kadji says he's more comfortable playing facing the basket. And the return of Johnson will help him do that.

"My natural position is the four," he said. "That's what I've been doing since high school, is where I fit better."

* Asked what's gone wrong for this team so far, Grant said, "We just have to learn to play for 40 minutes. We have to keep watching film, keep listening to coach L and understand that it's going to be a process. We still believe that we're going to be a great team."

Scott, Canes Looking for a Win

Inside the U
Dec. 16, 2011
Chris Stock

The Miami Hurricanes will look to get back to their winning ways on Saturday against Florida Atlantic at the Orange Bowl Classic in Sunrise.

"It's a great opportunity for us," junior guard Durant Scott. "I'm close with two guys (Greg Gantt and Raymond Taylor) on their team so it's going to be a fun game to go out and play against your friends. But for the most part I'm just focused on getting the win and get our streak back up."

Miami (5-4) comes into the game against FAU (4-6) having dropped four of five including back-to-back losses to Memphis (71-54, Dec. 6) and West Virginia (77-66, Dec. 10).

"I can't really pinpoint anything," Scott said. "We have to get better at everything. We are getting better day by day. Before the game Saturday I think we'll be better than we were against West Virginia."

The game will be played at noon and televised live on FSN. Miami has dominated the all-time series winning 20 of 21.

"I definitely enjoy the atmosphere (of the Orange Bowl Classic)," Scott said. "The early games are not really a great thing, but you're a basketball player and you have to be ready at all times no matter if it's at 9, 10, 11, 12 or whatnot. I'm just excited to play in a game like that and go out there and represent our team and our university."

Scott believes the Hurricanes can get back to winning games and have four non-conference games, all winnable, before ACC action begins Jan. 7.

"We definitely we can turn it around because we know we're a good team," Scott said. "We

know we can do it. We just need help from coach L (Jim Larranaga) and help from the players and put it all together. We have been talking a lot about the basic things we need to work on. I think these coaches are really helping us and getting us focused, but at the end of the day talking isn't really enough. You have to go out there, implement it and do it. And Saturday we have a chance to prove it and then go from there."

The Hurricanes have been without starting center Reggie Johnson (knee), who averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds last season, which has forced them to play a smaller lineup.

"It's really tough because we know that Reggie is a big body in there, a strong passer, and those are things we need and having him on the sidelines hurts a lot," Scott said. "But that's not something we can really do anything about. We just have to go with the post guys we have in Kenny (Kadji), Erik (Swoope), and Raphael (Akpejiori) and be able to try to help us."

Scott has gotten off to a slow start on the offensive end of the court this season. He's second on the team in scoring at 11.9 points a game after averaging 13.6 last season and is shooting just 30.2 percent from the floor.

"Personally, obviously the numbers don't lie and I don't think I'm doing as good as I would like to be," Scott said. "I've been struggling a lot, but I'm trying to stay positive and just trying to win. I'm getting more comfortable and more confident. On the defensive end, I'm trying to take pride in that and hopefully I can get rolling again."

Scott is capable of putting up bigger numbers as he's scored at least 20 points nine times in his career including a career-high 29 against North Carolina as a freshman.

"Seeing the ball go in the hoop can build your confidence knowing that you can make those

shots," Scott said. "I just need to go out there and make the right decisions."

Despite his shooting struggles, Scott leads the team in rebounding (5.0), assists (3.7), minutes (34.4), and free throw attempts (7.1).

The New York-native is just 64 points from reaching 1,000 in his career and would become the 33rd player in school history to do so as teammate Malcom Grant is just eight points shy of the mark.

Return of center would boost struggling Miami hoops team

Palm Beach Post
Dec. 16, 2011
Jorge Milian

CORAL GABLES — In the spirit of the holidays, the University of Miami might be getting an extra-large gift Saturday.

Reggie Johnson, the 6-foot-10, 300-pound center, could play for the first time this season when the struggling Hurricanes (5-4) face FAU (4-6) in the first game of the Orange Bowl Basketball Classic at the BankAtlantic Center in Sunrise.

Johnson, who averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds last season, has been sidelined since undergoing knee surgery in June. Coach Jim Larranaga said Thursday that Johnson has been practicing for two weeks and "making a lot of progress."

So could Johnson play Saturday?

"I wouldn't rule it out," Larranaga said.

That's about the first bit of good news the Hurricanes have received since Larranaga left George Mason in April to replace Frank Haith.

The optimism generated by Larranaga's hiring has been doused by a succession of events that have left the Hurricanes a depth-depleted, height-challenged team.

The run of bad luck began in June when Johnson tore cartilage in his right knee during a pick-up game.

That was followed a couple of months later with word that Julian Gamble, a 6-9 senior forward expected to replace Johnson, would miss the season after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee.

Then proving that bad news does come in threes, UM announced two days before the opener that senior forward DeQuan Jones would sit out the season as the NCAA continued to investigate allegations that he accepted impermissible benefits from former booster Nevin Shapiro.

"It's been tough," senior guard Malcolm Grant said. "You can see it. We're going as hard as we can, but by not having those three we're missing a lot of size and athletic ability. They're guys that can rebound, defend and also score."

UM has had difficulty doing any of those three things lately. After opening the season 4-0, the Hurricanes have lost four of five. The last three defeats have come by double-digits.

Without their missing big men, the Hurricanes have virtually no post presence, particularly on the offensive end.

With no inside threat, opponents have concentrated on shutting down guards Durand Scott and Grant, UM's best players. The tactic appears to be working. Scott is shooting 30.2 percent while Grant, who made 41.2 percent of his attempts last season, has seen his accuracy drop to 38.3 percent.

Johnson is a classic back-to-the-basket center who demands double-teams in the post, resulting in more open perimeter shots. Kenny Kadji, starting center in Johnson's absence, is 6-11 but is most comfortable offensively outside the paint.

"When we get Big Reg back, it's going to be a whole different ballgame," Scott said. "That's going to open up shots on the perimeter. I just can't wait for that day to come."

Johnson's return will also be a big boost to UM's ability to rebound. Without Johnson, Gamble and Jones, the Hurricanes have been starting Erik Swoope at power forward.

Swoope is generously listed at 6-6. UM is led in rebounding by Scott, a 6-5 guard.

Larranaga admits that his team, which is 10th in the ACC in rebounding margin, is "getting killed on the boards."

The Hurricanes were picked to finish fifth in the ACC and were viewed as a good bet to return to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2008.

Despite their personnel issues and 5-4 start, Johnson's imminent return gives UM hope that it can still finish strong in conference play, which begins in January, and put itself in position to earn an NCAA berth.

"The season is just beginning," Scott said. "We know we can do it."

Miami Insider: Larranga laments frontcourt injuries

The Sports Exchange
December 14, 2011

Coach Jim Larranaga has run into a situation in his first year at Miami that he never faced in previous stops at George Mason and Bowling Green.

"Some of our teams were not tall, but this is the first team I've ever had that doesn't have a clear low-post guy to go to who can score with his back to the basket in 25 years," Larranaga said in discussing the Hurricanes. "That puts a lot of pressure on your perimeter players and allows the other team's game plan to focus on just a few things."

The key to offense, Larranga noted, is balance.

Without an inside threat to complement his team's perimeter game, he doesn't have that at Miami.

That's because the Hurricanes lost 6-10 Reggie Johnson and 6-10 Julian Gamble to knee injuries in the summer. Gamble is out for the season. Johnson is expected to get back on the floor in either late December or January.

Until that happens, Larranaga is left with 6-10 sophomore Raphael Akpejori, who is still learning his way, and Kenny Kadji for his inside game.

Kadji is 6-11 but is more comfortable facing the basket and likes to roam the perimeter at times. He even took three shots from three-point range in the loss to West Virginia that dropped the Hurricanes to 5-4 after a 4-0 start.

He made all three, but that's not the point. What Larranaga wants is someone his plethora of guards can throw the ball to inside.

Whether that someone scores himself or feeds the ball back out, doesn't matter. Just

by being there he has become someone the opponent's defense has to pay attention to.

"You want a post presence," Larranaga said. "Someone you can post feed to."

NOTES, QUOTES

Miami has led the ACC in three-point shooting in four of the last five seasons. Through games of Dec. 10, the Hurricanes were shooting only 35.5 percent from three-point range, which ranked only fifth among conference teams.

The 71-54 loss to Memphis on Dec. 6 was the worst defeat for the Hurricanes since an 81-59 whipping at Maryland on Jan. 26, 2010.

Miami's best conference record since beginning play in the ACC for the 2004-05 season was an 8-8 mark in 2007-08. The Hurricanes have been 7-9, 4-12, and 6-10 for a combined 17-31 record the last three seasons.

PLAYER TO WATCH: G Shane Larkin -- The freshman didn't take long to work his way into the starting lineup. After being cleared to play in Miami's second game, he got his first start against UMass on Dec. 3. He adds quickness at both ends of the court and can shoot the three as well as hand out assists.

KEY CONFERENCE GAME: Jan. 7 at Virginia -- This is the first of two tough ones to start the conference season for the Hurricanes, who are at North Carolina three nights later. The Hurricanes pulled off a miracle rally to beat the Cavs in last season's ACC tourney, but the Cavs will have F Mike Scott back on the floor in this meeting. He adds scoring inside and rebounding, which is where the Hurricanes are most vulnerable.

QUOTE TO NOTE

"They had an answer for everything. So I give credit to them." -- Sophomore F Kenny Kadji, after the Hurricanes failed to come back and lost by double digits to Memphis.

Buttoned-up Larranaga brings unity to The U

ADL FanHouse

Dec. 5, 2011

David Steele

The University of Miami basketball team, in transition and turmoil the last eight months, enters Tuesday's home game against Memphis in the midst of a solid start. The 'Canes moved up to 5-2 Saturday by beating Massachusetts, with help from junior guard Durand Scott's team-high 16 points -- all from the free throw line, more than making up for an 0-for-6 day from the floor.

Scott seems to grasp the concept of giving the small details as much attention as the big ones. Jim Larranaga taught him that ... by making sure Scott tied his shoes.

Flash back to this past fall, to an informal workout shortly before practice officially began for Larranaga's first season after leaving the George Mason program he took on a Cinderella Final Four run. Scott, Miami's second-leading scorer a year ago, was still nursing an injury and, literally, was not planning to do anything more strenuous than join the team circle and clap before practice.

"I had my shoelaces untied because thought I didn't need them tied because of that," Scott recalled recently. "So we were walking on the floor, clapping, and (Larranaga) looked at me and said, 'Why aren't your shoelaces tied?'"

"He said, 'Every time you step on the court, you got to have your shoelaces tied.' And he told our strength coach I needed a reminder."

The reminder: an extra 20 minutes on the exercise bike. The lesson: "If we pay attention to every little thing ..." Scott paused, then added, "He wants nothing but the best for us. He wants to win games, he wants to turn the program around, and he wants us to be better players and better people, too."

The program under Frank Haith was never bad, just perceived as underachieving: just one NCAA Tournament trip in his seven seasons. That was good enough to land Haith at Missouri in April, a surprise move that led to the bigger surprise of Larranaga exiting George Mason after 14 years, five years after

that Final Four trip, and at age 61 (now 62).

Then came the biggest surprise of all: the explosive allegations last summer from booster Nevin Shapiro that, while indicting the Miami football program most, also touched on the basketball program and brought NCAA investigators on campus. That cost Larranaga senior DeQuan Jones, ruled ineligible by the school the day before the season opener in a repeat of the 11th-hour suspensions on the football team.

Lump that in with the fact that Miami won't have senior forward Julian Gamble after he tore his ACL over the summer; that junior center Reggie Johnson won't play until next month because of knee surgery; and that two transfers, Kenny Kadji and McKinney Jones, are already playing major roles to fill in for them ... and it's a group that needs laser-like focus and attention to minute details more than most.

"We put it into these categories, past, future and present," Larranaga said. "The past is history, the future is a mystery. The present is the only thing we can control. Let's deal with it and have the best season we can possibly have."

"(Those players) have nothing to do with the past, and who the heck knows what the future holds for us. We can only be who we are right now in this present moment."

The instant credibility Larranaga brings paid off almost immediately, even among those who had been brought in by Haith and believed they could make the leap with him this season. They showed faith in their new coach even before actually seeing him in action -- primarily because of all the intangible, not-in-the-box-score aspects of the game he drills them on. Everything from running downcourt instead of jogging, to valuing possessions, to time management while studying, practicing or even playing video games.

And, yes, including showing up with shoes tied.

"He sent a huge message through that story," said senior preseason all-ACC guard Malcolm Grant, "that between the lines you have

to be prepared at all times -- mentally, your gear, everything. It's a great message, and I'm just truly blessed to have him this year. And the team is, too, because after this year, they'll have a guy who's a great, consistent coach.

"And that's taking nothing away from Coach Haith, because he's the reason I'm here. I still love him ... but it was time for a change."

The punchline to the big shoelace lesson is that Larranaga has planned and plotted such things before, co-opting a veteran player to play along and make the point -- but this one was not planned. A player he was counting on for leadership had provided him a chance to improvise a teaching moment on the fly. "He just showed up one day with his shoelaces untied; that's a perfect example," he said.

Now? Scott, whose job and mindset has been to put the ball in the basket, helped win a game without making one field goal.

And those stray laces from a few months ago?

"My shoelaces have always been tied ever since," he said, grinning. "Before practice, everybody's looking at each other's feet ... Everything has to be right for the whole team, or else we're not really a team."

Read more: <http://aol.sportingnews.com/ncaa-basketball/story/2011-12-05/buttoned-up-larranaga-brings-unity-to-the-u#ixzz1fm0locel>

McKinney-Jones a Key for the Canes

Inside the U
Dec. 4, 2011
Chris Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Trey McKinney-Jones transferred to the University of Miami for the opportunity to play at a higher level.

He was a double-digit scorer in two seasons at UMKC before transferring to Miami after the 2009-10 season.

He was lured to UM by Frank Haith, who left after last season for Missouri leaving McKinney-Jones disappointed initially.

"I thought it was going to be worse than it was, but coach (Jim) Larranga is a great coach," McKinney-Jones said. "I couldn't imagine anyone else coming in here other than him. I'd say he's the perfect coach for us. It's what we needed. It's not difficult in that since and I like the situation I'm in."

Larranga has been impressed with what he has seen from McKinney-Jones, a 6-foot-5 junior guard, whom he moved into the starting lineup after the fifth game.

"I think Trey has progressed very, very nicely," Larranga said. "We moved him into the starting lineup basically because he's been very, very consistent and we need some scoring help with Malcolm (Grant) and Durand (Scott)."

McKinney-Jones responded in his first start at Purdue as he had plenty of supporters in the stand from his hometown of Milwaukee. He scored 10 points with seven rebounds and four assists in 32 minutes.

"It felt good (starting)," he said. "That was one of my goals coming in and it was a good time to come as I had about 25-30 family members in the stands too so it was good for them. It was good to get those extra minutes and see what it was like to be on the court in the be-

ginning of the game instead of coming in five minutes in. It makes a big difference. It was good to get the first one out of the way."

Through six games, McKinney-Jones is third on the team in scoring averaging 8.3 a game. While he's pleased with his scoring, he's looking to be more aggressive in driving to the basket, something he did a lot of at UMKC.

"It feels great to be on the court," he said. "I took last year off and it was very difficult. I'm still getting comfortable. It's a new coaching staff, a new system, everyone is still in the learning stages, but I'm still getting comfortable. I still have a long ways to go."

UM has decided to go with a small lineup, which includes four guards, which is the strength of their team.

"We are kind of forced to have that small lineup with Julian (Gamble) and Reggie (Johnson) out (with injuries)," McKinney-Jones said. "I think the advantages are that all four of the guards on the court can handle the ball and it's tough the big men on the other team to guard us so that's definitely an advantage on the offensive end."

Miami is hoping their small lineup will match-up well with Memphis as the Hurricanes host the Tigers Tuesday night at 9 p.m. The game will be televised live on ESPN2.

PG Larkin Excited for First Start

Inside the U
Dec. 3, 2011
Chris Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Freshman Shane Larkin is looking forward to his first start Saturday afternoon against Massachusetts.

Larkin received the news two days ago that he would start after scoring 16 points in a loss at Purdue Tuesday.

"It was a good feeling to finally get that starting nod as a freshman," said Larkin, who expects to have friends and family in attendance from Orlando. "I'm going to try and do the same thing I did off the bench and produce. It's going to be a fun game. It's going to be an exciting game."

Larkin hit 5 of 9 shots including making all four 3-pointers and both free throw attempts against Purdue for his first double-figure scoring output in his young career.

"It felt good to come in and produce because I haven't really—I have been doing my part on defense, but it felt good to come in and contribute on the offensive end and score 16 points off the bench," Larkin said. "I hope I can continue to come in and keep putting up big numbers like that either with assists or points. Purdue wasn't really guarding me as a scorer so that really opened up shots for me. My teammates did a good job of finding me."

Coach Jim Larranaga instructed Larkin before the game to be assertive on offense like he did during AAU ball, which is why Larranaga liked his game.

"He said if I score the ball it's going to make people press up on me, then I can get by them, get in the lane and distribute, which is just go-

ing to make us a more complicated team to guard," said Larkin, who also had two assists in 21 minutes.

Larkin is averaging 7.4 points and 2.8 assists in five games this year.

"It's definitely been a learning experience especially on the road," Larkin said. "I had never played in front of a hostile crowd like that before. It was my first true road game, the crowd gets into it. You can't really lose your exposure down the stretch."

Massachusetts (6-2) is led by point guard Chaz Williams' 13.9 points a game.

"I know they are a pressing team," Larkin said. "Coach says it will be a back and forth game with a lot of possessions. They only have one true ballhandler so if we press them, hit our shots, it should be a good game."

Following the UMass game for the Hurricanes is a showdown in Coral Gables against No. 22 Memphis on Tuesday.

"I know Memphis has three guards that were all-Americans and you always want to go up against the best, but you can never overlook anybody at the college basketball level because an upset can happen any night," Larkin said.

University of Miami's Shane Larkin takes leadership role

Miami Herald

Dec. 2, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

Shane Larkin, who will start for UM on Saturday, has an athletic pedigree and a mother for whom his devotion led him to transfer to Miami.

University of Miami freshman point guard Shane Larkin started out a baseball player, which should come as no surprise. His father, Barry, was a 12-time All-Star shortstop for the Cincinnati Reds and young Shane grew up shagging balls in center field when his father took batting practice. He was a fixture at spring training and in the Reds clubhouse, where he met many of the game's superstars.

But the younger Larkin's love for baseball came to a screeching halt on a Little League field in Orlando when he was 7 years old.

"Pete Rose taught me how to hit, and Tony Perez, too, so I had the whole little swing-the-bat thing going on," Larkin said. "I went out to play and started swinging, and the coach said, 'You're doing everything wrong. Whoever taught you how to hit didn't know what he was talking about.' I quit that year and never went back."

He turned to basketball and football. He has lightning speed and dazzled as a running back, quarterback and wide receiver, but when it came time to choose, he picked basketball. The 5-11 guard was the 6A Florida High School Player of the Year runner-up out of Dr. Phillips High in Orlando, beaten out by Austin Rivers, Duke's star freshman. He averaged 18.8 points, 6.4 rebounds, 6.3 assists and 3.5 steals as a senior.

Tuesday night at Purdue, after prodding from UM coach Jim Larranaga to stop being shy and play like he did in AAU and high school, Larkin scored 16 points in 21 minutes — including four three-pointers. UM lost the game but gained confidence in its young point guard.

Larkin admitted he had been deferring to seniors Malcolm Grant and Durand Scott

during his first few games, and was reluctant to be too assertive. Larranaga reminded him that he once hit 13 threes and scored 53 points in a game.

"Coach told me I need to be more of a vocal leader, but you don't want to come in as a freshman and try to command the Malcolm Grants, Durand Scotts because you might seem cocky," Larkin said. "As I grow more comfortable with the team, that will come more naturally."

Larranaga said Larkin will start on Saturday afternoon at home against UMass.

"Shane is very good, understands the game, is fast, can shoot and pass, has great anticipation," the coach said. "UMass is a pressing team, and I want him out there with Malcolm, Durand and Trey [McKinney Jones]."

Relatively speaking

Larkin has an athletic pedigree that goes beyond his father. One uncle, Stephen, played baseball in the minors and was called up for a game with the Reds. Another uncle, Mike, was captain of the Notre Dame football team in 1985. And a third uncle, Byron, was a second-team All-American basketball player at Xavier and is its radio announcer.

It is from Uncle Byron that Larkin said he learned the nuances of the game. They remain very close, and traveled together to AAU tournaments the past few summers because Barry was busy as a baseball analyst for ESPN. They broke down film of every one of Shane's games, which explains the kid's "very high basketball IQ" that so impressed Larranaga when he first recruited him at George Mason.

Byron Larkin watched Tuesday's UM-Purdue game on TV at a Cincinnati restaurant with his brother Stephen, and they erupted when their nephew took control in the second half.

"Shane was always naturally gifted, and I think at this stage, he's a better athlete than any of us were, including Barry," Byron Larkin said. "He's a great kid, quiet, coachable, rock solid. He could have been spoiled being the son of a major leaguer, but Barry and his wife, Lisa, did a great job of keeping him grounded."

Shane is extremely close with his family. He has two sisters, Cymber, a high school lacrosse player and aspiring singer, and Brielle D'Shea (in honor of Shea Stadium, where Larkin liked to play), a cosmetology student. He is also very close with a former high school teammate, Isaac Lane, who lives at the Larkin house and whom Shane considers a brother.

He has a particularly special relationship with his mother, and makes no apologies. With his father gone so much, Shane was the only male in the house and is protective of his mom. The feeling is mutual. They check in on each other every day. Lisa Larkin reports on her tennis matches and reminds Shane to gargle with warm salt water when his throat hurts, and Shane reports on school and basketball.

'Toughest decision'

That closeness is the reason Larkin ended up at UM after initially committing to DePaul and spending the summer in Chicago. He asked for a waiver from his scholarship, "the toughest decision of my life," because he felt he was burdening his mom by being so far. He had forged a bond with Larranaga during the recruiting process, and transferred to UM. He had visited here during high school, but "didn't connect" with former coach Frank Haith.

"My mom's a worrier, to the point that she sometimes panics, and it's better for my health and hers if I'm a four-hour drive from Orlando," he said. "It was so hard to leave DePaul because there was so much animosity toward me from their fan base. But they didn't understand. My anxiety hit the roof because I was worried about her and I couldn't perform the way I wanted to. Being here is a lot better for both of us, and hopefully, people won't criticize me for it."

Larranaga is family-oriented, and has allowed Larkin to visit home five times in the past few months. "Young men today are very close with their moms, and that support is very important to them and their success," Larranaga said. "If he is happier, he will play better."

Larkin's Debut for Canes Sign of Great Things: A Fan's Take

Yahoo.com

Dec. 2, 2011

Daniel Barber

When the Miami Hurricanes take on the Massachusetts Minutemen on Saturday, Dec. 3 it won't be senior guard Malcolm Grant—who leads the 'Canes in scoring with 17.5 ppg—who will be tasked with stopping speedy UMass point guard Chaz Williams, but Miami's freshman point guard Shane Larkin. As Michelle Kaufman of the Miami Herald reports in her latest article, the 18-year-old son of former baseball great Barry Larkin will make his debut as a Hurricanes starter in that game.

Frankly, I can't wait to see it.

That doesn't mean the 6'1", 188-pound Grant has been benched, as he's likely to start the game as well—shifting over to the shooting guard position with 6'5", 202-pound junior guard Durand Scott getting moved to the small forward position—as Miami head coach Jim Larranaga once again is forced to use a smaller lineup due to the absence of Reggie Johnson; whose season debut has been delayed due to injury.

The very quick Williams has led an up-tempo offense for the Minutemen—leading them in scoring with 13.9 ppg—that has seen them post a 6-2 record so far this year, and I'm sure Larranaga feels the almost equally fast 5-11, 160-pound Larkin can balance out the advantages Williams gives Massachusetts on the court. Whether that proves true or not is yet to be seen, but Larkin's 16 points in 21 minutes of the Hurricanes 76-65 loss to the Purdue Boilermakers on Tuesday, Nov. 29 had to have played a part in Larranaga's thinking.

What also probably played a part was the fact Larkin has an impressive resume.

As a member of the Dr. Phillips High School team in Orlando, Florida, Larkin was the runner-up for the 6A Florida High School Player

of the Year award. Averaging 18.8 points, 6.4 rebounds, 6.3 assists, and 3.5 steals as a senior for the Panthers, Larkin was just edged out by Austin Rivers of the Winter Park Wildcats, who is now a freshman point guard for the Duke Blue Devils.

That resume has led to Larranaga having immense confidence in his young guard, and has led the Hurricanes to probably trust their future at the point to him. Considering he once hit 13 three-pointers and scored 53 points in a high school game, that future could be very, very bright as long as Larkin has the confidence in himself and remains aggressive.

"Coach told me I need to be more of a vocal leader, but you don't want to come in as a freshman and try to command the Malcolm Grants and Durand Scotts, because you might seem cocky," Larkin said of his reluctance to be aggressive at first. "As I grow more comfortable with the team, that will come more naturally."

There's no question Larkin isn't all that intimidated by talented players of any stripe being who he is. After all, his father was a superstar major league shortstop who was a 12-time All-Star for the Cincinnati Reds and Shane grew up shagging balls in center field whenever his dad took batting practice.

That kind of exposure to professional athletes from a young age probably kept him from being too star-struck by those with talent. His uncles also probably played a part in that kind of development. One of them, Stephen Larkin, played in Cincinnati's minor league system, while another, Mike Larkin was a captain of the football team at Notre Dame back in 1985. And then, of course, there was Byron Larkin, who taught the young Shane how to play basketball. Byron was a second-team All-American at Xavier and is the school's current radio announcer.

Shane may have wanted to defer to Grant and Scott at first as a sign of respect and humbleness, but you can be sure that once he does make his first start that is going to give way to his natural-born leadership skills. Miami has been looking for someone as talented as him to be the floor general, and they may have just found him. While Grant has been more than a capable point guard himself, he's more of a natural shooter and scorer, and with Larkin feeding him the ball off of drives he may see his averages go up.

If he does, the Hurricanes might see their scoring go up overall, and the wins come right along with it. I won't say it's guaranteed this will all turn out as I see it possibly happening, but I think Larkin's first start is just the beginning of great things to come, and I can't wait till Johnson gets back on the court later this month to see what the Miami team can accomplish with all of their talent healthy.

As I've said before, Larranaga has the Hurricanes moving in the right direction, and now he may have just found the young man to help run the point of that charge to the top.

Hoops Buzz: 12/2

Inside the U
Dec. 2, 2011
Chris Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The Miami Hurricanes are coming off back-to-back losses, but look to get back on track with home games against Massachusetts and No. 22 Memphis.

Erik Swoope is shooting 71 percent from the floor this season.

Miami (4-2) is coming off a 76-65 loss to Purdue in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge.

"I think Purdue is a very fine team," coach Jim Larranaga said. "They had a very great crowd on hand. They played with a lot of focus. We felt we very well prepared to play the game, but they really exploited their ball-screen offense and we were not able to defend well enough during the stretch when we pulled within five in the second half."

Miami hosts Massachusetts (6-2) Saturday at 1 p.m. (ESPN2) and No. 22 Memphis on Tuesday at 9 p.m. (ESPN2).

"I watched some film on (Massachusetts), they are pretty good," said UM's leading scorer Malcolm Grant, who is averaging 17.5 points a game. "They are long, athletic, and force turnovers. If we're patient and play together, we should be fine."

News & Notes

- Freshman PG Shane Larkin will make his first start on Saturday after scoring a career-high 16 points last game. "Shane Larkin is the fastest guy we have guarding the basketball," Larranaga said. "When you can keep a player in front of you and not give up dribble penetration, your perimeter defense can be much better." Larranaga expects to play Larkin at the point as well as having guards Malcolm Grant and Durant Scott rotate at point too depending on the match-ups. Larkin is still learning to play with Grant and Scott as he's

primarily been on the second unit this year.

- Larranaga is planning to start G Trey McKinney-Jones and PF Raphael Akpejori at the other two spots along with Larkin, Grant, and Scott.

- PF Raphael Akpejori scored two points with a career-high seven rebounds against Purdue in 14 minutes and Larranaga praised his defensive efforts.

- SG Rion Brown is expected to have his role increase as well after missing two games to an illness. He played just two minutes in his return against Mississippi before playing a season-high 24 minutes against Purdue scoring three points with four rebounds.

- C Kenny Kadji is the team's tallest player at 6-11 and was expected to provide a steady post presence with Reggie Johnson out with a knee injury. However, Kadji has struggled with his play recently thus causing him to lose his starting job. Kadji started the first five games, but his minutes have decreased in the last three including playing just two minutes against Purdue. "Basically because from our statistical analysis of performance in the Tennessee Tech game we were down 10 with 10 minutes to go in the game and we went with a small lineup with Erik Swoope at center and came back and outscored them 20-2. Against Rutgers Kenny was very, very good and played a tremendous amount. In the third and fourth game we fell behind and went to the small lineup and they produced. The small lineup was the most effective. In the Mississippi game we were down 17-0 and it was very early to go to a small lineup like that, but we felt we had no choice. Then they played so well and we took the lead late in the game. It's nothing against Kenny, it's a strong compliment to the smaller unit." Kadji is averaging 5.0 points and 4.3 rebounds in 17.8 minutes.

- Larranaga praised F Erik Swoope for his effectiveness and proficiency. "He makes

very, very few mistakes," Larranaga said. "He doesn't take bad shots, doesn't throw the ball away, he defends and plays very hard, he's good on the backboards, is fun to play with and sets very good screens. We really like what Erik is doing." Swoope is averaging 6.5 points, 4.0 rebounds, and 1.3 blocks a game while shooting 70.8 percent from the floor (17 of 24).

- C Reggie Johnson (knee) went through two hard practices on Sunday and Monday and has practiced all week. There's still no timetable on his return, but he's been "better than expected" according to Larranaga. "He's doing a very good job. Obviously he needs to get in shape. Each day he seems to improve a little bit and get some more flexibility in that knee. The biggest thing I notice is that he doesn't have the flexibility or range of motion with his knee. Until he gets the flexibility back he's not going to be nearly 100 percent or as effective as he would be when he's completely healed.

- Freshman SG Bishop Daniels (foot) has not played yet this season. He recently has been out of his walking boot, but has not practiced recently thus falling behind. Whether or not he will play this year will be re-evaluated later this month.

Graham Recipient of the 2011 Ed Block Courage Award

NewOrleansSaints.com
Dec. 1, 2011

The New Orleans Saints announced today that second-year tight end Jimmy Graham has been voted by his teammates as the 2011 recipient of the Ed Block Courage Award.

The Ed Block Courage Award Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of neglected children and ending the cycle of abuse. The purpose is to raise Awareness and Prevention of child abuse. That objective is coupled with the Foundation's commitment to celebrating players of inspiration in the NFL.

Since its inception the Foundation through its charter with the Courage House National Support Network for Kids, and an affiliation with the National Football League and Professional Football Athletics Trainers Society has helped to provide hope to countless children and raised millions of dollars.

Graham, a 6-6, 260 pound native of Goldsboro, N.C., graduated from the University of Miami with degrees in both marketing and management in 2009. He was selected by the Saints in the third round of the 2010 NFL Draft after playing just one year of college football.

Prior to that, Graham was a four-year letterman for the Hurricanes in basketball. Graham spent portions of his childhood living in a group home before being taken in by a legal guardian, Rebecca Vinson. Despite putting herself through nursing school and overcoming financial struggles of her own, Vinson helped mentor and stress the importance of education to Graham while providing him with a caring home.

"The Ed Block Courage Award is one of the most prestigious awards an NFL player receives because it is voted on by his peers," said Saints' Head Athletic Trainer Scottie B. Patton. "The award is a testament to overcoming adversity, whether it is through setbacks

on the field or through challenges they have overcome in their lives. Jimmy has touched the lives of so many people he has come into contact with in his short time here and we all recognize and pay tribute to the amazing contributions he has made to our organization."

Graham currently leads the Saints' in receptions (67), receiving yards (967) and touchdowns (eight). Graham is the second-leading receiver in the NFL, trailing only New England Patriots WR Wes Welker (82) in receptions.

"He is an amazing person," said Saints' QB and co-captain Drew Brees. "He is humble, hard-working and I think we all recognize some of the challenges he faced growing up. He doesn't take things for granted and he inspires all of us."

"When I see Jimmy, I see perseverance," said LB Jonathan Vilma, the Saints' recipient of the Ed Block Courage Award in 2008 and a co-captain. "He is very dedicated, shows up every day and wants to get better. The adversity he has overcome in his life is something that should serve as inspiration to anyone who is facing tough times. He draws on it and it fuels him. He had every excuse to go the other way in his life. Instead he chose education, he chose to be a great person and to do the best at what's he's doing. And, he genuinely wants to help people. He has a great heart and a smile on his face. He knows he can make a positive difference in peoples' lives and he quietly goes about doing that."

"One of the things we pride ourselves on is having the right type of people in our locker room," said co-captain DE Will Smith. "Here's a guy you look up to, even though he's just in his second year. He's passionate about playing and learning this game and what he's doing is remarkable. Yet, you never hear him talking about himself. He puts the team ahead of everything else and he fits right in. He's a guy that likes to joke around at the right times, but he's all business when you boil it all down."

"I am rarely at a loss for words," Graham said. "But this is very special. I think anytime the people that you work with every day think highly enough of you to vote for a prestigious award such as the Ed Block Courage Award that it's very special. There are a lot of players in this locker room, as well as coaches, trainers and the people that are here to support our team on a daily basis that have overcome or are battling with tough breaks in their lives. Do I more deserve this more than they do? I don't know, but I do know that there have been some really amazing people in my life that took an interest in me at a young age and helped get my life headed in the right direction. I feel an obligation to them to be the best I can be and maximize the God-given abilities I have been blessed with."

Graham will be honored, along with recipients of the other 31 NFL teams, at the Ed Block Courage Awards in Baltimore, Maryland 2012.

UM Alum Will Allen Receives NCAA's Highest Honor

NCAA.com
Dec. 1, 2011

CORAL GABLES, Fla. - Former University of Miami basketball player Will Allen has been recognized as a Theodore Roosevelt Award winner by the NCAA.

Allen graduated from the University of Miami with a B.A. in physical education and went on to be drafted No. 60 overall in the fourth round of the 1971 NBA Draft by the Baltimore Bullets. After a short career in the ABA and playing professionally in Belgium, Allen started a career in marketing with Proctor and Gamble. In 1993, he left Proctor and Gamble and purchased Growing Power, a plant nursery on the north side of Milwaukee, Wis. The Rockville, Md., native has since been recognized as a leader in the industry of urban farming and sustainable food production.

The "Teddy" award is the highest honor the NCAA bestows upon individuals.

Named after President Theodore Roosevelt, whose concern for the conduct of intercollegiate athletics led to the formation of the NCAA in 1906, this annual award is given to an individual "for whom competitive athletics in college and attention to physical well-being thereafter have been important factors in a distinguished career of national significance and achievement."

More specifically, "The Theodore Roosevelt Award shall be presented annually to a distinguished citizen of national reputation and outstanding accomplishment who -- having graduated from an NCAA member institution and having earned a varsity athletics award in college or having participated in competitive intercollegiate athletics in college -- has by a continuing interest and concern for physical fitness and competitive sport and by personal example exemplified most clearly and forcefully the ideals and purposes to which collegiate athletics programs and amateur sports competition are dedicated."

Below is the full release from NCAA.com:

When Will Allen was a lanky seventh-grader in rural Maryland, his lack of coordination and meager basketball skills didn't deter his middle school basketball coach.

The coach saw only a six-foot four-inch 13-year-old who had a passion for a game he learned on his family's farm, aiming for a peach basket attached to an old oak tree. Allen fell in love with the game, which he saw as a more exciting alternative to playing the outfield for his middle school baseball team.

That passion led Allen to the University of Miami (Florida) as the school's first African-American men's basketball player, a professional hoops career in Europe and eventually

his life's work as an urban farmer and creator of the nonprofit Growing Power.

Allen will be honored with the NCAA's Theodore Roosevelt Award, the Association's highest honor, at the 2012 NCAA Convention in Indianapolis. Allen, the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant," and grants from both the Kellogg and Ford foundations, said the NCAA honor will be particularly special to him.

"I really value this award, because it shows that student-athletes can aspire to be more than just entertainment symbols for people," said Allen, who will be formally recognized at the Honors Celebration on Jan. 13. "You can do something positive with your life to impact other people's lives in a different way than just having them watch you play a sport. I hope other student-athletes will realize earlier that there's more to life than just playing (their sport). You need to start envisioning the day when you're not playing sports."

Named after President Theodore Roosevelt, whose concern for the conduct of intercollegiate athletics led to the formation of the NCAA in 1906, the award is given annually to an individual "for whom competitive athletics in college and attention to physical well-being thereafter have been important factors in a distinguished career of national significance and achievement." Dwight Eisenhower was the first recipient of the "Teddy" in 1967.

Allen's career almost never got started. By his own admission, he was a terrible basketball player when he started, gifted with height but little else. His own work ethic -- and a summer job at a swimming pool next door to the armory where the American University men's basketball team practiced -- developed his skills. From the time he was a rising eighth-grader, Allen spent his summers scrimmaging against college players, eventually holding his own. By the time he graduated from high school, he had more than 100 scholarship offers. He left his family's farm and swore he'd never return to that life.

He chose Miami for a variety of reasons, including the climate, the diversity of the city and his sense of ease with his future teammates. The fact that he would be the first African-American to play for the school had little influence over his decision. He was comfortable at Miami, and that was it. His first year, he fell in with the Zeta Beta Tau fraternity and met a senior named Cynthia who would become his wife before he finished his sophomore year. He credits both the Zetas and his wife for helping him adjust to college life far from home and family.

He played basketball at Miami from 1967 to 1971 and studied physical education and sociology, with the thought of one day becoming a

coach. After graduation, he caught on with a few professional American teams in the NBA and the ABA, but he spent most of his career in Europe. While he was in Belgium, Allen worked on the family farms of several of his teammates.

"When I left the (family) farm at 18, I said, 'Never again do I want to do this work.' I think most farm kids are like that. Then I went out with my teammates (in Belgium) and helped them plant potatoes. They farmed the way that we did -- without a lot of mechanized equipment. They did everything by hand," he said. "I realized I had a hidden passion and wanted to farm again."

When he got back to the States, he worked in sales and marketing for Proctor and Gamble. But he also started growing produce on some land outside of his wife's native Milwaukee. Eventually, he was growing food on more than 100 acres of land outside the city and purchased the last remaining farm within the city limits to sell his produce in the middle of a food desert.

That presence in the city led to his work with a youth group that wanted to grow an organic garden. Allen helped the kids plan and grow their garden and let them use space on his inner-city farm. It was the summer of 1995 -- hot and dry, and the groundhogs kept raiding the plot.

"Every time I thought 'These kids are going to quit,' they'd show up in their vans. They wound up growing some really nice crops," he said. A reporter from the local paper featured Allen and the youth group on the front page, and he began speaking to more and more groups around town, volunteering his time and expertise. Friends talked him into starting Growing Power.

"There is a lot of life-skill-building that happens when kids do a project like this, when they really have to take care of something and nurture something. That struck a chord with people," Allen said.

Today, Growing Power allows Allen to innovate in the agricultural field, experimenting with composting, vermicomposting and aquaponics. His life's goal is to broaden access to healthy food.

"I'm proud to say that I'm making a contribution to change people's lives, especially young people, around the thing that is most important to us: Our food," Allen said. "I am proud to be able to impact lives and hopefully save lives by influencing people around the world to eat healthier food and be able to grow food in a sustainable way."

College Chalk Talk with Coach Eric Konkol

www.collegechalktalk.com

November 28, 2011

Diary Series: Eric Konkol, Asst. Coach

'Instilling a new philosophy'

As new coaches hired to lead the University of Miami men's basketball program, it was important to introduce a philosophy and vision for the future to our players and support staff. For many years, Coach Larranaga's philosophy has been based on three words.

The first is ATTITUDE. We love being around people with a positive attitude and enthusiasm for life. Life is 10% of what happens to you and 90% how you react to it. No practice, game, or season is without adversity and we encourage all members of the program to bring positive energy to every situation. A question we ask each player, "Are you an energy giver or energy taker?" We love energy givers!

The second word is COMMITMENT. We ask our team to make a total and unconditional commitment to the program. Be passionate about what we do. Unconditional means in good times and in bad and no matter what the role. Whether it's the leading scorer, the player that rarely plays, or one of our student-managers, we ask that everyone be passionate and committed to being the best they can be.

The last word is CLASS. We encourage our team to show pride and respect in themselves, our program, and the University of Miami. Be the best they can be in thought, word, and deed. We each represent much more than just ourselves and we want to always act in a first class manner. Coach Larranaga will start each year by teaching the team how to introduce themselves and the importance of a strong first impression.

Around this Thanksgiving and holiday time, I have much to be thankful for. I'm thankful for my family, my friends, and the opportunity to coach. We have a tremendous responsibility to our players to help them become their very best not only during their time with us but long after they have graduated. At the University of Miami, we strive to coach every day with a positive attitude, total and unconditional commitment, and do it in a first class manner.

Best of luck to all this year.

Larranaga, Miami Hurricanes seem like perfect fit

Miami Herald

Nov. 11, 2011

By Israel Gutierrez

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larranaga visualizing success for Hurricanes

FOX Sports Florida
Nov. 11, 2011
By Chris Tomasson

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

The University of Miami guard is envisioning a national championship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We're certainly shorthanded," Larranaga said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larranaga compiled a 273-164 record at

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hurricanes senior Jones out for basketball season

Miami Herald

Nov. 10, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larranaga's preparedness, motivation could lift Canes

The Miami Hurricane

Nov. 9, 2011

Zach Beeker

He quotes Albert Schweitzer, reads books about everything from management to self-help and was drafted by the Detroit Pistons in the sixth round of the 1971 NBA draft.

But Jim Larranaga, head coach of the men's basketball team at the University of Miami, is best known for something completely different.

"Well, first thing I thought about was [the] Final Four run," said shooting guard Rion Brown when asked what initially crossed his mind upon hearing of Larranaga.

However, while his famous run with George Mason in 2006 certainly catapulted "Coach L" into the national spotlight, it was 20 years earlier that his success story started when he began his head coaching career at Bowling Green University.

"They had had four straight losing seasons," the Bronx native said. "My first year they were picked to finish last in the league and we were able to go from being picked last to finishing tied for second."

After 11 seasons with Bowling Green, which included three NIT appearances, opportunity came knocking again when Richmond, James Madison and George Mason were all looking for new head coaches.

"I inquired with all three schools and only George Mason returned my call," Larranaga said. "When I got the job they had had seven straight losing seasons from 1991 to 1997. I think four of those seasons they finished last, so they happened to be looking for someone who had already built a program."

It soon became clear that Larranaga was just the man for the job.

During his 14-year tenure with George Mason, he transformed the Patriots into the winningest program in Colonial Athletic Association history and became the most successful coach in the history of the conference. His unprecedented accomplishments culminated in the much-talked about Final Four run.

To get there, he had to first employ a quote from one of his favorite books: "Get the right people on the bus and then decide where you're going."

"When we first arrived ... we told everybody we were going to recruit locally and they said, 'Well, you'll never win, because Georgetown, Maryland and George Washington will get all the best players and you'll stink.' But on our Final Four team we had eight local players; the five starters were all from within an hour and a half from campus," Larranaga said.

It was also during his time with the Patriots that Larranaga introduced the country to his motivational skills and powerful pregame speeches, like when he told his team before facing UConn in the Regional Finals in 2006 that the CAA stood for Connecticut Assassins Association.

The famous pregame talk was developed the morning of the game, when Larranaga read an article that made it very clear that the George Mason players knew everything about their opponent, while the opposite was true for UConn's team.

"They didn't know anything about George Mason," the triumphant coach said. "They were asked who the coach was, they said, 'I have no idea.' They asked what league we were in, one of them said, 'They're in the Missouri Valley.' And the other guy said, 'No, they're in the Patriot League.' So in formulating my thoughts going into the pregame I structured it so that our players understood that they don't know anything about us, we know everything about them. We're better prepared to win this game than they are."

Larranaga's pregame speeches are often not quite so spontaneous, but rather meticulously conceived much earlier.

"I normally start writing my pregame talks in July ... I have thoughts about what a game might be like so I might use a quote. I might use one word, I might use a story to share with the team to put them in the ... best mental frame of mind to play."

His love for reading and broad arsenal of motivational quotes often aid Larranaga in instilling such a frame of mind in his players.

"One of my favorite books is called 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.' So there are stories there that I always share with the team," he said. "They always have a moral to them; there is always a point ... Some nights it'll be a quote. It might be a quote by Albert Schweitzer, who once wrote, 'Success is not the key to happiness, happiness is the key to success.'"

But even though success has been following him wherever he goes, Larranaga has never lost sight of his main motivation for coaching.

"Everything he does, he does for the players," said Miami assistant coach Chris Caputo, entering his 10th season at Larranaga's side. "He always has their best interests at heart."

Larranaga did exactly that with Jai Lewis, a talented player who came to George Mason with one problem: He weighed 300 pounds.

"A lot of coaches would have just said: 'Hey, you need to go run on the treadmill, you need to go run on the track, we're going to make you lose 50 pounds.'"

Not Larranaga.

He saw Lewis' potential and knew he had to be much more subtle in his approach. So Larranaga told Lewis, who planned on playing football after college, that he would send out letters to every NFL team and tell them about him, but that he had to be in good shape.

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

Four years later Lewis would go on to be the leading scorer and rebounder for George Mason when the team made its improbable run to the Final Four.

At Miami, Larranaga is looking to do many of the same things that have brought him so much success in the past, and his goals are as ambitious as ever: to be mentioned in the same vein as Duke and UNC.

If history has taught us anything, that goal is not out of Larranaga's reach.

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

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

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

And there's plenty to teach.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miami basketball preview

Sun Sentinel

Nov. 8, 2011

By Steve Garten

Three keys to success:

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

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

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

You didn't know:

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

Player to watch

Guard Malcolm Grant, a preseason All-ACC selection, led the Hurricanes in scoring (14.8 points per game) and assists (3.2) last season. The 6-1 senior from Brooklyn led the league in 3-point percentage (42.3) — he has made a 3-pointer in 23 consecutive games — and free-throw percentage (85.3) last season while playing the third-most minutes in school history. Grant, who grew up idolizing Kenny Anderson, has said he wants to develop his point-guard skills and become the primary ball-handler the 'Canes lack.

How they'll score

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

How they'll stop the other team

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

Writer's take

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

Miami has high expectations in Larranaga's first season

Sun Sentinel

Nov. 8, 2011

By Steve Gorten

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miami Hurricanes' Jim Larranaga a master motivator

Miami Herald

Nov. 7, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

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

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

"Tom Izzo told me he had two candidates in mind and Stan was not one of them," Larranaga recalled. "I told Stan he had to capture Tom's attention. I told him to get a mannequin and break off the right arm. Then get a long stem red rose box. Put the right arm in the box and 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 Larranaga likes to be called, is a quirky guy constantly seeking new ways to motivate his teams. He begins every practice with a Thought of the Day, and quotes everyone from John Wooden to the Dalai Lama to Ralph Waldo Emerson.

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

Number cruncher

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Game technician

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

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

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

Summer in Las Vegas Good for Scott

Inside the U
Nov. 7, 2011
Chris Stock

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Top 50 shooters: The best from downtown

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

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

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

Top Shooters

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

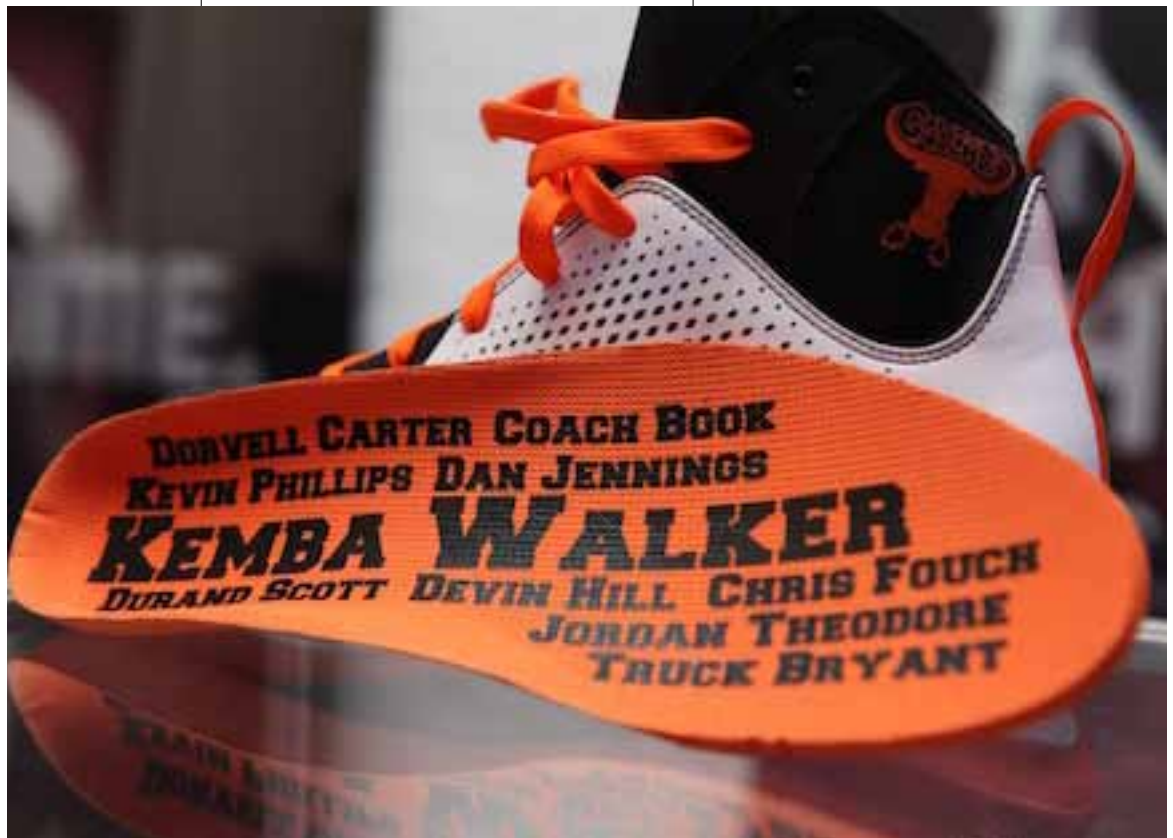
2KSports.com

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

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

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

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



Larranaga Making Mark as Teacher of the Game

CaneSport.com

Nov. 4, 2011

by Jim Martz

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The staff's main emphasis:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Can the Canes make it to the Big Dance?

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

Larranaga works on implementing new style

The Miami Hurricane
Nov. 4, 2011
by David Furones

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hurricanes adjust to new coaching style

DailyTarheel.com

Nov. 3, 2011

Henry Gargan

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

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

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

Yet the Miami basketball program still remains under the radar.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larranaga serious about Miami Hurricanes' basketball

AP
Nov. 3, 2011
by Steven Wine

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

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

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

"Double knots," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larranaga regales Hurricanes with tales of success

The Washington Times

Nov. 2, 2011

Patrick Stevens

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

Jim Larranaga can spin a yarn like few others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hoops Buzz: 11/2

Inside the U
Nov. 2, 2011
Chris Stock

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

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

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

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

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

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

News & Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jones to remain on bench until cleared by NCAA

Miami Herald

Nov. 2, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PG Larkin Awaits NCAA Decision

Inside the U
Nov. 1, 2011
Chris Stock

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

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

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

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

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

"He's practicing and practicing very well," Larranaga said. "We're very happy to have him."

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

"I'm just trying to add something new to the team," Larkin said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larranaga Assistant Talks Scheduling and More

CaneSport.com
Oct. 31, 2011
by Matt Shodell

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's a different philosophy than that of coach

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Barry Jacobs On ACC Coaches

Duke Basketball Report
Oct. 31, 2011
By Barry Jacobs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACC Coaching Roster For 2011-12 Men's Season

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

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

NOTE: Age entering 2011-12 season.

Hoops Recruiting: UM wants "State of Miami"

CaneSport.com
Oct. 30, 2011
by Matt Shodell

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With one exception: Center.

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

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

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

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

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

"Things like that - you're trying to put your best foot forward," Caputo said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* The system in place for giving a scholarship offer?

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

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

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

Hurricanes basketball coach wants better shot selection

Miami Herald

Oct. 28, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Barry Jacobs On Jim Larranaga And Defending The Three

Duke Basketball Report

Oct. 28, 2011

Barry Jacobs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nothing like ambitious goals, Coach L.

What is Miami's Problem?

Rush the Court
Oct. 28, 2011

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hoops Buzz: 10/27

Inside the U
Oct. 26, 2011
Chris Stock

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

News & Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hoops Buzz: 10/26

Inside the U
Oct. 26, 2011
David Lake

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

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

News & Notes

- The first unit consisted of PG Malcolm Grant, SG Durand Scott, SF Garrus Adams, PF DeQuan Jones, and C Kenny Kadji. The second unit was PG Trey McKinney-Jones, SG Bishop Daniels, SF Rion Brown, PF Erik Swoope, and C Raphael Akpejori.
- The two squads played two games to 21 with the teams getting two and three points for those shots, one point for rebounds, and negative one point for turnovers. The first unit won the first game, 24-18, with equal scoring from the entire team. The second unit was led by Rion Brown's steady scoring. The second game was won by the first unit as well, 22-20, with great play by Malcolm Grant. The second unit was led by Bishop Daniels in that second game.
- Following Tuesday's practice, coach Jim Larranaga expressed some frustrations with his team's shot selection. Last year's offense consisted of a high volume of three point shots and while Larranaga doesn't mind his team shooting threes, he wants the shots to be good shots. "Shot selection is very important and you have to know your own strengths and weaknesses, where you shoot well from and what shots you need to pass up," Larranaga said. "Even if you are open, that doesn't mean it is a good shot. Every player has shots that he makes at a higher rate than other shots. Some times you think you should shoot it because you are open, but in actuality you should be a little more patient and get the shot for someone else who can make the three or get yourself a shot that you can make at a higher rate."
- Speaking of improving shot selection, Larranaga got on Malcolm Grant early in the team's first scrimmage situation about taking a three-pointer early in the shot clock without working the possession with some passes. From that point on, Grant did a much better job of involving his teammates by making sharp passes and taking smarter shots.
- While the offense this year will be uptempo and feature a heavy dose of three point shooting under coach Larranaga, it appears the scheme will be much more structured than what Miami ran last year, which appeared at times to be a lot of freelancing. "There is way more ball movement and a lot of motion," Malcolm Grant said. "It is way more disciplined. Coach got on me today even though I was wide open, but he wants more ball movement and for everybody to touch the ball and get a good shot. Last year we were in the habit of if we were open we would shoot it right away, but now we are being more patient."
- Grant has impressed Larranaga with his three-point shooting ability. Last year Grant shot 43-percent from three and made nearly three threes a game. "I don't know if I have ever coached anybody who can shoot the ball better than him from three-point range," Larranaga said.
- While Grant is a great shooter, he has worked hard this offseason to improve other parts of his game. "I hate being referred to as just a shooter," Grant said. "I can drive the ball and dish and shoot those floaters. I have really concentrated on getting to the hole and shooting over 40-percent on field goals and improving my assist-to-turnover ratio."
- Larranaga has been impressed with Durand Scott's ability to get to the rim and shot creating ability. "Durand is a very crafty player that is good at getting to the basket and making shots," Larranaga said. "He can hit threes, pull up jumpers, get to the foul line, and make some lay-ups."
- In the past, Larranaga has had three of his guards handle point guard responsibilities. He would like to see Grant and Scott fill that role, but they will need to show more of an ability to initiate the offense. "Notice I didn't describe either [Grant or Scott] as point guards who can create shots for other people," Larranaga said. "They are good at scoring the ball, but like in football the quarterback calls the play and he orchestrates. He is delivering the ball to various people, including himself."
- C Kenny Kadji has a nice scoring touch around the basket, but it was clear at practice Larranaga is looking for him to have more of a physical presence on defense and with his rebounding. There were multiple times during Tuesday's practice when Larranaga worked with Kadji one-on-one. Kadji has good athleticism, but Miami will need him to play with great energy this year.
- Backup C Raphael Akpejori is extremely athletic and was the best rebounding during Tuesday's practice. Akpejori is still refining his skills on offense and is learning his rotations on defense, but his athleticism and energy will make him a valuable rebounder and piece off the bench. "Raphael is someone that plays extremely hard. He is really in the beginning stages of learning how to score."
- With DeQuan Jones (6-8, 221) and Erik Swoope (6-6, 220) both playing as undersized power forwards right now, Kadji and Akpejori must have a big presence on defense and rebounding situations. "We would like [the centers] to do three things. One: rebound the ball because they are the biggest guys on the team. Two: defend the other team's big men. Three: give us an inside presence so that if they do get the ball inside they can give us some points. I am not saying they have to average double figures, but they have to give us some kind of presence so teams can't just gang up on our guards."
- Jones has been a small forward throughout his UM career, but with the injuries to Reggie Johnson and Julian Gamble, he is learning to adjust to the power forward spot. "I think it is a work in progress," Larranaga said of Jones. "There are some days where he is very active and scoring a lot of buckets and getting rebounds, but for him and with everybody else there hasn't been a consistency there as to how they are going to score and produce points."
- One big difference between coach Larranaga's practices to coach Frank Haith's practices at UM is that Larranaga is much more hands on from drill to drill. Haith would often defer to his assistants during practices, while Larranaga is constantly teaching. "I think coach L harps on all the little things because he knows what it takes to win and what it takes to be successful," Grant said.
- C Reggie Johnson has lost 20 pounds since last season even though he is rehabbing from an ACL injury he sustained in the offseason. Johnson is down to 284 pounds and credits a lot of that weight loss to a new workout regimen of swimming and boxing. Johnson's goal is to eventually get down to 275 pounds and he believes once he is back to playing full court basketball he will get there. Johnson is on track to return some time at the beginning of ACC play in January.

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

Sports Illustrated.com
October 25, 2011
Luke Winn

Malcolm Grant

Sr., Miami

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

Larranaga wants to make Hurricane hoops popular

AP
October 25, 2011

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

Why 8 p.m.?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That sounds good to Larranaga's players.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enthusiasm reigns for men's, women's hoops

CaneSport.com
October 22, 2011
by Jim Martz

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

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

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

Maybe basketball will finally matter at UM.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are you ready for some basketball?

NBA players among fans watching Hurricanes 'Miami Madness'

Miami Herald

Oct. 20, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miami hoops looks to enter ACC's upper echelon

Sporting News

Oct. 20, 2011

by Barry Reeves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New coaches abound in the ACC

Freedom News Service

Oct. 20, 2011

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

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

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

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

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

Rumors hurting Miami's recruiting

ESPN.com
Oct. 20, 2011
Dick Vitale

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

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

Think about it, negative recruiting exists.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Excitement Surrounds UM Hoops at Miami Madness

CaneSport.com
October 20, 2011
by Matt Shodell

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Five things to look forward to this season

The Miami Hurricane

Oct. 19, 2011

David Furones

Coach L. bringing more W's

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

No more blown leads

When Miami collapsed and blew a 19-point lead to get eliminated by North Carolina in the ACC Tournament, it was an all-too-familiar feeling for Cane fans. Those 10 minutes, and the final buzzer-beating layup by Tyler Zeller, were a microcosm of the entire season synonymous with the struggles that plagued the Canes all year. They were unable to finish games and failed in pressure situations. Hopefully with a new coaching staff the team will become mentally tougher in the clutch, give up fewer three-pointers playing that horrid 2-3 zone that let teams back into games, and minimize wasted possessions where the ball is passed around the perimeter leading to an ill-advised jumper with the shot clock expiring.

An exciting schedule

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

A strong backcourt

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

A speedy recovery for Reggie

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

ACC lacks proven backcourt scorers, but potential exists

DailyPress.com

Oct. 19, 2011

By Norm Wood

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hoops weight room results show huge gains

CaneSport.com
October 18, 2011
By Matt Shodell

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Krumpo broke down some of the players:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* The ultimate compliments for Krumpo?

He's already heard them from Cane players.

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

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

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

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

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

Miami Hurricanes players get teachable moments from new coach Jim Larranaga

Miami Herald

Oct. 17, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Coach L said not to read anything into the line-

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

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

Freshman Daniels Brings Excitement

InsideTheU.com

Oct. 17, 2011

Christopher Stock

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

Not yet at least.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hoops Buzz: 10/16

InsideTheU.com

Oct. 16, 2011

Christopher Stock

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

News & Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- The season begins November 11 against Tennessee Tech.

Larranaga, players talk team, goals

CaneSport.com

Oct. 17, 2011

Matt Shodell

The Hurricane men's basketball team has begun practicing for the upcoming season.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scott adds that "I'm going to dream, and I want that championship."

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

"He's practicing very well," Larranaga said of Larkin.

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

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

"I'm just focusing on the upcoming season, every day coming out and playing," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where'd he get that idea?

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

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

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

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

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

* Scott says he's "100 percent" coming off a stress fracture.

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

Scott has high hopes for this team.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scott says he now double knots his shoes.

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

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

After resurrecting George Mason basketball, Jim Larranaga faces new challenges with Miami

Washington Post
October 10, 2011
By Amy Shipley

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other setbacks came on the court: losing star center

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

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

Planning ahead

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

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

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

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

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

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

George Mason Athletic Director Tom O'Connor disputes

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

"I wanted to make sure we were doing the right thing," O'Connor said. "Everyone wanted Jim to stay."

Difficult decision

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

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

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

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

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

"That's something my wife says to me," Larranaga said. "Can we do it all again?"

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

Sporting News by Ken Tysiac

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larranaga Building the UM Program

InsideTheU.com

Oct. 18, 2011

Christopher Stock

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

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

He's charismatic, personable, and colorful.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Creating a Fanbase

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"They all loved it," Larranaga said.

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

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

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

Recruiting Florida

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

Larranaga vows to change that.

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

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

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

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

SLAM Magazine

Oct. 10, 2011

By Jeremy Bauman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What did he work on?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As far as the future—life after college—is concerned, Scott doesn't seem to be in any kind of rush to leave Coral Gables, FL.

"I'm really not thinking about the future—I'm just thinking about work right now," said a stern Scott. "As far into the future I can go is tomorrow. I'm just trying to do everything I can to help my teammates, and when that time comes, I'll have to figure it out. But right now all I'm thinking about is now."

Hard work, friendships, family, a caring attitude, and a healthy competitive spirit are some of the characteristics that Durand Scott is comprised of.

A marvelous hunger to become better at his craft, the pursuit of creating a winning team, and honoring those stars on his right arm will help ensure that he attains his goals—both on and off the court—throughout his life.

***Shoutout to F4L, Chris Fouch at Drexel, Kemba Walker in the League, Darryl Truck Bryant at West Virginia, Dorvell Carter at Marist and Jordan Theodore at Seton Hall.

Larranaga Doing Best He Can With MASH Unit

CaneSport.com
Sept. 23, 2011
by Matt Shodell

First-year Cane coach Jim Larranaga, through all his coaching years, showed an uncanny knack for getting the most out of his teams.

And perhaps this season will pose one of his biggest challenges, as injuries to key players continue to pop up. First it was All-ACC center Reggie Johnson going down with a knee injury. He is expected out until at least January.

Then it was the team's other big man starter, Julian Gamble, going down for the season. Larranaga is hopeful Gamble can get a medical redshirt and return next season.

Freshman guard Bishop Daniels has also been on the shelf since mid-summer due to injury, and Larranaga is hopeful he will begin working out soon.

Most recently it was second-leading scorer Durand Scott (13.6 points, 4.2 rebounds, 3.1 assists) going down with a stress reaction. He isn't expected to return until sometime next month.

"We're kind of a MASH unit right now," Larranaga says.

But Larranaga says he's not frustrated, disappointed or upset.

Those words aren't in his vocabulary.

The word he does stress?

"Preparation."

"I find my job is all about preparing," Larranaga said. "How do we prepare them to be the best team we can be, a better defensive team than last year, better offensive team? The part of coaching I really enjoy is you have to have a lot of preparation for a season, know the personnel and take advantage of their strengths while minimizing weaknesses the opponent will try to exploit.

"Guys that aren't there ... it's not like I'm frustrated. I'd love for them to be healthy and out there, but these other guys are making nice progress."

Larranaga adds that "When you have Durand and Reggie out, and you have Julian and Bishop Daniels and the uncertainty of Shane Larkin (a freshman who left DePaul and is appealing to the NCAA to play right away), you have a lot of question marks and not so many answers. The guys who are working out - Malcolm (Grant), Trey McKinney Jones, Garrus (Adams), Rion Brown - are doing a terrific job. I'm very pleased with the work of (Kenny) Kadji and Raphael Akpejori. Those guys are battling each other, just as Eric Swoope and DeQuan Jones are battling. The guys that are healthy are working hard, making progress."

Without Johnson and Gamble in the front court the team will turn to Akpejori and Kadji, the only players on the roster over 6-foot-7. Because of the lack of depth inside, Larranaga says it's possible he'll use the 6-7 Jones at center in certain situations and the 6-foot-5 McKinney Jones at power forward.

"My coaches and I are a very flexible group," Larranaga said. "We have a number of different ways to play offense and defense based on our personnel. Some of it has to do with having coached so long, coaching so many different players. There were times even last season where I played four guards together because of how well that group played

offense and how well they were able to play team defense. Other teams I had were very big. It was the way they were able to play together that determined it."

That's the big emphasis now - teaching this group, the healthy ones at least, how to play team defense and work together efficiently on offense. And defensively the focus hasn't been on the scramble for which Larranaga's teams are so well known. For now it's all about how to stop another team going one-on-one.

"Our primary defense is straight up man to man with pressure on the ball," Larranaga said. "Our goal is to have a defensive field goal percentage overall of 40 percent or less. We have to begin teaching our man to man principles. Once they learn those we can institute our scramble defense which will complement the man to man."

Formal practice doesn't begin until Oct. 14. Currently coaches are allowed to spend eight hours a week with the team, with two of those on the basketball court. With so many players injured, there's only so much progress the Canes can make as an overall team right now.

"It's clear we have a lot of work ahead of us," Larranaga said. "There's going to be a major transition from what we've done in the past and what we're expecting them to do now. The defensive philosophy is different, the offensive style of play, too.

"There's a major learning curve with the defense we're going to play, and it's going to take some time. And I hope fans will be patient while they're learning."

* Syracuse and Pittsburgh will be joining the ACC, making an already tough conference that much more difficult.

"In my opinion the ACC is the best basketball conference in the country," Larranaga said. "It's the best and got better. For me as a coach, the reason I came to the University of Miami is to try and win the national championship. To do that you have to beat the best. If anything, playing against the likes of the Dukes, Carolinas, Syracuses, Pittsburghs will prepare our team for what will hopefully be a run at an ACC and national title. Is that easier now? No. Is it easier said than done? Absolutely. That's the challenge my staff and players have. That's what we all want."

* Johnson continues to drop weight as he rehabs off knee surgery. The once portly center is now a relatively slim 289 pounds.

"When I took the job he weighed 313," Larranaga said. "A lot of it is Reggie's determination to get back on the floor. He knows the lighter he is the quicker his transition back to good shape will be."

* Asked how much potential he sees on this team, Larranaga said, "No matter where we are to start the season I would expect we'll be considerably better in January and better still in February and hopefully in March. I say that in the anticipation of having a more healthy team."

* Regarding freshman Shane Larkin, who arrived on campus the day before classes began, Larranaga said, "We don't know his status yet as to whether he will be eligible to play or if he'll be classified as a transfer from DePaul (he withdrew from DePaul in early August following a medical situation in his family). We have to submit some paperwork and that hasn't been done yet and the NCAA has to have a ruling."

* A key for this team will be getting Scott back at 100

percent.

"If Durand is able to come back and start practicing, learn the offense and defense - that'll take him a while and he's not even doing the stuff right now," Larranaga said. "We start practice Oct. 14 and he'll be behind. Right now he's in the rehab stage and the trainer will let me know what his status is as we get closer to the start of practice. Right now he's in a boot and only shooting free throws.

"Having Durand back and healthy will give us a chance to see how we can take advantage of his skills. In the meantime we'll give someone else a chance to show what he can do. Trey McKinney Jones has really worked hard and shown a lot of promise."

* Acknowledging that the team is "down in numbers up front," Larranaga jokes of walkon tryouts to be held Sept. 28 that "We're hoping there will be a 7-2 walkon that wants to play, a real sleeper."

* Asked if, other than Grant and Scott, there is anyone he knows will get starter minutes in games at this point, Larranaga said, "There's absolutely nobody out of the running for substantial playing time right now. I've seen a lot of positives from every guy."

* Of Daniels' skills, Larranaga said, "I know he's got great speed and jumping ability. He's an athlete."

With Daniels missing time due to injury Larranaga adds that "He has a lot he has to learn in terms of the game."

Of Larkin, Larranaga said, "Shane is a true point guard. But he can also shoot. He gives us a dimension that you're always looking for. He can not only be a good basketball player himself but help others to play well. He's real good at getting ball to other guys."

* Asked if there are any NCAA issues relating to the basketball team and if Jones, who was mentioned in the Nevin Shapiro allegations, will be okay to play this season, Larranaga said, "To be quite honest I don't know any more than anybody else. I'm just waiting to hear what the status is."

* Larranaga's excited about his induction into the New York City Basketball Hall of Fame.

Larranaga, who grew up in the Bronx, joins a Hall of Fame that includes Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Red Auerbach, Bob Cousy, Clair Bee, Billy Cunningham, Pop Gates, Connie Hawkins, Dick McGuire and Adolph Schayes.

"When you grow up in New York City as a high school basketball player you quickly learn the history of basketball in the City," Larranaga said. "Everybody follows the legends. Then, when I got into college coaching, I went back to New York City all the time. I always felt there were so many great players, so if you could get one a year you were doing very well. Now, 40 years after I started coaching, I'm joining a very select group of coaches and athletes, and that's very special for me."

Kadji Ready to Step Up

InsideTheU.com

Sept. 22, 2011

By Christopher Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- Kenny Kadji will be looking for a second chance to live up to the hype surrounding him coming out of high school.

As the nation's fifth-ranked center in 2008 and out of Pendleton/IMG Academy, where he averaged 28 points, 12 rebounds, and four blocks a game, he had two unproductive seasons at Florida.

The 6-11, 250-pound center originally from Cameroon averaged 3.7 points and 2.4 rebounds in 42 games for the Gators before suffering a herniated disc in his back ending his sophomore season.

He transferred to Miami last August and sat out last season due to NCAA transfer rules. UM went 21-14.

"It was tough sitting out," Kadji said. "We lost a lot of close games and I felt if I was there I could have helped and gave something extra for us to win. I learned a lot of things like how my teammates play. It was tough, but I feel this year we are going to get over that hump."

Kadji says he's learned a lot from his time at Florida.

"I learned how the game is played, how different high school is from college," he said. "You have to come prepared every day and every practice. You can't fall back or relax. Whenever you start in November until March, you have to be ready every practice and come focused."

Last year was also a learning experience from him.

"I'd say my work ethic has gotten better," Kadji said. "Coming back mentally and be ready to take care of body because of injuries. My bas-

ketball IQ has gotten better because of all that time on the bench, watching film. I almost felt like an assistant coach these last two years."

Now, he's looking to be a big contributor for the Hurricanes in 2011-12.

"I just thought Miami was an upcoming program with Durand Scott, Malcolm Grant, and Reggie Johnson," Kadji said. "I knew we could have a great time and I wanted to come here, be coached, and have a chance to win a championship and I still feel like this team can do it."

Kadji's impact will need to be even greater this season with Johnson expected to be out until January and forward/center Julian Gamble out for the season with an ACL injury.

"I feel like I'm ready for whatever coaches want me to do," Kadji said. "Obviously with Julian and Reggie out, we're counting on me and Ralph (Akpejori). It's going to be a whole team effort. Reggie was one of the best big men in the ACC last year, it's big shoes to feel, and it's going to take the whole team."

Kadji, a projected starter, says he doesn't feel pressure to perform in his first season with the injuries to two key big men.

"Not really, but even if there is pressure, I kind of like it," Kadji said. "I've had pressure since I came out of high school with what I did in high school so that's not really a problem. The coaches haven't really put any pressure on me. I haven't paid attention to what fans or anyone else has said. I just want to help the team any way I can."

Kadji and the team have been busy with individual workouts in the off-season including working on his post moves and lifting weights. Last week, the team began doing workouts as

a group as they prepare for the season, which begins with an exhibition game on November 11.

Everyone has been getting used to what new coach Jim Larranaga expects and the style he wants to bring to the team.

"He's been great so far," Kadji said. "He just wants us to learn a lot with the way he plays. The way we played last year, it's going to be different. Right now we are learning a lot, watching a lot of film, he talks to us every day about what he wants and he's been great for us."

As far as the differences between this year's team under Larranaga compared to Frank Haith's squad a year ago, Kadji said: "A lot of sharing the ball, unselfish plays, running, and defense has been our main focus. I think we are going to be better on defense."

Top 68 Team Previews: #30 Miami Hurricanes

The Hoops Report
September 23, 2011
By Ryan Feldman

Miami Hurricanes
Last Season: 21-15 (6-10)
Key Losses: Adrian Thomas
Head Coach: Jim Larranaga

Projected Starting Lineup

PG: Malcolm Grant 6-1 Sr.

SG: Durand Scott 6-4 Jr.

SF: Garrius Adams 6-6 Jr.

PF: Kenny Kadji 6-11 So.

C: Reggie Johnson 6-10 Jr.

Key Reserves: DeQuan Jones 6-7 Sr. SF, Rion Brown 6-6 So. SG, Trey McKinney-Jones 6-5 Jr. SG, Bishop Daniels 6-3 Fr. SG

If the Miami Hurricanes have their full array of talent this season, they will be a force to be reckoned with in the ACC.

But there's no guarantee they will have their full array. Star center Reggie Johnson, who withdrew from the NBA Draft to return to Miami for his junior year, is coming off knee surgery after tearing his meniscus during the offseason. The good news is that he reportedly lost 20 pounds while rehabbing and is now down to about 285 pounds. The bad news is that Johnson may not return until after the New Year.

Johnson, who is a load down low and perhaps the most valuable player on the Hurricanes roster, is the main focus of concern for Miami fans, but he isn't the only one whose playing status is uncertain. DeQuan Jones, a 6-foot-7 talented senior wing, was accused of accepting illegal benefits and is under investigation by the NCAA.

Losing Jones wouldn't affect the outlook for the Hurricanes too much, but other players will have to step up while Johnson is out. That

includes incoming transfer Kenny Kadji, a 6-foot-10 big man who comes to Miami from the University of Florida. Kadji averaged 4.4 points and 2.7 rebounds per game as a freshman at Florida before being injured early in his sophomore year. Kadji will now be a fourth-year sophomore at Miami. With Kadji and Johnson playing together, they will be a powerful force down low in the ACC. But without Johnson, Kadji will have to step up as the Hurricanes' primary option in the frontcourt.

While Johnson is out, the Hurricanes will be thin up front with 6-foot-10 senior Julian Gamble likely out for the season with a torn ACL. That means Kadji will really have to step up and stay out of foul trouble.

Other than Johnson and Kadji, the Hurricanes have a slew of guards and wings. It starts with Malcolm Grant and Durand Scott, a high-powered New York backcourt duo. Neither is a pure point guard, but both can handle the ball and score.

Grant and Scott are both play-makers. Grant, a 6-foot-1 junior guard, likes to do most of his scoring from the perimeter. He shot 42.3 percent from 3-point range last season while attempting more than six 3-pointers per game. He led the team in scoring with 14.8 points per game while adding 3.2 assists per game.

Scott, a 6-foot-4 athletic guard, does most of his scoring around the basket. He uses his athleticism and play-making abilities to get to the rim. He averaged 13.6 points, 4.2 rebounds and 3.1 assists per game last season. Grant and Scott have the ball in their hands the majority of the time when they are on the floor. The Hurricanes rely on them to make things happen.

Garrius Adams will likely be the third guard in the Hurricanes starting backcourt. The 6-foot-6 junior averaged 7.3 points and 3.7 rebounds per game last season.

Backing up Grant, Scott and Adams will be Jones, Rion Brown, Trey McKinney-Jones and Bishop Daniels. Jones, as mentioned above, is an athletic wing who hasn't quite panned out into the star he was expected to be when he was recruited. Jones and Brown, a 6-foot-6 sophomore, each put up more than four points per game last season.

McKinney-Jones, a 6-foot-5 junior who transferred from UMKC, averaged 10.9 points per game during the 2009-10 season. Daniels, a 6-foot-3 freshman from Word of God in Raleigh, N.C. (same high school as John Wall), is a fast, athletic combo guard who can rise above the rim.

In his first season with the Hurricanes, head coach Jim Larranaga, who comes over from George Mason, will have a talented, experienced group that can compete in the ACC. The Hurricanes have increased their win total from 19 to 20 to 21 over the last three seasons. They hope to improve that total by more than one win this year, and they especially hope to improve upon their 6-10 finish in conference play last season.

Other than Johnson's health, Miami's biggest issue is not having a pure point guard. Grant and Scott are primed to turn the ball over often, but they also form a high-tempo scoring attack that is tough to stop. With their guard play combined with Johnson and Kadji down low, there is no reason the Hurricanes shouldn't be in the NCAA tournament in Larranaga's first season in South Beach.

Sitting Down On The Job

Sports Illustrated
September 20, 2011
George Dohrmann

The guard's summer conditioning drills were geared toward one thing: improving the biggest weakness in his game

DURAND SCOTT WILL REMEMBER THE 2011 OFF-SEASON AS THE WALL SIT SUMMER. The wall sit is a common conditioning drill during which the participant stands against a wall and then slowly lowers his body until his knees form a 90-degree angle. He must sit in this invisible chair for as long as he can. It is murder on the quads.

For several weeks last summer Scott, a New York City native, trained about 40 miles north at a gym in Peekskill, N.Y. His days were filled with wall sits and other drills designed to fix the one glaring weakness in his game: ball handling.

"I'm a big point guard [6' 4"], and last season I wouldn't get low enough, and guys could get under me and steal the ball," says Scott. "I worked on my whole game this summer, but most of all I worked on improving that one area."

If Scott's work pays off, he is poised to take a leap that could land Miami in the NCAA tournament for the first time in four seasons and land Scott in next summer's NBA draft. A skilled scorer, Scott hit a ceiling of sorts last season, as did his team. He scored with great efficiency (44.5% from the field, 39.1% on three-pointers), but he also turned the ball over far too often (100 for the season, including 10 in a game against Georgia Tech). When new coach Jim Larranaga arrived from George Mason, he had only to watch a few hours of film to see that taking care of the ball was at the top of Scott's, and the team's, to-do list.

"It was something I knew and also something Coach told me when he came in," says Scott. "So, I tried to do something about it."

Scott trained in Peekskill for several weeks, and it speaks to his dedication that he didn't regularly venture back to New York City to visit friends and family. Other than a few days in June around the NBA draft, when he celebrated with friend and former UConn guard Kemba Walker, Scott bunkered down in Peekskill working out with a trainer recommended by his AAU coach.

In addition to those wall sits, the trainer put Scott through drills in which he was forced to dribble low and move up the court while his trainer pushed against him. In another exercise Scott had to dribble while players grabbed his arms and legs. "I left with a lot more confidence in my ball handling," he says. "Decision-making will come with playing more and watching film, but I know I am better prepared now to handle the ball like I need to."

Scott's choice of Miami three years ago was a surprise, as he picked the school over UConn, UCLA and other top programs. He liked coach Frank Haith, and naturally he was disappointed when Haith bolted for Missouri last April. "But then [Larranaga] came in, and he's also from New York, and he connected with us and made us feel comfortable, and you see that he has some great ideas and expectations," Scott says.

One of Larranaga's expectations is that Scott will team with senior Malcolm Grant to form one of the best backcourts in the country. "They are both very experienced scorers and have provided great leadership for us during the transition," the coach says. Adds Scott, "Malcolm and I, we see that we aren't mentioned as one of the top backcourts, and we take offense to that. Especially after the summer I've had, I have so much confidence in myself and my team. We are going to open some eyes."

On Starting Over and the Things he can Control

Sports Illustrated
September 20, 2011
George Dohrmann

SI: You left George Mason, where you were happy and very successful. Has the Miami job been all that you expected?

JL: It was such a difficult decision because I enjoyed the school and loved every minute of my 14 years there. It helped that I wasn't making the transition by myself. My coaching staff came with me. It also helped that players here embraced us and made us feel at home.

SI: MOST PEOPLE DON'T THINK OF YOU AS A MIAMI KIND OF GUY. ARE YOU?

JL: MY FATHER WAS BORN AND RAISED IN KEY WEST. HIS FATHER WAS FROM CUBA. I WAS RAISED IN NEW YORK, BUT WE VACATIONED IN FLORIDA. SEVEN YEARS AGO MY WIFE AND I BOUGHT A HOUSE IN SARASOTA. I'M COMFORTABLE HERE.

SI: Since you took the job, a Yahoo! investigation alleged massive NCAA violations in the athletic department. Miami's reputation has taken another hit, and one of your players was named. How are you handling that with the team?

JL: I have told the players that our philosophy will be based on three things: attitude, commitment and class. Those are the things we can control, and we can't concern ourselves with things other people said or did or what is being reported.

Miami Hurricanes Preview

Sports Illustrated
September 20, 2011
George Dohrmann

Injuries and off-court issues will force Miami to lean heavily on its guards. Fortunately for new coach Jim Larranaga, that position is stocked with talent

WHEN ASSESSING A TEAM'S PROSPECTS, IT'S TYPICAL TO BEGIN with strengths, but in Jim Larranaga's first season in Coral Gables, the Hurricanes may well be defined by what they lack.

Star center Reggie Johnson injured his right knee over the summer and will be out until at least January. His backup, senior Julian Gamble, suffered a left-knee injury and is likely lost for the year. Add in the uncertain status of small forward DeQuan Jones—who was named in a Yahoo! report as having taken impermissible benefits from a booster (the NCAA is investigating)—and a giant VACANCY sign hangs over Miami's frontcourt.

"Early in the season we may not only play three guards, but we might play four," says Larranaga. "We don't have a choice."

The silver lining is that the Hurricanes have some stellar ball handlers. Senior Malcolm Grant and junior Durand Scott, a pair of New Yorkers, are dynamic scorers who combined to average 28.4 points (39.6% of Miami's total scoring). Two other established guards, junior Garrius Adams and sophomore Rion Brown, also return.

But going small means that the Hurricanes could be dominated on the boards. "It is going to be up to the guards to really help us compete [in the paint]," says Larranaga. "Everybody is going to have to rebound, and the guards who are going to play are going to be the ones who can help us in that area."

Miami must also get better at defending the three-point shot (it allowed teams to shoot 35.4% last season, which ranked ninth in the ACC) and cut down on turnovers. (Only Wake

Forest had a worse assist-to-turnover ratio.) "When I came here and watched the film, those were the two areas where it was clear we had to get better," says Larranaga.

In the best-case scenario, improving those trouble spots, combined with the scoring of Grant and Scott, will keep the Hurricanes afloat while the frontcourt gets sorted out. Kenny Kadji, a 6' 11" sophomore transfer from Florida, seems the surest bet to start along with the four guards.

"We are going to be small, but people shouldn't think we don't have any big men," Scott says. "Kenny might not be well known by a lot of people, but he is really talented. We feel like he can pick up the slack, and then when Reggie comes back, we will be deeper and even better."

TELLING NUMBERS

36 GAMES started by Malcolm Grant during 2010-11, a Miami single-season record. His 1,165 minutes played last year rank third all-time.

100 ASSISTS or more for Grant and fellow guard Durand Scott. They are the first Miami teammates with that many assists in two consecutive seasons since 1988-89.

15 GAMES decided by six points or less, including eight straight that were decided by four points or less, which is a conference record.

KEY GAME

PURDUE Miami's nonconference schedule isn't the stoutest, so snatching a road win against the rebuilding Boilermakers will help its NCAA tournament chances. This is a must-win before tougher tests against Memphis and at West Virginia.

PROJECTED STARTERS

G GARRIUS ADAMS JUNIOR

HEIGHT: 6' 6" 7.3 PPG 3.7 RPG 1.8 APG

The quietly efficient swingman may be the best bet to pick up the rebounding slack as Miami attempts to overcome a lack of size in the frontcourt.

G RION BROWN SOPHOMORE

HEIGHT: 6' 6" 4.4 PPG 2.0 RPG 0.6 APG

An up-and-down freshman season included some promising moments (19 points versus Maryland) and some frustrating ones (1 for 10 versus Florida State).

G MALCOLM GRANT SENIOR

HEIGHT: 6' 1" 14.8 PPG 1.8 RPG 3.2 APG

One of the nation's premier shooters, Grant was the ACC leader in three-point percentage (42.3) and free throw percentage (85.3).

G DURAND SCOTT JUNIOR

HEIGHT: 6' 4" 13.6 PPG 4.2 RPG 3.1 APG

He dramatically improved his free throw percentage (from 67.0 to 83.7) and his three-point shooting (27.6 to 39.1) in his sophomore season.

F-C KENNY KADJI SOPHOMORE

HEIGHT: 6' 11" 4.4 PPG 2.7 RPG 0.7 BPG*

Kadji was among the top prep centers in the class of 2008. The Hurricanes are hoping a change of scenery leads him to reach his potential.

TOP RESERVE

F ERIK SWOOPE SOPHOMORE

HEIGHT: 6' 6" 1.4 PPG 1.0 RPG 0.4 SPG

Made nine starts as a true freshman. Swoope averaged about 6½ minutes last season but will have an expanded role in a frontcourt decimated by injuries. An undersized forward, Swoope's strength and leaping ability will help him compete.

PLAYER TO WATCH

C REGGIE JOHNSON JUNIOR

HEIGHT: 6' 10" 11.9 PPG 9.7 APG 1.3 BPG

Should return from knee injury for ACC play. An All-ACC honorable mention as a sophomore, Johnson was second in the conference in offensive rebounds (3.5) and led the team in blocks (45). His 347 boards were the most by a Hurricanes player since Rick Barry's 475 in 1964-65.

Don't call Miami's Reggie Johnson fat

CBSSports.com
Sept. 2, 2011
by Jeff Goodman

CORAL GABLES, Fla. - When I walked into the weight room, I almost didn't recognize him.

A slimmed-down version of Reggie Johnson was in the midst of his rehab.

I'll be honest. I had written Johnson off the moment I heard the news back in early July that he would be out 5-6 months after suffering a major knee injury.

But that was when he was, well, fat (please don't tell him I said that).

That would put his return around the New Year - and usually, 300-plus pounders (Johnson played at about 310 a year ago) aren't able to come back quickly and in shape after being on the mend for such a lengthy period of time.

But Johnson has dropped about 20 or so pounds and is down in the 285 range - and Larranga and his staff are hopeful he will be able to make an impact when he returns, whether that be in December or January.

"I'm no doctor and just know the doctors told me it would be six months for him to be 100 percent," Larranaga said.

"We're going to have three different seasons," he added. "Without Reggie, when Reggie comes back and then with a healthy Reggie. We're obviously a different team with him."

Johnson gives the Hurricanes something few teams can boast these days: a legitimate inside presence and a guy who can score in the post. He averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds last season.

Larranga has already gone through plenty of

adversity since taking the job down in Miami - as I documented in my story last night - but the return of a sub-300 pound Johnson for ACC play would give the Hurricanes a chance to be an NCAA tournament team this season.

Miami's Reggie Johnson slims down during knee rehab

Sporting News
Sept. 2, 2011
Staff report

Miami center Reggie Johnson, who struggled to stay in shape even when healthy, has lost 20-plus pounds while rehabbing from a major knee injury.

Johnson, a 6-10 junior, averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds last season while playing at about 310 pounds. He now says he is down to 285 as he is rehabbing from a torn meniscus in late June. Rehab from surgery is going well, and Miami officials say he is on schedule to return to game action in late December or early January.

With senior swingman DeQuan Jones' eligibility status is limbo as the NCAA investigation allegations that he received \$10,000 from a Miami booster to attend the school, Johnson's recovery is even more important for the Hurricanes.

"I'm no doctor and just know the doctors told me it would be six months for him to be 100 percent," new Miami coach Jim Larranaga told CBS Sports. "We're going to have three different seasons: Without Reggie, when Reggie comes back and then with a healthy Reggie. We're obviously a different team with him."

While Johnson is out, Larranaga's first Miami team figures to be perimeter-oriented around Malcolm Grant and Durand Scott. Scott is a good penetrator, and Grant led the ACC in 3-point shooting (.423) last season.

Injuries thin front court

Injuries thin front court

Aug 24, 2011

By Allison Goodman

Julian Gamble, the Canes' fifth-year senior forward/center, is expected to miss the entire 2011-12 season after tearing his anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) Tuesday.

The veteran, who was expected to be a key contributor in Jim Larranaga's first season as head coach, played in all 35 games last year, starting 13. He averaged 3.8 points and four rebounds per game while placing second on the team in shooting percentage (58.6).

"We feel awful for Julian Gamble," said Jim Larranaga in a statement. "Tearing your ACL is a devastating injury at any time in your career, but particularly in your fifth year of eligibility."

For Gamble, his focus now shifts from the upcoming season to the rehabilitation of the knee ligament that has proved to be very troublesome for countless athletes before him.

"We will do everything we can to support him in his efforts to rehabilitate this injury," Larranaga said. "We know he will also be there supporting his teammates, because that is just the kind of person he is."

Gamble remains optimistic despite the devastating injury.

"I promise I will come back better and always keep my head up in hard times," Gamble tweeted Tuesday in the aftermath of the injury.

The news of Gamble's misfortune came less than two months after starting center Reggie Johnson underwent surgery to repair a torn meniscus in his right knee.

Johnson is expected to be held out for at least another four months and the team anticipates a mid-season return from the team's leading big man, who averaged a near double-double last season with 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds per game.

The injuries will force the Canes to get creative during the first few months of the season until Johnson's return. The 2011-2012 season schedule was released Wednesday afternoon, and features some challenging non-conference match-ups against NCAA tournament regulars.

With two of the Canes' best post players sidelined to start the season, Miami will rely heavily on redshirt sophomore center Kenny Kadji, who will be eligible to play for the Canes after sitting out the 2010-11 season due to his transfer from the University of Florida.

Kadji, a 6-foot-11-inch center from Cameroon, will be Larranaga's go-to option in the paint as sophomore Raphael Akpejiori, of Nigeria, looks to gain playing time in a frontcourt that is spreading thin.

Larranaga, however, is no stranger to success without size up front.

His 2006 George Mason team that made its miraculous run to the Final Four did not have a single player taller than 6 feet 8 inches.

George Mason, which belongs to the Colonial Athletic Association, defeated storied programs like Michigan State, UNC and Connecticut en route to the Final Four that season.

James Jones Hangs With Middle Schoolers

NBCMiami.com

Aug 9, 2011

By JuliaBagg

LOS ANGELES, CA - "He's tall," said 13-year-old Lyonna Knight when she first spotted the Miami Heat's hometown star.

Knight is one of 57 foster kids at the James Jones Legacy Foundation Summer Youth Enrichment Camp.

It's a partnership with the state's Department of Children and Families, which runs 'Camps for Champions.' Florida International University and other volunteers also make it possible.

For two-days, Knight will meet new friends, learn new athletic games, and hear from motivational speakers.

"We want them to know we support them," said Jones, who shared pointers with kids on the court. "It's a great opportunity to have fun with your friends."

Organizers plan to make the experience an annual self-esteem building event for middle schoolers.

Before Knight leaves, there is one thing she wants from Jones.

"His autograph," she said.

Brown Motivated, Excited for Season

InsideTheU.com

July, 2011

By Christopher Stock

CORAL GABLES, Fla. -- It's easy to find motivation at the University of Miami basketball practice facility.

The 10,000-square foot Fieldhouse, built in 2007, often yields some of the game's best players during the off-season.

Last summer, it was the surprise visit of two-time league MVP LeBron James that made headlines. Not to mention Chris Paul and Chris Bosh joining in open gym workouts with the current Canes.

This summer, perennial NBA All-Stars Kevin Durant and Joe Johnson along with 2011 top overall draft pick Kyrie Irving have worked out at the Fieldhouse.

"That's great to be in the gym with those guys working out at the same time," UM sophomore guard Rion Brown said. "They are on the other side of the court, but the fact that they are in here that makes you work even harder because you see what those guys are doing down there so that's great."

Former Hurricanes Jack McClinton (a 2009 second-round pick) and Lance Hurdle (D-League performer) have also been working out at UM.

For Brown, it only adds to his motivation of becoming a reliable scorer in the 2011-12 season.

"I really am looking to be that," Brown said. "I was kind of disappointed in myself last year because I could have helped a lot more with the scoring issues. Sometimes Malcolm (Grant) and A.T. (Adrian Thomas) would be off and I would just kind of be out there. I just always felt like I needed to step up and for some reason I just couldn't, but I'm just hoping I can do that this year and making sure I'm working on my game to have the confidence to do it."

Brown, a 6-foot-6 shooting guard out of Hinesville, Ga., has been busy during the summer working on his ability to get to the basket as opposed to relying on his three-point shot, which accounted for 64 percent of his shot attempts.

Rion Brown averaged 22.8 points a game as a senior at Liberty County HS.

"I got too trigger happy just shooting all of the time (last season)," Brown said. "In high school I was a slasher then I got here and then all I wanted to do was shoot. I just wanted to get back to how I used to play in high school, get to the rim and mix it up. I think that would help my game a lot more and help the team a lot more."

Brown averaged 4.4 points as a freshman playing in 35 games and starting the final four contests of the season, which included starts against North Carolina in the ACC tournament and three starts in the NIT earning valuable experience.

"I feel I accomplished something after that year, but now I'm just looking to maybe keep that spot," Brown said. "It's a free game now, everybody's out to get a spot. I've just got to keep working on my game to keep getting better."

The Coaching Change

Brown admits he considered transferring after former UM head coach Frank Haith left after the season for the Missouri job following a 21-14 season.

"Of course I thought about transferring," Brown said. "I said I would wait to see who the new coach was and soon as I saw it was (Jim Larranaga), knowing his track record, and meeting him, I already knew I was going to stay."

Larranaga relieved the anxiety Brown had after he met with him and his family and Brown decided to stay in Coral Gables.

"I knew enough about him before I met him so that eased me a little bit," Brown said. "All I had to do was talk to him. First time I talked to him, he met my family, after that I knew I was good."

And Brown has taken the change of coaches in stride.

"Of course I didn't expect that, but everything happens for a reason and maybe this is the guy that I was supposed to come here for and coach Haith was just a vessel to get me here to play for him, that's how I looked at it," Brown said.

Larranaga brings a wealth of experience and a successful track record to South Florida after 13 consecutive winning seasons at George Mason including a 2006 Final Four appearance.

"Obviously with the new coach everyone is excited," Brown said. "Everyone wants to see how the season is going to go, all of the changes. It's almost like my freshman year again, I don't know how he works. It's like the excitement of coming to college again. When I came to college I was just excited to get to work and it's the same thing now."

Larranaga is well-known for his personality, which is something Brown thinks will draw more of a buzz around a program that averaged 4,763 in attendance last season, a number that included many open seats.

"He's a great guy," Brown said. "He's real personable with everybody. When he first meets you, he shakes your hand, looks you dead in your eye. When you get qualities like that in a coach you can already tell how a season is going to go. Of course fans interact with him better, he gets with parents, everyone loves him so hopefully that will make for a better atmosphere during games and everybody wants to come out and see how we're doing, and that's great."

The 2011-12 season schedule will be announced in late August and the season won't begin until November, but Brown is already excited.

"I'm very excited because even with what we went through last year we felt we were a great team, the ball just didn't bounce our ways the last few minutes of some of those games, it could have been a totally different season," Brown said. "Now we're just hoping we can finish those games and be smarter, just get out of there with 'W's and it would be a completely different season. We are only losing Adrian and that is just one person. Yeah he was great for us, but now we have a freshman Bishop Daniels and he's great. He's going to give us more firepower at the guard spot so we should be great this year."

The goal for the 2011-12 season is to make an NCAA tournament appearance, something the Canes have not done since 2008.

"We've got to get there this year," Brown said. "If we don't get there this year, it's a disappointment. Honestly it is. I feel we can get there and get pretty deep there. If we keep building year after year and hopefully we can get to the Final Four one of these years."

Rebuilding The Hurricanes

ESPN.com
July 28, 2011
Andy Katz

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski and North Carolina coach Roy Williams were in attendance, as were Florida State's Leonard Hamilton, Ohio State's Thad Matta and Pitt's Jamie Dixon. Alabama and NC State were represented as well.

Sitting among the headline names at the HP Field House on the campus of the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex was Jim Larranaga, adorning a freshly acquired bright orange golf shirt with a "U" embroidered on the left chest, the traditional moniker for the University of Miami.

For 14 years as the coach of upstart George Mason, Larranaga relished his role as the underdog, most notably when the Patriots embarked on a historic run to the 2006 Final Four. He cashed in on that achievement by becoming a successful motivational speaker with a Washington, D.C.-based speakers group.

Larranaga had carved out his niche. George Mason was a Colonial Athletic Association power and a regular contender for an NCAA tournament berth. The Patriots are expected to be a preseason Top 25 team this season, and one that could possibly go on another magical March run.

He was 61. Yet he wasn't satisfied.

"I loved my 14 years at George Mason, and I know a lot of coaches say this: 'Don't mess with happiness,' and I was very, very happy at George Mason," Larranaga said. "I'm very goal-oriented and I wanted to take a shot at a league that gives you a chance to win a national championship."

Larranaga had an opportunity to return to his alma mater, Providence, three years ago when the Friars fired Tim Welsh. He turned them down.

"I've always been driven by the opportunity to succeed in your own league, so when I was being courted by my alma mater, Providence, in the Big East I knew the money was substantially better, but the opportunity to win the Big East for Providence would have been a stretch. To compete with teams like Connecticut, Syracuse, Georgetown and Louisville?" Larranaga said.

So Larranaga stayed on at Mason in the CAA. The league put another team in the Final Four in April when Virginia Commonwealth made an improbable run from the inaugural First Four to the Final Four. That means the CAA has put two teams in the Final Four in a five-year period; Miami has four NCAA tournament wins in its history.

And let's be honest: Miami isn't beating North Carolina or Duke for the ACC regular-season title any time soon. But getting access to an NCAA tournament berth should be easier out of what is currently a rather pedestrian ACC once you get past the Blue Devils and Tar Heels.

After former coach Frank Haith was scooped up by Missouri, Miami initially flirted with Harvard's Tommy Amaker, but to no avail. Then Miami president Donna Shalala and her top administrators got word of some

interest from Larranaga and, suddenly, there was a match few would have predicted.

"Every individual is on their own journey," said Larranaga, who consistently speaks as though he were giving a motivational speech. "I've never been driven by money, and when other schools came courting everyone thought I would move for the money."

"Right now, the ACC is going through a tremendous transition with eight new coaches [over the past three seasons], and any one of those eight could jump up into the upper echelon and make themselves a national contender," Larranaga said.

The theory that a coach has to move to a power-six job to compete for a national title seems to have less clout. Larranaga, in large part, helped start the trend that has since been followed by Butler's Brad Stevens and VCU's Shaka Smart.

But one thing that hasn't changed is access to players. Recruiting at a high level remains difficult, and in most cases out of reach for schools outside the power six.

"The quality of the player that receives our phone calls and shows genuine interest is different," Larranaga said. "We're now in the battle to get the really good players. Our football team has won five national championships. Our baseball team has won titles. In my mind, and the coaches here feel the same way, there's no reason why we can't compete with the best teams in the country to win a national championship. That's our goal."

Larranaga is no stranger to the ACC. He was an assistant to Terry Holland at Virginia in the 1980s when Ralph Sampson starred for the Cavaliers. But Duke wasn't Duke then. Now, North Carolina and Duke aren't going anywhere but the top of the ACC. The rest of the league is trying to catch them, with each taking a rotating turn in the chase. Maryland is going through a transition with the departure of Gary Williams and the arrival of Mark Turgeon; Hamilton has made Florida State consistently good; Virginia Tech has been a thorn in the side of all the above teams under Seth Greenberg but hasn't been able to get through to the NCAA tournament; Clemson made a smooth transition from Oliver Purnell to Brad Brownell and should be a regular in the postseason discussion; Virginia appears to be on the verge of a breakthrough under Tony Bennett.

It's too early to judge Steve Donahue at Boston College, but he is facing an overhaul of his roster. Mark Gottfried and Brian Gregory just arrived at their respective schools. NC State and Georgia Tech. Wake Forest is facing a major rebuild under Jeff Bzdelik.

"I love the challenge of now recruiting against the best teams in the country," Larranaga said.

Larranaga's current team took a major hit when one of the best big men in the ACC, Reggie Johnson, went down with a knee injury (torn meniscus) that will sideline him until January at the earliest. Johnson, a 6-foot-10, 305-pound center, averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds for the Canes as a sophomore.

"Reggie was going to be an impact force for us in the low post and could have been the leading rebounder in

the league," Larranaga said. "Because of the sensitivity of the knee and the decision to repair the cartilage they need four to five months for it to heal properly. He weighs 300 pounds and that can pound on his knee. So it will take three to four weeks to get him in playing shape."

"The earliest is Jan. 1 for a return, but it's more realistic to think mid-January," Larranaga said. "There will be a transition when Reggie comes back. He'll have to shed the cobwebs from being out for six months. Then we'll have him hopefully for the close of the ACC season in February, the ACC tournament and hopefully the postseason."

Larranaga will be counting on Florida transfer Kenny Kadji -- who never realized his potential with the Gators -- senior Julian Gamble and sophomore Raphael Akpejori to fill in for Johnson. All are about 6-10 to 6-11, but none have proved themselves at this level.

Getting shooting guard Bishop Daniels to keep his commitment was one of Larranaga's most significant coups after he got the job. Daniels will join an experienced roster in the backcourt with Malcolm Grant, Durand Scott and DeQuan Jones, and there's an expectation that UMKC transfer Trey McKinney Jones will have an impact, too.

Miami had the talent a year ago to be an NCAA tournament team, but the guard play wasn't strong in late-game possessions, notably early in the season at Memphis. That contributed to a bizarre season in which the Hurricanes finished ninth in the ACC at 6-10 overall, yet finished 21-15, enough to earn a bid to the NIT, where they lost to Alabama in the quarterfinals.

"Miami did win 21 games last season, but they did finish [ninth] in the ACC, and that concerns me," Larranaga said. "I think everyone thinks we'll be better this season, but it's a new system and a new philosophy and there will be an adjustment. They played a lot of 2-3 zone, and we'll only play zone in an extreme situation."

Larranaga said the Hurricanes will have multiple seasons within one -- the nonconference, the early ACC without Johnson, the latter part of the ACC with him and the ACC tournament before possibly the postseason. To reach that postseason goal, the Hurricanes will have to make some noise in the nonconference schedule. The ACC ranked 16th in nonconference scheduling last season. The Big East was No. 1. That was a major issue at the annual spring meetings. The ACC had four NCAA tournament teams. The Big East had 11.

Larranaga knows about scheduling into the NCAA tournament. He had multiple at-large berths at Mason, including in its 2006 Final Four run.

This season, the Canes will play Purdue, Memphis, West Virginia, Rutgers, Ole Miss and UMass in nonconference play.

"If we can succeed without Reggie in the nonconference then we should be able to set ourselves up to compete for postseason play out of the ACC," Larranaga said. "I've never had the ambition to retire. I love coaching. I have the passion to keep doing it and see players develop and mature."

Opinion: You can feel the passion in new hirings

CaneSport.com
April 23, 2011
by Jim Martz

What's next? Is Jim Morris going to announce he's retiring as the Miami Hurricanes' baseball coach?

No, I'm not starting a rumor. Let's hope he's coaching at UM for many more seasons.

But look at what has happened at the top of the athletics program in just three months. And three days.

A new football coach, a new director of athletics earlier this week and Friday a new men's basketball coach. That's unprecedented over the last three decades or so.

When there was a revolving door of coaches and AD's in the 1970s, there couldn't be a change in basketball coaches because there was no program for 15 years.

Football coach Al Golden, new AD Shawn Eichorst and new basketball coach Jim Larranaga share one thing that stands out: Passion.

That was obvious in the first few seconds of Larranaga's opening remarks Friday evening at his first press conference. If you were just listening and not watching, you'd swear Dick Vitale was speaking.

"I can tell you right away, I am very excited to be here!" Larranaga said, pounding his fist on the podium and speaking with Vitale's enthusiasm, mannerisms and New York/New Jersey accent. "I have no question about that."

And there's no question that the people at the top of UM athletics in this period of transition exude enthusiasm. And they all are great communicators.

"It's extremely exciting," Eichorst said of this period. "It's the reason I took the opportunity."

Asked for his expectations for the next five to 10 years, he replied with a message to fans and the community, "Get on board because you have lot to be proud of. We have great young people in this program, dynamic coaches who want to do it the right way. And so if you want to be associated with the U, with a program that's going to do it the right way, we're ready to take you on."

UM invariably is knocked for its bandwagon fan base in football and basketball. That may be changing soon.

Golden, Larranaga, and Eichorst exude enthusiasm. So does women's basketball coach Katie Meier, whose team just finished as co-regular-season ACC champions and reached the NCAA Tournament. Her passion is so contagious I considered writing a column suggesting she be considered to be the men's basketball coach.

Turns out that Larranaga is just as enthusiastic. And Meier even coaches defense like he does.

"It's funny," she said, "because I do a staff retreat every year and we give each other homework. The homework I gave myself was his scramble defense two years ago. I watched all of his tapes. I didn't actually call him but I studied his teams, his defenses, certainly took a lot of it because I knew we had this athletic team that could scramble.

"So I was really excited when I heard who the hire was, I was thrilled. I think he's awesome. I know I'll be watching a lot of his practices and sitting in his office and sharing a lot of information. We met for a half hour this morning, had a lot of high energy exchange. He's got a ton of energy, he's world class."

Meier added, "The thing I loved when I studied him, he knew his part. He knew what to do with what he had. And then he adapts. Miami should be really thrilled."

Some people I talked to Friday raised eyebrows when they heard that Larranaga is 61.

"Hah," said Meier when I mentioned his age. "I had no concern about his age when we talked this morning. He's very young, very young, got a ton of energy. And I do, too."

So he's 61. That's not old nowadays. At first glance he's 61 going on 41. UConn's Jim Calhoun just won the NCAA championship at age 68.

"For me, age is a number," said Eichorst. "Some people think I'm too young, some think he's too old. That's not a factor to me. He wanted to be here and we wanted him to be here."

Larranaga said his new job is "kind of the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be all about."

No, he doesn't have one foot in retirement. I see more fire in him than in any of the coaches hired since the program was resurrected in 1985.

Here's something else to like about Larranaga: He's the first basketball coach in UM history to have taken a team to the Final Four as a head coach.

Frank Martin of Kansas State, who reportedly lobbied for the job, has been a head coach for just five years and hasn't gone past the Elite 8.

I think Larranaga is a better hire, and not just because he took an unheralded program to the Final Four but because he's a veteran coach with a solid record. Martin could have lit a fire in the fan base. Larranaga will do that, too, and more, I believe.

"Our challenge is to build a program that can sustain success so that everybody in this community is going to be dying to get a ticket and get a seat to watch us play," he said. "You may say 'that ain't happening here.' I heard it before at Bowling Green and George Mason. Now George Mason is an

impossible place to play because of the home court advantage. We're going to create that atmosphere so they want to be associated with our team."

Ever since Frank Haith left UM a few weeks ago for Missouri, I've thought it was important for UM to hire a coach who not only has been a successful head coach but is someone who can excite the fan base and put bodies in seats at the BankUnited Center. Larranaga appears to be that person. He commands the room when he speaks.

"He'll be a first-class ambassador for the University of Miami," said Eichorst. "He's a gifted speaker, communicator."

Some may say "he only got to the NCAA Tournament five times in 14 years" at George Mason. But that's better than any of the candidates considered for the job or any who showed interest. And it's far better than any UM coach has done.

When Golden was hired, you had to think if he can take Temple to a bowl game for the first time in three decades, he can win at Miami. The same could be said for Larranaga: If you can win and win consistently at George Mason, you can win and win consistently at Miami, even in the ACC, which Larranaga calls "the best basketball league in the country."

He inherits a team that loses only one senior, Adrian Thomas, and he presumably will be able to talk center Reggie Johnson into staying rather than opting for the NBA draft.

Before Haith departed, there was a feeling among many observers and fans that if he didn't get next season's team into the NCAA Tournament he'd be fired. Larranaga is convinced there's enough talent to reach the tournament and be ranked in the top 25.

"I'm leaving behind a team that in the ridiculously early top 25 polls was picked to be in the top 25," he said. "I would not have left that caliber of team if we did not already that caliber talent already here at the U, to challenge not only the ACC but the entire country ... I think we can have a special season next year."

Interestingly, Larranaga not only sounds a little like Vitale, the "awesome, baby!" ESPN analyst, but he and his wife own a home on Florida's west coast they bought from Vitale's daughter Sherri.

"I stopped by to visit Dick and his wife (a few years ago) and told him we're looking for a second home in Florida," Larranaga said. "Dick said it wasn't on the market but his daughter might want to sell. We put a bid on it and we have a home in Sarasota."

Soon they'll have one in the Miami area. Can he ignite the fan base and put teams in the NCAA Tournament on a regular basis?

Been there, done that at a program you probably hadn't heard of until 2006. Why not here?

Players react to new hire

CaneSport.com
April 22, 2011

Malcolm Grant didn't waste any time welcoming new coach Jim Larranaga to the Hurricane program.

When the new coach entered his first meeting with players this afternoon, Grant stood up and welcomed him ... by intentionally mispronouncing his last name with a soft 'a.'

"I just like to be funny to get off to a good start, break the ice a little bit because it's awkward - he doesn't know us, we don't know him," Grant said, adding "He seems like a real people person."

Grant knows levity will only go so far with Larranaga. The coach has already promised a scramble style of defense that will require a high level of effort and endurance level.

"Some of the guys that have tried to get to that level are going to have to step it up," Grant said. "You can tell the intensity he's bringing. Guys want to be successful so we have to buy in, do whatever he says. He's going to create a lot of turnovers, and defense does win championships. He's going to make sure we're playing up-tempo, the way I like to play, getting guys dunks. I think it's going to be real exciting for us."

The time spent without a coach weighed on Grant and his teammates. So much so that some considered transferring.

One of those was Rion Brown, who said today that he "was thinking about" playing elsewhere after coach Frank Haith left. But now that he's met Larranaga he says he's sticking with UM.

"The way I see it now is this is great, I'm good," Brown said. "He walked in with a big smile, shook everyone's hand. It felt good. It's hard not to like him. You can tell he's a real

fundamental guy. The little things in basketball he knows can win games, and that's how I was brought up my whole life."

Brown said he knew about Larranaga's track record before he was hired.

"I heard a lot of great things about him from other people; he's a great guy, I can't wait to play for him," Brown said.

Julian Gamble, who is coming off post-season arthroscopic ankle surgery, added of Larranaga that "We're really excited. It was a time we didn't know who the coaches would be, the direction of our team. Through all the time we kept our goal the same, that we want to make the NCAA Tournament, and I feel we have coach L here now and he'll get us there."

While Larranaga mentioned he wants to play a scramble style of defense, it's unclear if UM's current personnel will support that.

Brown, asked if he thinks UM has the depth and athleticism to successfully use the scramble (which Brown's high school team used), he said, "At the guard spot we do; maybe not at the big so much. But as long as we get in shape we should be good. It's really about getting in shape."

What can Miami fans who aren't acquainted with the scramble expect?

"Everywhere yelling and screaming - we have to do a lot of talking, communicating with each other," Brown said. "It's going to make the game real, real fun to watch because we'll be getting up and down the court and next thing you know we're at the other end dunking. It's going to be great."

* Larranaga's first words when he met the team before the press conference today?

"He told us that he wanted us to think about the dreams, all the accomplishments that we

want to get done this year," Grant said. "He said it's his job as well as his coaching staff's to help us get to it. That was really great to start off with."

* Gamble said he's staying in touch with Reggie Johnson, who declared for the NBA Draft but could still opt to return to UM since he hasn't hired an agent.

"He'll be a huge part of our team (if he comes back)," Gamble said. "He's chasing the NBA dream right now, but if he decides to come back - big Reg is a huge part of our team."

Johnson is home in North Carolina, so what will Gamble tell him about the new coach?

"I'm just going to tell him he's a great guy, made a great first impression," Gamble said. "I think he fits the mold of what type of team we have. We're really family oriented and I know I'm going to grow to love this coaching staff. We'll be a tight-knit group and we'll win a lot of games."

Gamble, who graduates in May, says he had options to transfer without having to sit out a year but decided to return to UM.

"I'm excited to start something new with it being my last year," he said.

Larranaga ready to put UM on national map

CaneSport.com

April 22, 2011

Jim Larranaga was introduced today as the Miami Hurricanes' new men's basketball coach. And he has lofty goals for UM's program.

"I am very excited to be here, there ain't no question about that," Larranaga said. "(This) offers a tremendous opportunity to compete at the highest level of college basketball. The ACC since the day I arrived at Virginia in 1979 is the best basketball league in the country. And it is our opportunity now as coaches, players and a community to get behind the program and do something very, very special. It's going to take a lot of work, but the reason I came here is because of the people.

"We have a lot of hard work in front of us, but I'm excited to get started."

Larranaga pointed out how his George Mason team was being ranked in the early top 25 for next year and said, "I would not have left that caliber of team if we didn't feel we had that caliber of talent already here at the U, if we had the capability of challenging the very best teams not only in the ACC but also the entire country. Our challenge is to build a program that can (be successful) over an extended period of time so everyone in this community will be dying to get a ticket, get a seat to watch us play. You may say 'that ain't going to happen here.' I heard it at Bowling Green and George Mason (and fans packed the stands there). We want to create that atmosphere here."

Larranaga also joked that "It didn't take me long to feel part of the program when Malcolm Grant greeted me as I walked into the office and tried to pronounce my name correctly."

Larranaga addressed trying to get more students show up for games by saying "My staff and I will be in the dormitories recruiting students. We will work with the faculty.

"We need to reach out to the community of Coral Gables, the people who make up the community. My wife is the social director - I guarantee she will know more people in the community in the next year than some people who have lived here their whole lives.

At 61 years old, Larranaga was asked why he wants to take this job at this point of his career.

"I'm crazy," he said to laughs, adding, "I love a challenge. I thought about my own career, what goals I wasn't able to accomplish in my 40 years. And one was I'd love to coach in the ACC, take a team to Cameron Indoor Stadium or the Dean Dome. At this time in my life I felt once I talked to Shawn Eichorst and could hear the energy in his voice, to find out things about the other basketball program here, the job that Katie Meier has already done - it showed if the women can do it the men should be able to do it. It's a challenge for me, but something that excites me very much. It's like the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be all about. When I first arrived at George Mason I said we wanted to do something very special, and our run to the Final Four was

that moment. But we didn't win the national championship, and quite frankly that irks me. I think being a member of the ACC, with the opportunities to recruit nationally but with a focus locally and regionally, with the talent already on hand, we can be headed in the right direction to challenge the best programs in the conference and the country."

* Larranaga said that when the UM job opened up he inquired about it through friends that were tied to a Michael Jordan camp "as coaches do - who is going to get the job?" Larranaga said. "They shared a name with me (who was being looked at), it wasn't me. And then they called me back and said 'Hey, would you be interested.' So I made contact with the University to let them know of my interest."

* Larranaga addressed the team, which met with him before the press conference and then attended it as he spoke: "The members of the team become our family," Larranaga said. "We will have the players to my house. My wife will cook for them - you will love her chocolate chip cookies."

- Reggie Johnson wasn't at the press conference - Larranaga said he remained home in North Carolina.

* Two of Larranaga's players at George Mason were from Florida, and he made it clear that recruiting Florida is his No. 1 priority.

"We will actively recruit in-state players to try and build our program with a very strong foundation of local recruits," Larranaga said. "We want to develop the relationship with youth league coaches, high school coaches, AAU coaches."

* Larranaga addressed leaving George Mason, saying, "The players that I leave behind at George Mason are an incredible group of young men. They just finished the best season in school history in terms of record. I thank those players who made my job so much fun every day. I told those players today that when we met in Fairfax in our locker room that I was going to become the head coach of the U basketball program. Every one of them hugged me and wished me well, and I did the same to them. But this opportunity is very, very special to me. ... I love coaching, helping players be the best that they can be."

* Larranaga's grandfather on his father's side was from Cuba, and Larranaga said "I'm very proud of my heritage, of having grown up spending time in Kissimmee and Key West and in the State of Florida, because that's where my father vacationed every year. And now I feel I'm back home at the University of Miami. We're going to put together a fantastic Hurricane team."

* First-year athletic director Shawn Eichorst said of his decision to hire Larranaga that "I was asked what we were looking for in our next men's basketball coach - we are delighted to say we have found it, and it's Jim Larranaga. (He) is a fundamentally sound teacher of the game and will positively lead our student-athletes with a tremendous amount of passion, integrity and dedication. Jim is a man of great character who will be a first-class ambassador for the University of Mi-

ami and our basketball program. He has successful transitioned two other programs at George Mason and Bowling Green. And he is no stranger to the ACC having served as an assistant coach at Virginia - they won three ACC championships and finished in the top five of the AP rankings. Jim is a tremendously gifted speaker and communicator. His players follow his philosophy and play fundamentally sound basketball, take care of the basketball, play fierce defense and are very efficient on the offensive end of the court.

"This is an exciting day for the University of Miami."

* Football coach Al Golden attended today's press conference, giving Larranaga a hug before it began.

* Of his basketball philosophy, Larranaga said, "I have two boys - when my wife and I were raising our sons the two things we stressed (were) we wanted them to grow up to be happy and successful. But to accomplish both those goals they had to be great students and use those smarts to advance themselves, enjoy their life. That's the same approach we take as a coaching staff with this team. Basketball is a game, it should be fun. We emphasize attitude, commitment and class. Attitude, we ask our players to have a positive attitude, talk about life being 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it. Second we talk about making a total and unconditional commitment to being the best at everything you do, every aspect of your life. The third is class - we want our players to always behave in a first-class manner.

"As far as basketball is concerned, I'm a big believer that defense wins championships. And we are coming here to compete and win. That means we have to be fundamentally sound on the defensive end of the floor. We have to be able to guard the basketball but also help the guy who guards the basketball. Players will hear me and my coaching staff say 'one man guards the basketball and four men help him guard the basketball.' Our choice is to be an up-tempo team. The defense will create the offense. One part of our offensive opportunity is to create fast-break layups and open threes in transitions. That will not change.

"The scramble defense - I'm hoping to implement that to a degree so it can become a weapon and something the opponent has to prepare for. But it will depend on the work ethic of the team, because it forces the players to play at a high level of intensity for a (long) time. It requires a deep bench. My Bowling Green teams scrambled 70, 80 percent of the time. My George Mason teams of recent years have scrambled less because we were so strong in the half court."

* Larranaga said he's still in the process of putting together his coaching staff.

* Larranaga has a home in Sarasota that he purchased from Dick Vitale's daughter (Vitale is a friend of his).

Hurricanes hire Larranaga

CaneSport.com

April 22, 2011

George Mason Basketball Coach Jim Larranaga, who reached the 2006 Final Four, has accepted an offer to be the next basketball coach at Miami. A press conference is scheduled for late Friday to announce the hiring.

"Coach Larranaga is the real deal," said University of Miami President Donna Shalala. "He's a winner, an inspirational leader, and he cares deeply about his players and staff. We're delighted to welcome him and his wife as the newest members of the Miami Hurricane family."

Larranaga was a bit of a surprise candidate because of his age (61) and modest credentials, but is universally considered a very good coach.

Over 14 seasons with George Mason, Larranaga built the Patriots' program into a perennial contender in the highly-regarded Colonial Athletic Association, winning more games than any other coach in program and conference history (273) en route to three conference titles (2008, 2001, 1999).

A two-time CAA Coach of the Year honoree, Larranaga earned the accolade in 2011, after leading the Patriots to a 27-7 overall record and 16-2 conference mark en route to the CAA regular-season title and their fifth NCAA Tournament appearance under his leadership. Seeded a program-best eighth in the NCAA Tournament, George Mason rallied from a double-digit deficit to defeat ninth-seeded Villanova, 61-57, before falling to overall No. 1 seed Ohio State in the third round.

Last season, Larranaga's Patriots - who were ranked 24th in the final RPI - finished the season 11th in the nation in three-point field goal percentage (39.5), 18th in scoring margin (10.3), 22nd in turnovers (11.1), 26th in assist-to-turnover ratio (1.28) and 37th in scoring

defense (62.5). During its 16-game win streak - which catapulted Mason to No. 25 in the ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll on Feb. 28 - all but four victories came by a double-digit margin. That streak included the 71-51 win at VCU on Feb. 15, with Mason holding the Rams to a season-low offensive output.

Larranaga earned his first conference accolades in 1999 after guiding the Patriots to a 19-11 overall record and a 13-3 CAA mark - making a 10-game improvement over the previous season and leading the program to its first-ever conference regular season championship, its second CAA Tournament title and first NCAA Tournament appearance since 1989.

With 27 years of head coaching experience, the native of Bronx, N.Y., previously served as the head coach at Bowling Green for 11 seasons (1986-1997) and at Division II American International (Springfield, Mass.) for two seasons (1977-79).

In addition, he has had assistant coaching stints at Davidson (1971-76) and Virginia (1979-86) - where he helped the Cavaliers reach the NCAA Final Four on two occasions (1981 and 1984), finish in the top five of the AP and UPI polls, win three regular season ACC championships and make four NCAA Tournament appearances. Larranaga was on the staff during the careers of three-time National Player of the Year Ralph Sampson and NBA first-round draft choice Olden Polynice.

A 1971 graduate of Providence College with a degree in economics, Larranaga was a four-year letterman for the Friars. As the team captain in his senior season, he led Providence to a 20-8 record and an NIT appearance. He graduated as the school's fifth all-time leading scorer with 1,258 points and was selected in the sixth round of the draft by the Detroit Pistons of the National Basketball Association. He was inducted into the Providence College Hall of Fame in 1991.

Larranaga and his wife, Liz, have two sons - Jay, who played for his father at Bowling Green and is the head coach of the NBDL's Erie Bayhawks, and Jon, who was a member of his father's George Mason teams from 1999-2003 - and three grandchildren.

Larranaga takes over a program that loses just one player in Adrian Thomas and returns four starters and the team's top-three scorers from last season. The Hurricanes went 21-15 in 2011, advancing to the quarterfinals of the National Invitation Tournament.

UM embraces new men's basketball coach Jim Larranaga

Palm Beach Post
April 22, 2011
By Jorge Milian

CORAL GABLES — So why would a 61-year-old guy leave a cushy job at a top mid-major college basketball program to coach a team whose history is mostly forgettable?

"I'm crazy," Jim Larranaga said a couple of questions into a news conference introducing him on Friday night as the University of Miami's men's basketball coach.

Anything but, although Larranaga certainly has plenty of personality.

During his question-and-answer session with reporters, Larranaga quoted Confucius, emphasized words by unexpectedly shouting them out and broke out into a little Spanish.

"You can tell he's going to be a lot of fun," said senior guard Malcolm Grant, who was in attendance Friday with most of his teammates.

Judging by his history at George Mason, Larranaga will do far more than act colorfully. In 14 seasons, Larranaga coached the Patriots to five NCAA tournaments and famously led his 2006 team to the Final Four before it lost to eventual national champion Florida.

After passing up other intriguing offers during his tenure at George Mason, most expected Larranaga to remain at the Fairfax, Va., school until he retired.

"I started thinking about my own career, where I am and what goals have I not been able to accomplish during the course of my 40-year career in coaching," said Larranaga, who also coached at Bowling Green and Division II American International. "One thing kept coming back in my mind, that I'd love to coach in the ACC.

"It's kind of the last piece of a coaching career"

Larranaga inherits a team that is expected to return virtually its entire roster, including Grant, an All-ACC third-team selection last season. But, like his predecessors, Larranaga will also be tasked with selling a program whose existence has been marked by apathy.

The Hurricanes shut down the program from 1971 to 1985 and have ranked last in ACC attendance since joining the league in 2004. UM rarely attracts more than a few hundred students to games even though they are admitted for free and are further enticed by offers like free pizza.

"It's going to be hard," said Sammy Hernandez, a member of George Mason's Final Four team who attended Friday's news conference. "But when I was at George Mason in 2005-06, I was a freshman and our stadium is the way you guys have it now — empty seats. By 2007, there were huge crowds. And not because of the Final Four, but because of him."

Larranaga, whose father is from Key West and grandfather was from Cuba, promised to build a team in which "everyone in this community is going to be dying to get a ticket and a seat to watch us play."

Larranaga's signature style is what he calls "scramble defense," a high-intensity, full-court press that demands extreme fitness and a deep bench.

"I'm a tremendous believer that defense wins championships," Larranaga said.

Larranaga's deal is for five seasons and will pay him \$1.3 million per season, according to The Washington Post. Last season, Larranaga earned \$700,000, including incentives, on a contract that ran through the 2015-16 season.

Larranaga said he made it known through a search firm used by UM that he was interested in replacing Frank Haith as the Hurricanes' coach. Haith resigned earlier this month to become Missouri's coach.

UM athletic director Shawn Eichorst and Larranaga spoke on Wednesday and a deal was in place by Thursday evening.

Eichorst said he didn't allow Larranaga's age to concern him.

"For me, age is a number," said Eichorst, named UM's athletic director 10 days ago. "That's not a factor for me. He wanted to be here and we wanted him to be here."

The hiring drew rave reviews around the college basketball world.

ESPN analyst Dick Vitale referred to the move as a "grand slam for Miami."

"Jim is going to bring a certain spark," Vitale said. "He's got a personality. You'll see them playing exciting basketball and, more importantly, with Jim, they'll play winning basketball. You have to get people excited about basketball and, in Miami, they have not been excited about college basketball."

Larranaga's hiring completes a major overhaul among UM's most prominent positions in the athletic department. Al Golden was hired in December as the school's football coach. Eichorst replaced Kirby Hocutt, who quit in February to become athletic director at Texas Tech.

Miami has right answer to age-old old-age question

The Sporting News
April 22, 2011
Mike DeCourcy

The coach who won it before Krzyzewski, Roy Williams of the North Carolina Tar Heels, was a mere teenager by comparison. He was 59 years old on that chilly Detroit evening in April 2009.

All of which points up how ridiculously silly it was for Twitter to ignite Friday afternoon with questions about how Miami could consider hiring Jim Larranaga to coach the Hurricanes. Larranaga is 61. In the current climate, that should have been the first item on his resume, ahead of leading George Mason to the most improbable Final Four of the past three decades.

Larranaga is taking his talents to Coral Gables because he'll be able to position himself, by doubling his salary to the \$1 million range, for a more comfortable retirement. There's no question that's his motivation for moving.

What drives him to coach every day will be the same, however: the challenge of the game. And it'll probably be a boost to his energy level to know he can measure himself each season against two confirmed Hall of Famers (Krzyzewski and Williams) and one who should be there (Gary Williams of Maryland).

Of course Larranaga will need to put together a staff to help him recruit successfully, whether the emphasis is to be on regional talent or mining the East Coast for overlooked or restless prospects—or both, which is pretty much how Frank Haith built the roster that's in place. But every coach needs the right staff to achieve success, so that's not specific to this instance.

It is true that Larranaga's age will be used against him in recruiting, but that would seem to be a tougher tactic to employ when the three most attractive situations for players

predisposed to compete in the ACC are all run by men in his age bracket.

Some of the concerns expressed involve whether Larranaga would be up for a massive rebuilding job. Well, he might or might not, but he doesn't face one in Miami.

If sophomore center Reggie Johnson withdraws from the draft, as he should, he'll learn a ton from Larranaga about low-post play and be better positioned for a serious shot at the NBA in the next couple years.

And if he does, the Hurricanes will have back seven of the eight rotation players who finished the season, reached the quarterfinals of the NIT and went 21-15—losing nine times by two possessions or less.

Typically when hiring a coach, a university might like to consider that if the right person is selected the process might not need to be revisited for another decade.

MORE: NHL player flips off fans | Beckham to royal wedding | Packer gets probation on drug charge

A program such as Miami, though—paying less than its peers, supported by fewer people and located in a community where basketball is not a high priority—is wise to acknowledge a young coach will pursue other jobs if he's successful. Haith got out, and he reached only one NCAA Tournament.

If the Hurricanes are to lose their coach again in the next six or seven years, what's the difference if he leaves to climb the coaching ladder—or to play golf and go fishing?

Larranaga will be good for Miami

FoxSports South
April 22, 2011
Andrew Jones

George Mason coach Jim Larranaga will be 62 years old when he coaches his first game at the University of Miami in November. He'll be among the oldest first-year coaches in ACC history, and he's also 17 years older than Frank Haith, who jumped ship at Miami for Missouri before his seat got too hot.

Haith took the Hurricanes to just one NCAA Tournament in seven seasons, and while the team was talented enough to get there the past two seasons, he failed both times.

Heck, the 2010 Canes finished last in the ACC, although they won 20 games overall. That win total is a positive at Miami, but the program had seriously stagnated and was going in the wrong direction. That was part of the problem; the school didn't quite know what to do with Haith.

Haith's teams lacked offensive rhythm and cohesion, and the plays they ran late in close games often defied logic; too many possessions ended with the ball never touching the rim. He just isn't a very good offensive coach.

Defensively, however, and on the glass, the 'Canes have always been strong under Haith, who learned much of his craft from Texas' Rick Barnes.

In Larranaga, however, Miami gets a coach who has won wherever he's been; a tough but fair coach who will get a lot out of his talent.

Unlike Haith — a soft-spoken, comfortable coach whom the players love — Larranaga is a bit more of a drill sergeant. The players won't always like Larranaga, but they will learn to love playing for him when they realize how much he's getting out of them.

Larranaga grew up in the Bronx, he has six

kids, and he's built a program nestled in the shadows of bigger, more enticing things. Located in Washington, D.C.'s, Virginia suburbs, George Mason is still a commuter school to a significant percentage of its student body. It rarely drew well in its 9,600-seat Patriot Center into the 2000s.

But after a few seasons with Larranaga at the helm, notably the Final Four run in 2006, the Patriots have drawn huge crowds and this past season averaged 700 fans per game more than Miami did, a figure that would have been greater if not for wintry weather affecting a few turnouts.

In 14 seasons at Mason, Larranaga went 273-164. He led five clubs to the NCAA Tournament and three others to the NIT at a school that had previously been to one of each before his arrival. His last 13 GMU teams finished with winning records. Larranaga also coached two years at American International and 11 seasons at Bowling Green before going to Mason.

The chatter circuit already is flooded with questions and criticisms of Miami's search for Haith's replacement, which clearly wasn't a smooth operation. And many are also wondering why the school opted for a man nearing the national retirement age who's never coached in a power conference.

That's a legitimate concern, but when it comes down to it there are two things Miami basketball desperately needs: quality and success. Larranaga can provide both starting today.

The quality part comes in how the 'Canes play: what they do coming out of timeouts, the frequency with which they switch defenses depending on situations, and their use of players. People close to the program still can't figure out Haith's rotation philosophies.

There will be no such confusion under Larranaga. The man prides himself on discipline and order. He goes to painstaking lengths to

make sure players understand their roles and the role of the team as a whole, which is what should excite Miami fans.

After seven years of dribble city on the perimeter by guards trying to create their own shots, the Hurricanes will run sets and incorporate intelligent freelance, and will actually run the ball through the post. Are you paying attention, Reggie Johnson? This change at the top will be good for you, so you might want to consider returning to school.

Larranaga loves strong forwards with post moves, and the prospect of coaching Johnson must have the coach salivating.

Look for the 'Canes to press some, and maybe at times a lot. Look for them to play with passion and to win on the road. Larranaga's teams loved being hated, which means they won a lot in other people's buildings. Essentially, they took on the personality of their coach, whose razor's edge served his teams well most of the time.

Larranaga isn't going to take South Beach by storm — he's much more suited for rough, cold neighborhoods where there's little grass — but his teams might. They play fun basketball and win, and that's exactly what Miami has been lacking.

Larranaga leaves GMU, accepts coaching job at Miami

USA Today
April 22, 2011
By Mark Duncan, AP

George Mason coach Jim Larranaga has accepted an offer from the University of Miami (Fla.) to become its new head basketball coach, the school announced Friday.

"Coach Larranaga is the real deal," University of Miami President Donna E. Shalala said in a statement from the school. "He's a winner, an inspirational leader, and he cares deeply about his players and staff. We're delighted to welcome him and his wife as the newest members of the Miami Hurricane family."

At a press conference Friday, Larranaga said he took the Miami job because of the chance to coach in the Atlantic Coast Conference, which he considers the best basketball league in the country.

"I am very excited to be here," he shouted with a grin. "It's kind of like the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be about."

Another lure was that three of Larranaga's siblings live in Florida, and their father grew up in Key West. Larranaga spent summers in Florida growing up and has a second home in Sarasota.

"I feel like I'm back home at the University of Miami," he said.

Larranaga replaces Frank Haith, who went 43-69 in the ACC in his seven seasons at Miami. With such mediocre teams, small crowds persisted for the Hurricanes, who are perennially overshadowed in a market that includes all four major professional sports.

"Our challenge is going to be to build a program that can sustain success over an extended period of time, so that everyone in this community is going to be dying to get a ticket to watch us play. You may say, 'That ain't happening here.' But I've heard all that stuff before."

According to The Washington Post, George Mason athletics director Tom O'Connor said the Patriots will move "as quickly as possible, but as thoroughly as possible" in their search for a new coach.

Ultimately, George Mason just couldn't compete financially with what Miami was offering Larranaga.

"In all honesty, the university can only go so far with finances," O'Connor said, according to the AP. "We think we put together a very, very attractive financial compensation package. We couldn't compete with an ACC school, a big football school with its budget."

Larranaga, 61, heads to the ACC after 14 seasons with the Patriots, where he became the school and the Colonial Athletic Association's all-time wins leader.

He led the Patriots to five NCAA tournament appearances, including a surprising run to the Final Four in 2006.

Last season, Larranaga led Mason to the CAA regular-season title and an at-large berth in the Big Dance. After beating Villanova, the Patriots lost to overall No. 1 seed Ohio State.

Before coaching at George Mason, Larranaga spent 11 seasons as the coach at Bowling Green.

At George Mason, Larranaga was slated to make just over \$500,000 next season with the possibility -- thanks to bonuses -- of raising that number to around \$700,000.

At Miami, reports say that Larranaga's deal will be worth more than \$1 million.

What college basketball experts are saying on Twitter

What college basketball experts are saying on Twitter about Jim Larranaga

ESPN's Seth Davis

@SethDavisHoops: Jim is nearing end of his career. Why not take a shot? What does he have to lose? He'll need top assts to get players but he can win there.

@SethDavisHoops: Larranaga to Miami is a win win. He gets a better job for more money. UM gets a great coach. Let's not overthink this.

@SethDavisHoops: Sorry if this comes as a shock but if you asked every Division I coach to choose between Miami and George Mason, 90 pct would take UM.

ESPN's Dick Vitale

@DickieV I realize Miami got a great guy, but I'm not sure Jim got even a good job. It may pay a lot more than George Mason, but resources?

@DickieV Miami hit a grand slam in getting Jim Larranaga from George Mason- He is a fierce competitor & has loads of contacts. Great hire!

CBSSports.com's Gary Parrish

@GaryParrishCBS: I'm told it got "nasty" between Jim Larranaga and athletic director Tom O'Connor at the end. Both egos played a role in this happening.

@GaryParrisCBS: Wonder how much of Larranaga's initial interest in Miami has to do with Larranaga looking up and seeing Shaka making way more \$\$\$ than him?

Fox Sports' Jason Whitlock

@WhitlockJason: Jim Larranaga is an odd fit for Miami hoops, no?

Is Larranaga really the right fit for Miami?

Sun Sentinel
April 22, 2011
By Dave Hyde

The first thing, the very first thing, anyone hiring coaches in South Florida should fear is an older man from the North who receives a big pay raise in what could be the final contract of his career.

That's a general recipe for trouble.

Hopefully, new Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga is the exception. Maybe he's not Perry Clark. Maybe he's not Mike Keenan. Maybe he's not one of several guys who just put in the time, left with a fat wallet and didn't leave with any success.

Larranaga did a fantastic job at George Mason. Absolutely fantastic. Everyone knows that. He was beloved in Washington, DC area. Everyone knows that, too. He had to take great pride in that program he built and seemed a nice fit at the school forever.

So the question becomes why, at 61, he wants to undertake what is a challenging job at Miami?

Is it because he's infuriated at George Mason officials? Is it for the money that would double his salary? Is it to come to a prime basketball conference in the ACC? Is it to move to the land of retirement a few years early?

Don't overlook the idea that Shaka Smart got a hefty pay raise for taking Virginia Commonwealth to the Final Four. Larranaga did the same for George Mason a few years back. He took it back to the NCAA Tournament this year. But George Mason didn't pony up the money for him like VCU did for Smart.

By any estimation, this would seem a young man's gig. Sam Jankovich, way back when, always considered the best guy for the Miami football job to be a young, hungry guy who

wanted to build something. His hires reflected that. Jimmy Johnson. Dennis Erickson.

The most success Miami's basketball program had was under that kind of coach in Leonard Hamilton. Frank Haith fit the model, but didn't have the success.

I'm one of the few who thinks this is a good job. The money is decent. Expectations are low. The state has some good talent (more players in the Sweet 16 this year were from Florida than any other state).

Is Larranaga coming for national success on a bigger platform than George Mason?

That's if you believe Miami is a bigger platform in the college basketball world than George Mason. In today's world of Butler and VCU and, yes, George Mason, they can reach the same success that a program like Miami can.

This has been a curious coaching search for Miami. Kansas State coach Frank Martin evidently had too much baggage from his Miami High days. It leaked that Harvard's Tommy Amaker met with Miami officials - which is how the game's played by a coach to build up his name.

Then there was Miami contacting the coach at Wisconsin-Milwaukee coach, Rob Jeter, whom new athletic director Shawn Eichorst worked with. So either Jeter is potentially the next great coach or this was Eichorst's way of getting his name on the national map.

Ultimately, it fell completely the other way from a young guy to Larranaga. He comes here with impeccable credentials. He's really overqualified for the job when it comes down to it.

But that doesn't stop from asking the strange question: What's his motivation for taking the job?

Former Miami & Heat player Tim James honored before Nuggets game

Sun Sentinel

March 19, 2011

By Shandel Richardson

University of Miami alum traded in high-tops for combat boots after playing career turned out less spectacular than expected

MIAMI — When Tim James first joined the military, he was greeted by a few raised eyebrows when he told fellow soldiers he was a former NBA player.

They always thought he was lying. One drill sergeant went far as resorting to the Internet to confirm James' credentials.

The result was another shocked face. James told the story before the Heat's first-round draft pick in 1999 was honored at Saturday's game at AmericanAirlines Arena.

"He went back and Googled it and he was like holy you know what," James said.

"It's a fascination that [the soldiers] have. It's a good thing because they need things to take their minds off all the stress and struggles and the burden that they have going on across the worlds."

James, a South Florida native and University of Miami alum, traded in his high-tops for combat boots after his playing career turned out less spectacular than expected.

He appeared in just four games with the Heat.

His NBA career ended after 43 games, having stints with Charlotte and Philadelphia. After playing a couple years overseas in Japan, Turkey and Israel, he left basketball for good in 2007.

It was time to pursue one of his greatest passions.

James said he always had a fascination with the military. He showed an interest in the technology while also keeping up with the current events.

"It was time for me to move on from the sport of basketball," James said.

"I always had a fascination with military. People in my house would get mad at me because I'd watch the military channel from hours on end."

The 6-foot-8 James joined the Army on Sept. 12, 2008. He served time in Iraq, but now is stationed in Killeen, Texas.

James carries the rank of Corporal. He participated in Saturday's pre-game ceremonies as part of the Heat's "Home Strong" program, which has honored soldiers since 2006.

James was introduced to the crowd by Alonzo Mourning, and presented a commemorative framed No. 40 Heat Jersey by forwards Udou Haslem and James Jones.

James last met with the team when the Heat played in San Antonio March 4.

"We were proud of him because he still continues to show a lot more courage I think than 99 percent of the guys in this league," Jones said.

"We understand what he's doing is real. We're playing games and he's over there protecting our lives."

James said he still remains a basketball fan, keeping tabs on the Heat. When they signed LeBron James and Chris Bosh last summer,

the troops were critical of the move.

Tim James defended the decision of his former team by saying, "Hey guys, I was with the Heat."

"You just never leave the game," James said. "You're not physically there, but it's always an internal thing with you when you've been around it and played the game."

James also used his time in South Florida to visit his alma mater.

On Saturday morning, he met with UM basketball coach Frank Haith and offered encouragement entering Monday's game against Missouri State in the National Invitational Tournament.

James was one of the top players in school history, winning Big East Player of the Year his senior season.

"It's a long way from the Hecht days," James said, referring to UM's new practice facility. "I wish those guys well against Missouri State coming up. I just want to see the program continue to move up."