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University of Miami
Men's Basketball Clips
2014-15

2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14 highlights on last 35 pages

Jim Larranaga adjusts on the fly

ESPN.com
C.L. Brown
Nov. 19, 2014

Miami has nearly an entirely new roster, so it'll take time to get going? Um, no. Evidence lies in that upset of Florida.

Miami coach Jim Larranaga welcomed nine newcomers to his team this season, including seven players who are wearing orange and green uniforms for the first time ever. Considering that Davon Reed, one of his two returnees from last season, is injured, it's easy to see how daunting a challenge he faced. It would appear the hard part is over after the Hurricanes' 69-67 upset win at No. 8 Florida on Monday. Larranaga spoke with ESPN.com about how he's gotten a team of strangers to work together.

With so many newcomers this season, how do you go about molding so many new faces so fast?

I think we're still in the growing process. We're not anywhere near where we want to be. There are a lot of questions that still need to be answered. I think last week Florida took advantage of our mistakes in the first half and in the first part of the second half, and then we started to make some adjustments and our guys really got focused on what we wanted to do and executed much better in the last eight minutes of the game. As a coach what you're looking for is consistency in execution, both offensively and for us very especially defensively. I think we did a much better job of being focused defensively in the last eight minutes.

So much for taking things slow. Jim Larranaga and Miami have come out of the gate hot, registering the season's first big upset by beating Florida.

Of course it's early, but what did you learn about your team?

On the road, down 15, Florida had a 33-game home win streak ... Certainly you could have folded the tent. One of the things we anticipated was great leadership from Angel Rodriguez. And leadership comes in many different forms. Angel is one of those guys who defensively is very, very tough. He never wants to give in and he sends that message to all of his teammates by the way he plays. He plays so hard. He's so tenacious on defense. When necessary he can step up and make the big shots like he did [Monday] night. But the big key is the leadership and Angel provides that. His

teammates have a great deal of respect and trust in him. That's where we are right now. We're building on that.

I'm going to ask you to split hairs here, but what is his best attribute -- his leadership qualities or his playing skills?

His leadership is what provides all the other intangibles and the tangibles. He has the ability to shoot the ball, to handle the ball, to defend the ball, to steal the ball, to rebound the ball. He has all of those qualities. But he wouldn't have that if he didn't have that tough-mindedness, the will to win and how hard he's going to play.

How much did your trip to Spain [in August] help not only against Florida but just to start the year with some kind of continuity?

One of the funny, peculiar things is Angel Rodriguez didn't play in the trip to Spain. He had an injury and we did not want to take the risk of making it worse. But he did all the practices at home before we left. He got injured in the last day. So it gave the coaches the opportunity to look at the other players and the other combinations. If you look at the Florida game all four of our freshmen [DeAndre Burnett, Ja'Quan Newton, Omar Sherman, James Palmer] came off the bench and every one of them made a contribution. When you have four freshmen and they're all learning and we were able to give them four exhibition games in Spain, now it really is like eight games into the season and our coaching staff knows them better and better as we go along.

You have the best win of the early season, does that buy you more credit, do they buy in faster because of a win like that?

Certainly it gives our team confidence being down 15, on the road, coming back and beating a top-10 team in the country, a team that was a Final Four participant. So our players, they're smart, they know that Florida is going have a great season and be one of the top 10 teams in the country all season long. So it gives us a step in the right direction to know what we had to do and how deep we had to dig to win a game like that.

During your time at any of your other coaching stops have you ever experienced anything like the roster turnover you had and the newcomers you've had to mold? Did you feel like you're starting from scratch?

No. We have nine new guys. Nine players

of out 12 have never worn a Miami uniform until this season. It's not a change for us in terms of what we've always have done; we've always focused on the basic things. It's a matter of getting the players to embrace the style, to embrace the art of improving. One of the things we want out players to do is to get better. The way we practice allows them to do that and as good as we played [Monday] night to win that's not going to be good enough to win in January.

Do they understand that?

They definitely do. We quiz the players on a lot of things and one of the things we do is personnel of our opponents -- not just ACC teams.

I heard that you quiz your team on plays? Is it a written quiz and did you just start that this season?

It is written. There's a question on the left side of the page and on the right side you have to fill out the answer. There were about 15 questions. We've quizzed the players throughout my career, but with so many new guys we have so many more quizzes because the new players are all learning and it's important for the coaching staff to know who really knows this stuff and who is thinking too much.

Do they have to score a certain percentage?

The ideal is everybody scores 100 percent, but it's still early in the season and we're adding things on a weekly basis. It's very likely that new players will get confused. We use hand signals to call plays and some of the signals are very similar so the opponent won't know exactly what we're doing but our players should. But because of the similarity the players can sometimes get confused this early in the year, especially someone brand-new.

Speaking of hand signals, how often do you throw up the "U"?

(Laughs) I'd say regularly.

4 Corners

FOS Sports South

Zach Dillard

Nov. 19, 2014

Back at ACC Media Days in Charlotte, Miami guard Angel Rodriguez could hardly hide his distaste for zone defense. Sitting alongside fellow transfer Sheldon McClellan as the Hurricanes' two media representatives at the event, the former Kansas State guard was adamant that the biggest different in last season's undermanned 17-16 team and the 2014-15 model will be its defensive identity.

Remember, Rodriguez originally committed out of high school to play for Frank Martin, a fiery supporter of high-pressure man-to-man defense. Rodriguez embraces that style. Miami coach Jim Larranaga is happy to oblige.

"We don't want to sit in a zone and slow the game down. I'm not used to it. (McClellan's) not used to it. And at the same time, now that we look at the team, we don't have that type of personnel. We have the personnel to run," Rodriguez said. "Obviously we can sit and play zone, anybody can do that I guess. That's not what we want to do. We want to go out and run and pressure the other team and get open 3s and open layups. It's going to be a different team this year."

Through two games -- granted, a very small sample size -- things are working out for the Hurricanes. Behind a second-half barrage of 3-pointers, Rodriguez & Co. claimed the first substantial upset of the season to date, knocking off the shorthanded No. 8 Florida Gators on Monday night. With the exception of a quick three-possession changeup, the Hurricanes went man-to-man from start to finish. It wasn't perfect (Florida effectively shot 60 percent from the field), but they played passing lanes, sprinkled in double

teams on ball screens and forced turnovers on a fifth of the Gators' possessions. Here's a quick comparison from 2014's zone to this season's man principles:

2014: 100 points per 100 possessions, 47 percent effective FG, 16.4 turnover rate

2015: 96.6 points per 100 possessions, 43.4 percent effective FG, 22.5 turnover rate

Two games provides very little context, and adding to the so-so defensive effort in the upset was the fact that Florida was severely undermanned. Starting forward Dorian Finney-Smith sat the entire game with a broken left hand, while athletic big man and NBA prospect Chris Walker finished serving his two-game suspension. The Gators' starting five included one returning starter, highly touted sophomore Kasey Hill, transfers Eli Carter and Jon Horford and a former team manager who logged 36 minutes.

Florida will get better, but then again Miami is still going through its own adjustment period. Aside from Rodriguez and McClellan, the Hurricanes are working three freshmen and a third transfer (Niagra's Joe Thomas) into the regular rotation.

Rodriguez was correct: the personnel is different. So is the approach. Miami looks better for it.

Which team is poised to surprise people this season?

NBC Sports

Raphielle Johnson

Nov. 18, 2014

Last year, teams such as Texas and Nebraska were dismissed right away only to defy preseason expectations and reach the NCAA tournament. What team out there will surprise this season?

Terrence Payne: Sticking with the ACC theme we've got going here, I'll go with Miami. Doesn't sound like I'm going out on too much of a limb here given Angel Rodriguez's heroics on Monday night against No. 8 Florida, but the Hurricanes were slotted 10th in the ACC preseason poll. Jim Larranaga has a steady perimeter with Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan, Manu Lecomte, JaQuan Newton and Deandre Burnett. The frontline is the issue, but Tony Jekiri will get some help in mid-January with the addition of Ivan Cruz Uceda. I see Miami back in the conversation come Selection Sunday.

Rodriguez putting smiles on faces of UM hoops fans

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 18, 2014

The college basketball world was buzzing about Angel Rodriguez after his performance Monday night in Gainesville. In Miami's 69-67 victory at eighth-ranked Florida, the 5-foot-11 point junior scored 22 points in the final nine minutes, including the winning 3-pointer with 16 seconds left.

His winning shot, which hit the net as a shove made him hit the floor, was replayed on sports highlight show across America. It was one of his game-high 24 points, which helped Miami (2-0) snapped the Gators' school-record 33-game home winning streak.

Miami guard Angel Rodriguez (13) talks with the media following Miami's 69-67 win over Florida during the NCAA College basketball in Gainesville, Fla., Monday, Nov. 17, 2014. Rodriguez scored 24 of Miami's 69 points. (AP Photo/Phil Sandlin) Though his gutsy performance was a career highlight, it's far from the only reason he's smiling lately.

"I wouldn't trade this for nothing," Rodriguez said. "I wake up every day in a great mood, no matter what. Nothing like home."

He said that on UM's media day a month ago, before he began his debut season with the Hurricanes. It's a homecoming that has Rodriguez, 21, feeling better than ever.

Seven years ago, he left his family in the Cupey district of San Juan, P.R. to try and earn a college basketball scholarship in the U.S. He played at Miami-Dr. Krop like his cousin, Javi Gonzalez, who went on to North Carolina State.

After averaging 23 points and six assists per game as a senior, Rodriguez turned down offers from Florida, Louisville and N.C. State to play for Cuban-American and Miami native Frank Martin at Kansas State.

He started 17 games as a freshman, then Martin left for South Carolina. Rodriguez earned an All-Big 12 honorable mention nod as a sophomore, but his desire to play closer to home led him back to Miami.

He had to sit out last season to satisfy NCAA transfer rules, earning a reputation as a bulldog leader and defender in practices. He also bonded with fellow Big 12 transfer Sheldon McClellan (Texas), who chose Miami after hearing Rodriguez would play there.

Most importantly, Rodriguez got to see more of his widowed mother, Jacqueline, two younger brothers Luis and Daniel, his girlfriend and high school friends, many of whom celebrated with him Monday. He said he's grateful for Miami's weather, Latin food, big-city atmosphere and beaches, all commodities he couldn't enjoy in Manhattan.

"At K-State I had a reputation of being serious and not smiling, but I've changed," he said. "I smile a lot and talk a lot. I enjoy it more now. Maybe you'll see some dancing on the bench."

With more performances like Monday, maybe he and the Hurricanes will be dancing in March.

Transfers show their value

ESPN.com
Myron Medcalf
Nov. 18, 2014

It has been called an epidemic.

Players come and players go. They transfer. Players find loopholes, such as hardship waivers, which the NCAA intends to banish. These guards ain't loyal, they say.

If you listen to coaches -- coaches who switch jobs without hesitation -- they'll tell you this new brand of collegiate athlete will leave campus as soon as adversity hits. They run.

Maybe that's true. But sometimes they're running because they're searching for -- as Biggie Smalls once preached -- one more chance. And what's wrong with that?

Back in Manhattan, Kansas, Angel Rodriguez got homesick. He wanted to be closer to his family in Puerto Rico. Like any son, he missed his mother. So he left the Midwest and joined Jim Larranaga's Miami squad. He sat out a year and returned to the floor this season.

You see what he did? His Hurricanes were down by as much as 15 points against a top-10 Florida team Monday night. Rodriguez willed them back into the game. With 16 seconds to play, he hit a dramatic, go-ahead 3-pointer in traffic in a 69-67 come-from-behind, upset win over No. 8 Florida that snapped the Gators' 33-game home win streak.

The epidemic or the cure?

Remember Kyle Wiltjer? Man, Wiltjer had so much juice he earned McDonald's All-American honors following an outstanding career at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon. Then he went to Kentucky, where

All-Americans come off the bench. He realized he could shine elsewhere, and John Calipari agreed.

So he went West to Spokane. On Monday, he finished with 10 points (4-for-10), 5 rebounds and 3 assists in No. 13 Gonzaga's 72-56 victory over No. 22 SMU. The 6-foot-10 forward's tools make him the perfect component in Gonzaga's pick-and-pop scenarios. He's a dilemma for any opponent.

Sheldon McClellan (Texas) had 9 points, 7 rebounds and 5 assists in Miami's win over Florida. Byron Wesley (USC) added 4 points, 6 rebounds and 3 assists in Gonzaga's win over SMU.

The solution or the problem?

Some of these transfers warrant scrutiny. Some of them are just bouncing around, from school to school, carrying their red flags to the programs of any enabling coaches who'll have them. There's always someone willing to take on a bad seed if it leads to wins.

There are also situations involving selfish kids who just want buckets. They won't settle until they find a squad that will let them shoot -- often. That casual maneuvering does not help the game or the individuals, so the NCAA and coaches have a right to be agitated.

But don't put Wiltjer and Rodriguez in that pool. They wanted better situations, and their respective reasons were sound.

Now, Rodriguez could help Miami surpass modest expectations for a squad that added 10 players this season. Wiltjer might be the key piece in Gonzaga's first national championship quest.

They're both vital. They were just looking

for another chance, and they found one. There's nothing wrong with that.

They're not, however, the only transfers who could change their respective programs. These guys matter, too:

Notes from Miami's Win Over #8 Florida

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Nov. 18, 2014

After this weekend's heart breaking loss to FSU on the gridiron, Miami fans needed... heck deserved, a night like last.

Led by K State transfer Angel Rodriguez the Hurricanes stormed back from multiple double digit deficits to defeat #8 Florida 69-67 in Gainesville.

Ok, the loss to the Seminoles is not going to be erased, but beating UF in anything feels pretty good.

Now before we put this team in the Final 4, it is important to note that for 30 minutes of this game they had some serious issues with shooting, turnovers, and especially defense.

Also noteworthy is the fact that the Gators were missing two of their better players in Chris Walker (suspended), and Dorian Finney-Smith (fractured wrist).

Here are a few other observations on a more positive note:

Miami itself was with out Davon Reed (knee injury hopefully back by December), and Ivan Cruz Uceda (NCAA suspension for 17 games). They promise get better when these two return.

UM clearly has a lot of depth at the G spots. Freshman James Palmer (10 points) looks very smooth. Deandre Burnett was only 1-2 from the floor, but he promises to have explosive nights this season. Highly touted JaQuan Newton (2-3, 5 points) also looked good in limited action. Miami barely needed Manu Lecomte (3 points) and he is widely regarded as the team's third best player.

6'8 Freshman F/C Omar Sherman nailed a huge three, and had a monster block

down the stretch. Sherman finished with 8 points and 4 rebounds and did not look overwhelmed by the moment in the slightest. The 'Canes are going to need his size and production this season to be successful.

Sheldon McClellan only showed glimpses of his potential as a scorer with 9 points. But his 7 rebounds and 5 assists were huge.

Sign me up for 8 points, 8 rebounds, and 3 blocks from Tonye Jekiri all season long.

And of course there was Rodriguez. I don't expect him to be that kind of scorer all season long, but his toughness and leadership make this a dangerous squad.....

22 of his 24 points came in the final 9 minutes.

UM trailed by two with under a minute to go.....

And then, Rodriguez did this! (Not to mention the charge he drew on UF's second to last possession with under 5 seconds left to seal the deal)

Rodriguez rallies Miami past Florida with late barrage

Yahoo! Sports
Jeff Eisenberg
Nov. 17, 2014

For the first 30 minutes of Monday night's game between Florida and Miami, the primary storyline was the eighth-ranked Gators' ability to withstand the absence of two critical frontcourt weapons.

Then all that changed abruptly when Angel Rodriguez put his team on his back.

Rodriguez scored 22 of his game-high 24 points in the final nine minutes of the second half to rally Miami to a 69-67 road victory over a Florida team that had won 33 straight at home. The point guard who transferred from Kansas State had a hand in almost every key play as the Hurricanes stormed back from a 14-point second-half deficit.

There were his back-to-back-to-back 3-pointers that launched a game-changing 18-1 Miami spurt. There was the crossover dribble he used to free himself for a go-ahead 3-pointer over counterpart Kasey Hill with 18 seconds left in the game. And there was the game-saving charge he took in the lane to prevent Eli Carter from tying the game on Florida's ensuing possession.

Miami's victory serves notice that the Hurricanes are poised to ascend in the ACC pecking order this year. Having lost all five starters from an ACC championship team in 2013, Miami suffered through a 16-loss campaign a year ago that was actually surprisingly decent considering the threadbare roster Jim Larranaga had at his disposal. Expectations are higher this season, however, thanks to the arrival of coveted transfers Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan.

Rodriguez, a former second-team All-Big 12 selection, will provide the scoring,

distributing and leadership at point guard that Miami lacked last season after Shane Larkin turned pro early. McClellan, one of Texas' leading scorers as a sophomore, has the ability to carry his team with his perimeter scoring.

Before Rodriguez caught fire Friday night, it appeared Miami lacked the offensive firepower to even remain competitive with Florida, let alone spring the upset. Fierce defense, crisp ball movement and timely jump shots from Jon Horford, Michael Frazier and Carter propelled the Gators to what seemed to be an insurmountable double-digit lead given the way the Hurricanes were misfiring.

It was then that Florida's lack of depth began to catch up with it.

With Chris Walker suspended, Dorian Finney-Smith sidelined with a fractured wrist and Alex Murphy not yet eligible, Florida had to start walk-on Jacob Kurtz at one forward spot. Billy Donovan also really had nowhere else to turn when sophomore point guard Kasey Hill got careless with the basketball and struggled through a 1-for-9 shooting night.

The collapse of the Gators will probably validate preseason chatter that Florida is a tad overrated after losing four starters off last year's Final Four team. The truth is, however, that it's a bit soon to pass judgment on this team.

They lost because two starters weren't available. They lost because the guys who did play are still adjusting to increased roles. And they lost because Miami's starting point guard delivered a final nine minutes no one who saw it will forget anytime soon.

Miami upsets No. 8 Florida thanks to Rodriguez takeover

NBC Sports
Rob Dauster
Nov. 17, 2014

Did you forget about Angel Rodriguez?

The former Kansas State point guard left after his all-conference sophomore season, spending the 2013-14 as one of the few players that voluntarily sits out his mandatory one year as a transfer.

Seriously.

He didn't apply for a waiver that he could have gotten as he returned home to Miami because he wanted to be able to play at full health on a team that was as full strength. That would be the best way for him to make a return trip to the NCAA tournament, and on Monday night, the Hurricanes took a huge step in that direction.

Miami erased a 15-point second half deficit on the heels of some electrifying shooting from Rodriguez, knocking off the No. 8 Gators, 69-67, thanks to this three from their new point guard:

Rodriguez finished with 24 points, three assists and three steals, scoring 22 of those 24 in the final nine minutes of the game. He had 20 in the last 6:47, including five threes and all three free throws after being fouled shooting a three.

Their performance itself was up and down, as the Gators kept control of the game for the first 30 minutes, before Rodriguez took over. The 'Canes held their own defensively, but none of the guards that entered this season with hype — Sheldon McClellan, Manu Lecomte, JaQuan Newton or Deandre Burnett — did much of anything. Couple that with the fact that Miami's already week interior will

be without their best big man for the first semester, and that's what you get.

But Rodriguez certainly made a statement.

As Jay-Z would say, "allow me to reintroduce myself".

For Florida, their issues on the offensive end of the floor were once again a red flag. They have no low-post presence right now without Chris Walker on the floor, and there's no guarantee that Walker will be able to provide that once he does return to action; he's suspended for the first three games of the season.

The other question mark is who takes the shots at the end of the games. Last year, the ball was in Scottie Wilbekin's hands, and he was as good as anyone at ensuring that the Gators would be getting a good look at the rim.

This year?

Is it Kasey Hill, who hasn't proven capable of consistently hitting a shot beyond 15 feet? Or Eli Carter, who sat out last season as he recovered from a broken leg? Can Michael Frazier do enough to create his own shot?

Florida was overrated at No. 8 in the country. If you looked at our Top 25, you would already know that. And frankly, losing to a team when Rodriguez puts on the kind of performance down the stretch that he did is not as bad as it will look on paper.

But that doesn't mean the Gators don't have some serious red flags, although it is worth noting that Florida was without Walker, Dorian Finney-Smith (injury) and Alex Murphy (eligible in December).

Billy Donovan is going to have his work

cut out for him this season if the Gators are going to compete with Kentucky for an SEC title.

Rodriguez to Make Much-Anticipated Hurricane Debut

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Nov. 14, 2014

After redshirting last year following a transfer from Kansas State, Angel Rodriguez will make his much-anticipated debut with the Miami Hurricanes on Friday night.

Rodriguez, a two-year starter for K-State and all-Big 12 second-team selection in 2013, will look to lead the Hurricanes against Howard (7:00 p.m., ESPN3) at the BankUnited Center.

"It's definitely very exciting, I've been thinking about it every day," said Rodriguez, who played his high school ball in Miami and will have people in the stands rooting for him. "It's like being a little kid before Christmas. I think we're all excited obviously. We get a chance to go out there and prove what we have. I still think we're going to be good. Obviously we need to make some improvements on defense, but we'll see how things go and see how coach mixes the lineups because now there's no more exhibitions or scrimmages. Everything is going to count and everything is going to change a little bit and hopefully we'll see more consistency on stuff."

With a game at No. 7 Florida looming on Monday (7:00 p.m., ESPNU), Rodriguez doesn't want to look ahead.

"Taking a year off just really taught me how not to take a game for granted," Rodriguez said. "Sometimes at K-State I used to do that. If I didn't feel the opponent, I would just be like whatever, but this time I'm really appreciating every time I get a chance to step on the floor whether I'm rusty or not."

The Gators present an opportunity for the new-look Hurricanes to make a statement.

"They're top 10 in the country and you don't get that many opportunities especially early in the season," Rodriguez said. "It's a great test for us and obviously

everybody wants to play at the highest level. It's exciting, but we have to focus on Friday first because if we lose Friday we're not going to be as happy."

In last week's exhibition game against Eckerd College, Rodriguez had 11 points on 2-for-6 shooting including missing all three 3-point attempts, six assists, three rebounds, and five steals as the team's starting point guard.

"I'm rusty," Rodriguez said. "It's not because I took a year off because I've been working on my craft, but the ankle sprain had me out for some time. It's part of the process, I knew it was going to happen. I'm not concerned. I know, hopefully by Friday (night) everything is going to fall back into place, but honestly everything has gotten better over the days. I just need my shot to fall and after that, I'll be alright. Even if it doesn't fall you've got to find a way and help your team and I think I can do that. It's all about effort."

Head coach Jim Larranaga liked what he saw from his leader.

"I think what you saw from him is how hard he plays all of the time," Larranaga said. "He's a pit bull on defense, he's going to come up with loose balls, deflections, steals, and he distributes the ball very well. He find the open man, he's a very willing passer, and he's also a very good 3-point shooter, he didn't make any 3s the other night. It's going to take him a while. Even though he's in very good shape and he's practicing, he's rusty—he hasn't played in a lot of games and you don't feel as comfortable and confident in your shot and your ballhandling until you're doing it on a regular basis. You take time off, you're hurt, or what have you, it takes a while to get in sync."

Possibly the most encouraging stat to take from Rodriguez's performance in the exhibition game was that he was able to play 30 minutes after dealing with knee tendinitis and a sprained right tackle during

the preseason.

"I felt great," Rodriguez said. "I was tired to be honest, but I needed that because practice is not the same as a game. To play 30 minutes is actually what I wanted, I felt like it was a competitive game and it was finally an opportunity for me to try to get the rust off and see in tough situations how I can help my team win. The next day, as expected, I was sore, but it's nothing new. It happens, I've been through it."

While there were some positives from the exhibition game, Rodriguez wasn't pleased because he believes he can be more productive.

"I wasn't happy, but at the same time I'm not concerned because this is not about me," Rodriguez said. "We got the win and I'm happy I helped the team in some way. That night they clearly didn't need me to score the ball. I always say that I'm going to help the team in any way I can. If that doesn't require scoring, then so what. Stats are only important for those who care and for fans, but for me and my team, all we care about is winning."

Although UM won by 16, it was disappointing to see the team get outrebounded 33-32, which head coach Jim Larranaga addressed to the team and Rodriguez believes he can improve in that area as well.

"I've actually been thinking about that as well especially on the defensive end, there's no excuse for me not to rebound," Rodriguez said. "I need to get my nose dirty."

New-look Miami Hurricanes coast in opener

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 14, 2014

Things are about to get a lot more difficult for the University of Miami men's basketball team, but the first night of the season was a breeze for the new-look Hurricanes. They led start to finish in an 84-49 win over Howard University at the BankUnited Center.

Surely, it won't be that easy on Monday, when the Hurricanes travel to Gainesville for a game against the seventh-ranked Florida Gators. But the UM players head north with confidence, and the knowledge that they have plenty of scoring options. Nine of the 11 players scored, including sophomore walk-on Mike Fernandez, a Belen High grad, who got a big cheer when he hit a long jumper in the closing minutes.

Transfers Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez were the go-to guys, as expected. McClellan, who came to Miami from the University of Texas, was the leading scorer with 19 points on 8-of-12 shooting.

Rodriguez is a Miami Krop High grad who spent two seasons at Kansas State, but decided to come back to more familiar surroundings.

Rodriguez became an instant leader in the locker room and media favorite, and looked perfectly at home on the court Friday with 16 points, four steals and three assists, including a crowd-pleasing alley-oop to McClellan.

"You will be seeing a lot of that," Rodriguez said, smiling. "We have good chemistry. He can jump high. So if you get it up there to him, he's going to score."

Sophomore guard Manu Lecomte scored

the first points of the season on a floater, and the Canes coasted from there. They took a 17-1 lead and held the Bison to 0-for-13 shooting in the first 10 minutes. They led by as many as 28 points and were comfortably ahead 45-21 at halftime.

"We came in with a great mind-set from the get-go," Rodriguez said. "We punched first, kept punching, and it was a great team win. I told the guys in the huddle before the game, 'Teams like that you can't give them any hope. They're trying to prove themselves, so they bring their best game. You can't start flat.'"

UM coach Jim Larrañaga was "very, very happy" with the way his team started.

"To get ahead 17-1 was very much a surprise, a very pleasant surprise," he said. "We kept inching ahead into the 20s, eventually into the 30s."

Seven-foot center Tonye Jekiri missed the exhibition game with an injury, and has been challenged by coaches all preseason to pick up his game. He is the tallest man on the UM team. He is also the most experienced, the only player left from the Canes' Sweet 16 run in 2013.

On Friday, he grabbed nine first-half rebounds and finished with 11 rebounds and six points.

The UM defense swarmed Howard's top player, James "J-Byrd" Daniel, the MEAC Preseason Player of the Year, who averaged 21 points per game last season. They held him to 10 points on 3-of-15 shooting, and he was scoreless in the second half.

"You could tell they were geared to stop him," said Howard coach Kevin Nickelberry. "Every three he took, they were right there. I played against Jim

[Larrañaga] a lot when I was at Hampton, and his teams are always gritty and well-coached. He's done a great job making these guys gel. He finds a way."

Rodriguez is happy to continue his career where it started: Home

NBC Sports
Rob Dauster
Nov. 13, 2014

When Angel Rodriguez announced that he had decided to transfer out of the Kansas State program where he played his first two seasons of collegiate basketball, it came as no surprise that the all-Big 12 point guard wound up heading to Miami.

Rodriguez lived in Puerto Rico until he was a freshman in high school. His family then moved to Miami, where he developed under Shakey Rodriguez at Krop High School into the player that Frank Martin brought to Manhattan, Kansas, as the Wildcats' point guard of the future. Moving to the flyover states meant that Rodriguez would be competing for Big 12 titles with programs like Kansas and Texas, but it also meant that he would be separated from everyone he held near and dear: his mom, his brothers, his girlfriend, all of his friends and family.

It wasn't a state secret that homesickness is what made him a Hurricane, but it wasn't just family that Rodriguez missed.

"Now I get to eat spanish food as often as I want," Rodriguez told NBCSports.com in an interview earlier this month. "That's a big thing for me."

On Friday, Rodriguez will be taking the floor for the Hurricanes for the first time as Miami hosts Howard at the BankUnited Center. He's spent the past week trying to figure out just how he's got to accommodate all of the ticket requests that he's getting from those close to him. "It's going to be exciting to have people you love watching," he said.

Rodriguez has already been in Coral Gables for a year and a half. He sat out the 2013-2014 season, the mandatory redshirt year that the NCAA requires for transfers, instead pursuing a waiver — one that was fairly attainable — that would have allowed him to be eligible immediately. The prevailing theory at the time was that this was strategically orchestrated by the Miami staff. After winning dual-ACC titles in 2013, the Hurricanes watched as six of their seven rotation players — including

all-ACC point guard and current New York Knick Shane Larken — departed. Head coach Jim Larrañaga will disagree, but even with Rodriguez in the lineup last season, a return trip to the NCAA tournament was unlikely. Competing for the ACC title was probably a pipe dream.

So Rodriguez, along with fellow-transfer Sheldon McClellan and then-freshman Deandre Burnett, sat out. And while the end result was probably a best-case scenario for the long-term, the decision to forego a waiver was more the by-product of circumstance than it was a well-thought-out plan.

You see, Rodriguez played through a knee injury throughout his time at Kansas State. He wasn't healthy when he got to Miami, and he didn't want to waste a year of eligibility if he wasn't going to be playing at 100%. "He's a great competitor," Larrañaga said. "He wanted to be at his best when the season rolled around. He did not feel like he was last year."

What that meant was Rodriguez would become best friends with Miami's trainer, working his way through rehab without having the pressure of knowing that he needed to be ready when November rolled around. According to Larrañaga, Rodriguez sat out most of last summer and didn't even return to the court until sometime in the fall of 2013.

The season provided an opportunity for Rodriguez to practice with the team, to learn their system and figure out the way that the coaching staff wanted their point guards to operate. This was just one year after Larkin had been the ACC Player of the Year, so it was obvious that Larrañaga would put Rodriguez in a position to be successful.

But over the summer, Rodriguez suffered a setback. He called it an ankle injury. Larrañaga called it a "lower extremity injury". Whatever it was, it was bad enough that Miami took their team trip to Spain without their starting point guard capable of playing.

"We didn't want to take the chance again on him overdoing it," Larrañaga said. "He's

not someone that knows how to give 75%. It's all or nothing." It was the right decision — you don't risk injury to one of your team's most important players in games that don't matter — but it still was a disappointment for both the player and the program. Those foreign trips are great for team bonding, providing a cultural experience to the players on the roster and for allowing them to gauge just how good professional basketball is overseas. But it's also an opportunity for a program to work out some kicks and to get a head start on figuring out things like role allocation, a rotation and how each individual is going to fit into the group.

In simpler terms, teams learn how to play together, and Rodriguez would not be a beneficiary.

As a result, the first time that Rodriguez would suit up with his Miami teammates would be during the fall, in scrimmages and exhibition games. By the time that the Hurricanes go to Gainesville to visit Florida, he'll have played in all of one game and one exhibition with his new team.

So the experience may not be there just yet.

But Rodriguez isn't worried. He's ready to get back out on the court in whatever role the team needs him in.

"If one night they need me to score, I will," he said. "But I know for sure that every night, I'm going to pay defense and play hard and try to impact the game in ways that doesn't require scoring."

And he's happy he's able to do it in a place where all of his loved ones can come see him play.

"I left to be close to my family," he said, "and there's not a closer school than Miami."

Larrañaga eager to mold new crop of 'Canes

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Nov. 13, 2014

There was the day he used a colander, some plastic cups and water to show his new-look team the value of defense. And then there are the quizzes Jim Larrañaga uses to make sure his players know the hand signals they'll use in some of the ACC's loudest arenas where the Hurricanes won't be able to hear themselves think.

Every day, Larrañaga — who happens to be a professor as well as basketball coach at Miami — strives to make teaching the game interesting for his players. It's an approach that's worked for the 65-year-old coach, especially considering the kind of work he's had to put into each of his previous three seasons with the Hurricanes, who host Howard in their season opener Friday.

During his relatively short tenure at UM, Larrañaga has presided over an ACC Championship run, navigated a protracted NCAA investigation and is poised to embark on another rebuilding job with a roster that features nine newcomers and just two returning players — Tony Jekiri and Manu Lecomte — from last year's 17-16 team. One other returning player, guard Davon Reed — will be out several months after having offseason knee surgery. That's just one more twist for Larrañaga, who has adapted to changes every season in Coral Gables.

Still, the coach isn't fazed. Instead, he embraces the challenge of figuring out what will work best for each particular team and his individual players.

"There are some coaches that have been able to play the same offense and use the same defense throughout their careers. I have not had that pleasure," Larrañaga said. "But one of the benefits of having

coached for as long as I have is that I've had all different kinds of players and all different kinds of style of play based on the strengths and weaknesses of the talent that we had in a given year."

This year, Larrañaga's efforts should be helped by the addition of two top-notch transfers in Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan. Though both will be donning Miami uniforms for the first time, Rodriguez and McClellan are expected to give the Hurricanes experience, solid guard play and a scoring punch that was missing last season when Miami averaged just 61.5 points per game and lost eight games by five points or less.

Redshirt freshman Deandre Burnett, a 2012 Parade All-American who averaged 37 points his senior year at Miami Carol City High, is also expected to provide a scoring boost. Burnett injured his left wrist during the preseason last November and redshirted, but like Rodriguez and McClellan is eager to get back on the court and help give Miami a scoring spark.

"I was just learning. Last year, for everybody, was just a big learning process — even for the coaches," Burnett said. "I think I learned a lot sitting out and watching."

Along with helping his team improve its scoring numbers from a season ago, Larrañaga will be tasked with helping Miami overcome what will likely be a size deficit. Seven-footer Jekiri is the Hurricanes' lone big man, especially with forward Ivan Cruz Uceda sidelined until January because of an eligibility issue.

Still, if anyone's shown he can work with what he has, it's Larrañaga. And his players say they're willing to do their part to deliver for him.

"He just makes you feel like there's no other place to be and that's why I came here," said McClellan, who averaged 13.5 points as a sophomore at Texas. "He's the best coach I ever played for. . . . He gives me so much confidence and so many positive things to look forward to."

Can the ACC produce four Final Four teams?

NBC Sports
Rob Dauster
Nov. 13, 2014

We're entering a new era in the ACC, as Louisville enters the conference while Maryland exits to the Big Ten. Some old rivalries will die as a result — the Duke-Maryland rivalry in the early-2000s was as good as it gets — but the ACC is now the best conference in the country. The top four teams in the conference are all good enough to make a Final Four and win the ACC regular season title. There are at least six more teams that will have a chance to earn an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament. It's going to be a fun league to watch play out.

REALIGNMENT MOVES

In: Louisville
Out: Maryland

FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. The top four in the ACC is clear-cut: Duke, North Carolina, Louisville and Virginia. Those are the four best teams in the ACC, and there really isn't a debate to be had there. All four are ranked in the top ten of the NBCSports.com preseason poll, and all four are legitimate national title contenders. What order those four should be ranked is something we are all going to disagree on, but the bottom-line is this: no one else in the conference can even be called a consensus top 25 team. That said ...

2. ... the race for fifth place will be just as contested: There may not be another consensus top 25 team in the conference, but there are six teams in the league that could end up being ranked at some point during the season and earning themselves an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament. All six could also end up missing the NCAA tournament. We have Notre Dame fifth and Miami tenth in our preseason poll. You could flip-flop them and I wouldn't argue all that much. The middle of the league is going to be a mess.

3. The offseason talking points had more to do with students than athletes: Despite the fact that the ACC is home to four top ten teams, four players that made at least one appearance as a preseason first-team all-american and four hall of fame head coaches, the stories that dominated the headlines this offseason were all bad. Syracuse is staring down the barrel of an NCAA investigation into academic improprieties, improper benefits, failed drug tests and who knows what else. But those issues paled in comparison to what North Carolina dealt with this fall, as a damaging independent investigation into the academic fraud in the athletic department — the Wainstein Report — legitimized the questions surrounding Roy Williams' program. It's bad enough that there's a real chance the 2005 national title could end up being vacated.

4. It's been two years since a blueblood won an ACC title: For all the talk of the ACC's bluebloods — Duke and North Carolina — and the storied programs the league swiped from the Big East — Syracuse, Pitt, Louisville — it's mildly surprising that it has been a full two years since anyone of those programs have won an ACC regular season or tournament title. In 2014, Virginia won dual ACC titles. In 2013, Miami did the same.

5. Best point guard play in the country: You like watching elite ball-handlers? You'll love the ACC this season. North Carolina's Marcus Paige and Louisville's Terry Rozier are going to get the majority of the attention, but that's just the beginning of it. Notre Dame's Jerian Grant is talented enough to put together an all-american caliber campaign. Miami's Angel Rodriguez was an all-Big 12 point guard before transferring out of Kansas State. Duke's Tyus

Jones is the nation's best freshman point guard. Olivier Hanlan (Boston College), Codi Miller-McIntyre (Wake Forest), Xavier Rathan-Mayes (Florida State), Cat Barber (N.C. State). There are going to be some really good point guards that don't sniff the all-ACC team.

PRESEASON ACC PLAYER OF THE YEAR: Jahliil Okafor, Duke

Jahliil Okafor is my pick to be the National Player of the Year this season, so it would only make sense that he is the Preseason ACC Player of the Year as well. I expect Okafor to have an impact as a freshman similar to that of Jabari Parker last season, as the 6-foot-11 center will be the most-skilled low-post player in the country.

THE REST OF THE ALL-ACC FIRST TEAM:

Marcus Paige, North Carolina, Jr.: Paige was dominant at times as a sophomore, as he learned how to play the role of facilitator until he needed to take over.

Montrezl Harrell, Louisville, Jr.: Louisville caught a bit of a break when Harrell made the decision to return to school for his junior season. We know about his work in the paint, but he's hitting threes now as well.

Malcolm Brogdon, Virginia, Jr.: Brogdon is one of the most underrated players in the country. He's not flashy and won't post huge numbers, but he's consistent and the key for Virginia offensively.

Jerian Grant, Notre Dame, Sr.: Grant was having an all-american caliber season when he was suspended from school for the second semester. Expect him to pick up where he left off.

FIVE MORE NAMES TO KNOW:

Terry Rozier, Louisville, So.

Angel Rodriguez, Miami, Jr.

Olivier Hanlan, Boston College, Jr.

Aaron Thomas, Florida State, Jr.

Tyus Jones, Duke, Fr.

BREAKOUT STAR: Terry Rozier had a handful of impressive performances as a freshman, but consistent minutes were tough for him to come by. Part of that was the result of playing the same position as all-american Russ Smith. But it wasn't a secret that Rozier was the best pro prospect on Louisville's roster last season, and using the 6-foot-2 combo-guard in a reserve role helped ensure that Rozier would be back for another season.

COACH UNDER PRESSURE: Georgia Tech head coach Brian Gregory is the obvious pick here, but it's also the boring one. We know that the Yellow Jackets have not been good during his tenure, and when you're the coach at an ACC school that isn't winning, you're job will be in jeopardy. What's more interesting is the status of hall of famers Jim Boeheim and Roy Williams. Syracuse is currently dealing with an NCAA investigation into issues with academics and improper benefits while North Carolina is undergoing intense scrutiny regarding their use of "paper classes" and just how much of the cheating Williams was aware of.

Are they in danger of losing their jobs? Not unless they want to retire. But you'd be hard-pressed to find a pair of coaches in any league facing more pressure entering the season than those two.

ON SELECTION SUNDAY WE'LL BE SAYING ... : The ACC might get four teams into the Final Four, but will anyone else win a game?

I'M MOST EXCITED ABOUT : Watching the top four teams in this league battle it out for a regular season title. The race for ACC Player of the Year will be fun as well.

FIVE NON-CONFERENCE GAMES TO CIRCLE ON YOUR CALENDAR:

12/3, Duke at Wisconsin (ACC/Big Ten Challenge)

12/6, Virginia at VCU

12/13, North Carolina at Kentucky

12/18, Duke vs. UConn (at the Izod Center)

12/27, Kentucky at Louisville

ONE TWITTER FEED TO FOLLOW: @scacchoops

PREDICTED FINISH

1. Duke: I have my doubts about Duke, but the Blue Devils have the single-toughest matchup in the ACC in Jahliil Okafor roaming the paint and a ton of perimeter depth to surround him.

2. North Carolina: Picking the Tar Heels here means two things: Brice Johnson and Kennedy Meeks both lived up to their potential, and Justin Jackson played like the McDonald's All-American he is.

3. Virginia: The 'Hoos don't look menacing on paper, but they return the majority of their roster from a team that won a dual-ACC title last season.

4. Louisville: Love Rozier and Harrell, but there are some real question marks elsewhere on the roster. That said, a fourth-place finish in the ACC could still yield a top three seed.

5. Notre Dame: Jerian Grant — and, to a lesser extent, Patrick Connaughton — good enough to get Notre Dame to .500 on his own. The Irish will be a tournament team if Zach Auguste, Demetrius Jackson and Steve Vasturia improve.

6. Syracuse: The Orange are loaded with athletes, especially in their front court. But the inconsistent Trevor Cooney is the only proven scorer and Kaleb Joseph is the only point guard. I could see the Orange missing the tournament.

7. N.C. State: Cat Barber, Ralston Turner and Trevor Lacey is a talented back court, BeeJay Anya has shed a bunch of weight and Abdul-Malik Abu could end up being an all-freshmen team player.

8. Pitt: Getting Durand Johnson back healthy is key, as is the return of Cameron Wright and James Robinson. How good will Sheldon Jeter and Michael Young be up front?

9. Florida State: Aaron Thomas is one of the most underrated players in the league and the addition of Xavier Rathan-Mayes should be key. If they address their turnover and defensive rebounding issues, a top five finish is feasible.

10. Miami: The quartet of Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan, Deandre Burnett and JaQuan Newton gives the Canes a talented perimeter. But what about their front line?

11. Wake Forest: The Demon Deacons have had made a habit of picking off elite opponents at home, but they'll need to shore up their defense and get help for Codi Miller-McIntyre and Devin Thomas to finish in the top half of the league in Danny Manning's first year.

12. Georgia Tech: Point guard play is still an issue, but DeMarco Cox and Charles Mitchell are both eligible up front while Marcus Georges-Hunt is underrated on the wing.

13. Clemson: The Tigers were a top 20 defensive team last season, and while they return a number of veterans, they lose K.J. McDaniels, their best defender and leading scorer.

14. Virginia Tech: The future looks bright in Blacksburg with Buzz Williams coming to town, but it's going to take some time for him to get enough talent into the program to compete near the top of the ACC.

15. Boston College: The Eagles bring back Olivier Hanlan, but they lose Ryan Anderson, among others, and look destined for the ACC cellar.

Transfers Rodriguez & McClellan key to Miami's resurgence

Syracuse.com

Patrick Stevens

Nov. 12, 2014

One of 15 posts previewing the ACC basketball season, which begins later this week.

Last year's record: 17-16, 7-11 ACC

The plot: Forget what you saw last year. Just forget it. Working with a limited roster, the irrepressible Jim Larrañaga slowed the pace at both ends of the floor, by advocating a deliberate offense and often relying on zone to force opponents to take their time finding shots.

Miami won't finish last in the country in possessions per game. With point guard Angel Rodriguez and wing Sheldon McClellan eligible after transferring from Kansas State and Texas, respectively, the Hurricanes have some intriguing elements on offense. The big question, though, is whether Miami has enough size to be effective.

Best player: Rodriguez. There's a good chance McClellan will lead Miami in scoring. But Rodriguez is the table-setter who will make the Hurricanes' offense work efficiently. After playing for Frank Martin at Kansas State, Rodriguez is well-prepared to deal with a defense-first coach like Larrañaga as well.

Upside: Being overlooked is part of life at Miami, a city where winning big is the only way to etch a place in the public consciousness. But while the Hurricanes don't have the depth and experience of two years ago, when they won the ACC regular season and tournament, they have enough in place to make it into the NCAA tournament with ease. A fifth-place finish in the ACC's regular-season standings is plausible.

Downside: The Hurricanes' big men simply aren't effective enough (especially in nonconference play when Ivan Cruz Uceda is suspended for an eligibility issue), and the ACC's beefier teams pick Miami apart in the post. Miami is improved and a much easier team to watch, but it struggles to get to 20 wins and an NIT bid.

Circle it on the calendar: Jan. 3 vs. Virginia. The Hurricanes' conference opener comes at home against defending league champion Virginia. Picking off the Cavaliers won't be an easy task, but it is an early opportunity for Miami to demonstrate it will have to be accounted for this season in the ACC title chase.

New name to know: McClellan. A guy who averaged 13.5 points in the Big 12 at Texas is probably going to do just fine in the ACC at Miami. He quickly identified Miami as a possible landing spot when he opted to transfer, and his style of play is well-suited to the Hurricanes' approach.

Projection: 21-10, 10-8 ACC

UM preview: Transfer players should provide spark

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 11, 2014

Much of the talk among University of Miami men's basketball fans this preseason centered on transfers Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan. The duo is eligible to play after a year on the bench, and that is certainly the most obvious storyline heading into Friday's home season opener against Howard.

Rodriguez, a native of Puerto Rico and a Miami Krop High grad, is thrilled to be home from Kansas State and couldn't wait to get back on the court. He made second-team All-Big 12 as a sophomore point guard at K-State, but was homesick for Miami weather and Latin culture.

McClellan, a high-octane 6-5 guard, was unhappy at the University of Texas, and fell in love with the Canes after watching them play in Austin during their Sweet 16 run in 2013. He contacted former UM star Shane Larkin on Twitter, got the transfer ball rolling, and is so happy with Miami he says, "I should have come here as a freshman."

The two players bonded on the bench last season.

"We've both been two years in college, so we know what it takes to win," McClellan said. "Just sitting there in suits, watching the losses, and the almost-wins, when we felt we could have made a difference, that was really tough. We talked about what we could do next year. We know every guy on the other teams. I don't know if they know us, but we know them and what they do."

There is no question McClellan and Rodriguez will share a huge load of responsibility. In an exhibition win against

Eckerd College last week, McClellan was 7 of 10 for 24 points. Rodriguez had 11 points, six assists and five steals.

But there is a lesser-known newcomer, a guy with a plain name and an unflashy résumé, whom coach Jim Larrañaga predicts could be the Hurricanes' "secret weapon." His name is Joe Thomas. He is a Miami native. And he is a 23-year-old grad student.

Thomas was Rodriguez's teammate at Krop, where he averaged 12 points, 10 rebounds and four assists as a senior. He was not highly-recruited, so he wound up at Niagara University in New York. He redshirted as a freshman, played three seasons, and he had an additional year of eligibility remaining when he graduated last May with a Criminal Justice degree.

He averaged 3.1 points and 2.9 rebounds during his Niagara career, and wasn't sure whether he should pursue another season. He knew he didn't want to stay at Niagara, so he came home and began exploring options. He called Rodriguez and asked if UM had open gym sessions because he wanted to stay in shape. Not only did UM have open gym, it had one open scholarship left. Rodriguez urged Thomas to try out. He showed up, and coaches were so impressed they gave him the scholarship.

"My assistants are great recruiters, but not a single one of them had ever heard of Joe Thomas," Larrañaga said. "It was Angel Rodriguez who brought him to our attention. It was almost a decision based on convenience for both of us. It's great for us to have a local kid on our team and great opportunity for him to play in the ACC for a year, in Miami, his home town. He will play a big role, maybe be our secret weapon."

Thomas, who is 6-7 and 245 pounds, is the strongest player on the team with a 370-pound bench press. With 6-10 forward Ivan Cruz Uceda suspended until January for an eligibility violation, Thomas, freshman Omar Sherman and 7-0 center Tonye Jekiri will get the bulk of the work inside.

"Maybe people who don't know about the game won't appreciate what he does, but I do because he comes in, doesn't ask for any plays or touches, is just happy to be on the court," Rodriguez said of Thomas. "He's going to play hard, hit guys, and rebound. He's not as offensively skilled as others, but others don't bring the energy and hustle plays he does."

Said Thomas: "I had no intentions of coming to The U, had no idea the U needed people. I was never on their radar because I wasn't that level player yet. It's weird how it turned out. I got lucky."

Miami will try to repeat history with influx of transfer talent

News and Observer

Luke DeCock

Nov. 11, 2014

When Jim Larranaga shows his Miami team video from two years ago, when the Hurricanes surprised everyone to win the ACC regular-season and tournament titles, he never fails to point out the ranking next to Miami on the screen.

Sometimes, in video from early in the season, there's no number at all. By the end, it gets all the way down to No. 2. At a time when many are once again paying little attention to Miami, Larranaga drives that history home repeatedly.

"He always makes sure he points it out," guard Angel Rodriguez said. "You see this number? What does it mean? It absolutely means nothing," he always says. So we leave that up to the fans and the experts, whoever wants to give you respect. All we can do is play, and it will take care of itself."

That team relied heavily on impact transfers Shane Larkin, the eventual ACC Player of the Year, and Kenny Kadji. This team will rely heavily on Rodriguez, a point guard from Kansas State, and Sheldon McClellan, a shooting guard from Texas.

In a season when the ACC boasts four legitimate national title contenders in Duke, North Carolina, Louisville and Virginia, there isn't much room at the top, but the influx of elite talent – Rodriguez averaged 11.2 points and 5.4 assists and McClellan 13.5 points against Big 12 competition in 2012-13 – might make the Hurricanes an ACC sleeper, not unlike two years ago.

Larranaga worked miracles of wizardry to coax seven ACC wins out of a young and not particularly threatening Hurricanes team last year. Four players are back from

that team, but the Hurricanes return the least amount of scoring and rebounding in the conference, which makes the injection of top-level talent sorely needed.

Figuring out how to mix the returning players with the newcomers might be Larranaga's most pressing concern, but he more than anyone has a road map for making it work.

"I would say it's less difficult, but still difficult," Larranaga said. "Because the thing about coaching is, you have your teaching methods, you have your style of play, you have your teaching points, and if they've come from programs where the style is considerably different, it's quite a transition for those transfers to make.

"We've been very fortunate. The guys we've had transfer in have fit in beautifully with our program."

The Hurricanes have one returning starter who will still be a starter, center Tonye Jekiri, and one who probably won't, point guard Manu Lecomte. They also bring back one part-time starter, guard Davon Reed, to go with three Division I transfers, one junior-college transfer, one redshirt freshman and four incoming freshmen.

It's quite a mix.

"Coach L feels like we have enough weapons to score," Rodriguez said. "His concern is not scoring, although we work on it obviously. His concern is defense, because we feel like there are some very good teams in this league, and when you have a lot of newcomers, you have to spend a lot of time teaching the small things on defense."

From Larranaga's perspective, Miami's most important transfer might be getting the least attention. Rodriguez and

McClellan figure to be big-time scorers, but Niagara transfer Joe Thomas might have the most critical role. Two years ago, few noticed Trey McKinney-Jones' transfer from Missouri-Kansas City until he became a key player for Miami.

Larranaga expects Thomas to step in at forward and have the same kind of impact. If he does, Larranaga might have the same kind of surprise awaiting the ACC this season.

Bleacher Report
Scott Henry
Nov. 11, 2014

Every November, we think we see what's coming. Analysts confidently make their predictions. Readers confidently call those analysts delusional idiots if the predictions aren't sufficiently rosy for the fans' favorite teams or tip the proverbial cap if the writer gives their team some rare respect.

Every April, we look back at the season that's transpired and find several events that none of us saw coming. Teams that rise up in defiance of all conventional wisdom and crash the NCAA tournament are always fun, and there are several expected also-rans that might pull the feat this year.

While these nine teams aren't likely to win their leagues, all have the potential to earn an at-large bid from a major conference. Most will need great production from newcomers to accomplish the mission, but there's also either tremendous talent returning or masterful coaching on the sideline. All will make their conference races that much more interesting.

ACC: Miami Hurricanes

The Miami Hurricanes don't have a ton of returning talent from last year's team, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Coach Jim Larranaga pulling a 17-16 record out of his 2013-14 roster is testament to his coaching abilities, and he's fast becoming a coach who's difficult to bet against.

This season's Hurricanes don't have a great deal of size or experience, but there's talent for days, especially in the backcourt.

Veterans Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan were Big 12 rivals at Kansas

State and Texas, respectively, now they'll lead Miami's young group of guards. Freshman Ja'Quan Newton was one of the nation's top point guard recruits and redshirt DeAndre Burnett averaged 37 PPG before missing his first college season with a wrist injury.

The U's weak spot will be in the frontcourt, where depth is in short supply, but there is some bulk on hand. Junior Tonye Jekiri (7'0", 235), grad transfer Joe Thomas (6'7", 235), freshman Omar Sherman (6'8", 220) and junior college import Ivan Cruz Uceda (6'10", 240) will all see minutes out of necessity. Uceda, however, won't be eligible until late December.

The ACC's middle tier—teams like Florida State, NC State, Syracuse, Pitt and Notre Dame—all have their own questions, meaning none can really be considered several steps ahead of the Canes. Miami has plenty of opportunities for signature wins both in and out of conference, and it has Larranaga. That might add up to an NCAA tournament bid.

Hurricanes primer: Roster gets another overhaul

FOX Sports Florida

Christina De Nicola

Nov. 10, 2014

Rodgers and Hammerstein's seminal Broadway classic tune "Getting to Know You" has been referenced multiple times over the past seven decades.

Strange as it may seem, it best embodies the major theme of the 2014-15 University of Miami men's basketball team.

When Miami opens the regular season by hosting Howard on Friday night, nine players will suit up as a Hurricane for the first time. This marks the second straight year the program will feature eight or more new players. Only one member of the Atlantic Coast Conference championship team of 2012-13 remains: senior center Tonye Jekiri.

"I'd like about another six months of practice, but the players I think are ready to play a game," head coach Jim Larranaga said last week. "They want to get out there, they want to compete. The coaches want to see them against outside competition. We need to do a really, really good job of playing as a unit. Sometimes it's really hard early in the season to get everyone on the same page. It was almost impossible last year 'cause everybody had such a new role. This year it's a little less challenging because so many guys have natural positions on the court."

Last year's team finished 10th in the ACC with a 17-16 (7-11 ACC) record. Just 19.3 percent of its scoring, 24.0 percent of its rebounds, 28.6 percent of its assists, 26.1 percent of its steals and 24.2 percent of its blocks return.

Of the nine fresh faces, two -- redshirt juniors Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan -- are transfers that were around the program in 2013-14. Another, redshirt freshman Deandre Burnett, sat out because of an injury.

Rodriguez, sophomore Manu Lecomte and freshman Ja'Quan Newton are natural point guards. The latter can also play shooting guard. Burnett is a 2. Both McClellan and freshman James Palmer are small forwards. Freshman Omar Sherman can play either power forward or center, while graduate transfer Joe Thomas is a natural 4.

Still, there is room for versatility. McClellan expects to help out on the boards since the Hurricanes don't boast a tall lineup. Burnett anticipates a varied emphasis on passing and scoring, depending on the opponent and matchups.

"I think the team's been gelling pretty good," McClellan said. "It's still a work in progress, guys getting familiar with each other's roles and what different guys like to do."

With nine newcomers, chemistry will likely take awhile. Miami does, however, have an advantage over other teams.

This summer, it played four games in Spain -- and won them all. Not only did the Hurricanes get to play together on the court, but they also visited and learned about historical sites around the country on a 10-day trip.

"It did a lot because everybody, nine new guys -- I think only three returners -- I think it helped bring us together," Burnett said of the Spain trip. "I think we've got pretty good chemistry, but I feel like any team playing brings chemistry more together. We'll see."

Learning has become paramount.

During a meeting last week, Larranaga focused on defense, specifically the importance of defending elbows and blocks. Penetration -- being able to prevent it on defense and create it on offense

-- will be crucial to Miami's success. In order to explain the importance, Larranaga provided visual examples. To represent the defense, he brought out a colander to show how holes in a defense allow breakdowns and easy points. On offense, the players are still getting used to finding outlets once penetrating and drawing in defenders.

In last Thursday's 74-58 victory over Eckerd in an exhibition, the Hurricanes recorded 16 assists and just nine turnovers. Three players -- Rodriguez, Lecomte and McClellan -- tallied multiple assists.

"I think we are progressing," Larranaga said. "There has been some improvement in each category with still a lot more improvement expected. We're working on some very specific things. Some of the improvement has to be mental. Most people think it's all about the physical effort, which nothing works without a great physical effort. But if you're giving a physical effort but not doing the right things then you don't improve. Or you don't improve as much as you would when you're doing the right things."

KEY LOSSES

Forward James Kelly, who averaged 6.0 points and 3.7 rebounds, transferred to Marshall. Sophomore guard Davon Reed scored 6.6 points per game and made 10 starts last year, but he is likely lost for the season after undergoing surgery for a lower-extremity injury.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Redshirt Junior G Angel Rodriguez: An All-Big 12 Second Team performer with Kansas State, Rodriguez sat out last season per NCAA transfer rules. Originally from Cupey, Puerto Rico, Rodriguez grew up in Miami and attended Krop High School. As a sophomore, he averaged 11.4 points, 5.2 assists, 2.1 rebounds and 1.5 steals in 33 starts for the Wildcats, leading them to the Big 12 Championship. He was named to the Cousy Award Watch list, given to the nation's top point guard.

"I think he's definitely going to be one of the top point guards in the conference without a doubt," McClellan said. "I think he's up there with Marcus Paige (of North Carolina) and all the rest of the guards. He knows how to win. He's going to be a great leader for us."

Redshirt Freshman G Deandre Burnett: Losing Burnett to a left wrist injury was a huge blow to an already shorthanded squad in 2013-14. As a senior at Miami Carol City High, he averaged 37 points, six rebounds and five assists per game. He ranked third in the nation in scoring as a 2012 Parade All-American.

"Just learning," Burnett said of the experience. "Last year it was just a big learning process even for the coaches. I just think last year was a big learning process, so I think I learned a lot just sitting out watching."

Graduate F Joe Thomas: Thomas fell into the program's lap four days before the start of summer school. Larranaga's coaches didn't recruit him. Rodriguez, his former high school teammate, did. For a team lacking in height, the Hurricanes could use the 6-foot-7 Thomas to make an impact. He appeared in 33 games (10 starts) for Niagara last season, leading or matching the team in blocks 13 times and rebounds three times.

"I would say he's an absolute great kid, fits in wonderfully with our team and is going to have a very important role," Larranaga said.

DID YOU KNOW?

Larranaga is 14 wins shy of 550 career victories and three away from 300 conference victories over 30 seasons as a coach. Miami's 14-man roster includes players from four countries -- Belgium, Nigeria, Spain and the United States. Six

states are represented: Florida, Texas, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New Hampshire, plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico. Since Larranaga took over, Miami has the fourth-most wins (31) of all schools in ACC play and the most combined wins (6) of any ACC school against the two winningest programs -- North Carolina and Duke.

BURNING QUESTIONS

Can Angel Rodriguez stay healthy?

Rodriguez has been hampered by an ankle injury, but he played 30 minutes (second most on the team) in the exhibition win over Eckerd. According to McClellan, Rodriguez comes in and out for plays during practice in order to limit the strain on it. A similar situation arose last year with Adams. The trainer told Larranaga the guard wouldn't be able to compete in half of the practices. But he did, and also started all 33 games. As Larranaga said, there is "no crystal ball" to predict injuries.

"He's still a little rusty, he's a little bit anxious right now, but he's also playing really hard," Larranaga said of Rodriguez. "It's just a matter of getting some game minutes under his belt to help him relax and become the confident and skilled player he knows he's capable of being."

Will the Hurricanes be able to keep up on the boards?

Miami will find itself at a distinct height disadvantage until Jan. 13, 2015, since NCAA rules have prevented 6-foot-10 forward Ivan Cruz Uceda from playing until then. Originally from Madrid, he spent two seasons at Harcum College before transferring to Miami. A player must be enrolled within one year after high school graduation. Other than Jekiri (7 feet), the next tallest player on the roster is Sherman (6-foot-8). The Hurricanes have seven players 6-foot-5 or shorter. Miami will rely on a guard-heavy rotation. In the exhibition win, the team started with four guards -- Thomas, McClellan, Rodriguez and Lecomte. Eckerd outrebounded Miami 33-32.

"Something that happens more regularly is rebounding, and we want to be a very good defensive rebounding team 'cause we want to run," Larranaga said. "In order to create the tempo that we're looking for it will be about our defense -- our man-to-man defense and our scramble defense."

Can Miami exceed preseason media expectations?

The Hurricanes were picked to finish 10th out of 15 teams in the ACC by Operation ACC Basketball. But preseason rankings don't mean much when looking back on how the standings have played out of late. Prior to the 2012-13 season, Miami was chosen fourth but ended up capturing its first ACC title. Last year, Virginia won the ACC after being picked fourth. The Hurricanes were expected to finish 12th and instead placed 10th.

"That's what the writers get paid to do -- make predictions," McClellan said. "Like Coach L said, the last three teams predicted to win the ACC haven't won it, so it means nothing. The number next to the team means nothing. We're just going to go out there and play hard every game no matter who it is."

Added Burnett: "It's expected because of all the big names, and we're Miami. We've got the Dukes and everybody else in our conference, but just got to prove everybody wrong. I feel we've got a lot of talent and we can prove a lot of people wrong."

College Basketball Preview - ACC

Athlon Magazine

Nov. 7, 2014

MIAMI-FLORIDA: Despite having a slew of newcomers last season, Jim Larranaga managed to lead the Hurricanes to a winning record. The Hurricanes did win the ACC the year prior, but a 17-16 overall mark was really a solid job considering all that had to be replaced from that championship squad. Unfortunately, this season will likely mirror last year, as the team needs to replace a ton of talent, including Rion Brown (15.5 ppg) and Garrius Adams (10.2 ppg). The good news is that Kansas State transfer Angel Rodriguez is ready to suit up and handle the point. A gifted distributor and defender, Rodriguez posted 11.4 points and 5.2 assists per game for the Wildcats two seasons ago and was an All-Big 12 defensive team member two times. The point guard spot is settled, leaving scoring along the perimeter to be vetted out. Texas transfer Sheldon McClellan could be the man for the job, after averaging 13.5 ppg in 2012-13 with the Longhorns. Sophomore guard Manu Lecomte (7.7 ppg) showed flashes of strong play a year ago and a lot is expected of incoming freshman scorer DeAndre Burnett (6-2, 191), who averaged a ridiculous 37.0 ppg as a high school senior. The frontcourt isn't nearly as stocked as Miami's backcourt and balance may be hard to come by. There simply weren't any players of note on the roster following last year, but the hope is that Niagara transfer Joe Thomas (6-7, 235) and/or incoming freshmen Chris Stowell (6-7, 190) and Omar Sherman (6-8, 220) can develop into solid contributors. - See more at: <http://athlonsports.com/college-basketball/college-basketball-preview-atlantic-coast-conference-0#sthash.svFecAlz.dpuf>

The First-Year Guys

CanesWarning
Juan Toribio
Nov. 6, 2014

College basketball is baaaaack. That means that it's almost exhibition time and that's no exception for the Miami Hurricanes basketball team. Jim Larranaga and his squad will take on Eckerd College on Thursday night at the BankUnited Center for their only exhibition game before their opener against Howard on November 14th, also at the BUC.

We're all ready to welcome college basketball into our lives, but before that, we're going to get you ready for Thursday's exhibition game by previewing everything about the 2014-2015 Canes Hoops team.

We already took a look at the guys that left and came back and at the guys who came over from other schools via transfer. Now, let's take a look at the incoming freshman that Coach L was able to recruit.

Deandre Burnett, RS Freshman 6'2" 195 lbs — Carol City High School (Miami, Fla.) There's some people who were brought into this world to drop buckets. Deandre Burnett is one of those people. This kid can flat-out score and the Canes are going to benefit tremendously for his ability to get his own shot. Burnett missed last season after fracturing his wrist right after the exhibition game against Florida Tech, where he scored 16 points for Miami. I added him to this list of freshmen because he's yet to play a game after redshirting last season. The Miami back court is filled with good players but nobody can create for himself quite like Deandre Burnett. How good is he? He averaged 37 points per game his senior year of high school.

Ja'Quan Newton, Freshman 6'2" 185 lbs — Neumann-Goretti High School (Philadelphia, Pa.)

If I had to describe Ja'Quan Newton in one word, it would be "baller." The Neumann-Goretti High School product is Coach L's best recruit in his time at Miami. Newton was a consensus top-60 player in every major recruiting ranking. Much like Burnett, he can also light up a scoreboard and is good at creating for himself, as well as others. He is the leading scorer in Philadelphia's Catholic School League and for Neumann-Goretti. It'll be interesting how much playing time Newton gets right off the bat in a stacked back court, but if he does things like this, he'll be in good shape.

James Palmer, Freshman 6'5" 200 lbs — St. John's College High School (Washington, D.C.)

Here's a guy that isn't as good of a natural scorer as Burnett and Newton, but James Palmer can flat-out shoot the ball. With good size at 6'5", Palmer should be able to spread the floor and let the scorers on the team penetrate easily with his ability to spread the floor to the three-point line. I initially thought Palmer was heading for a redshirt season to get his body in tune for the college game, but after Davon Reed went down with the knee injury, I don't think that's an option now. The Canes are going to rely on Palmer to hit down timely threes and he's going to be guarding tough wings throughout the season. I don't know how many minutes Palmer will rack up, but he's one player that I'm really intrigued to watch during Thursday's exhibition. Coming in quietly behind Newton and the transfer guards, Palmer is looking to sneak up on some people and produce for Miami.

Omar Sherman, Freshman 6'8" 260 lbs — Duncanville High School (Duncanville, Texas)

Omar Sherman is probably the least talked about incoming recruit, but he also might be the most important one. We've talked about the questions in the Miami front court, and we'll continue to do so until they prove they can compete with limited depth. Sherman was the only big man brought on board this recruiting class and he's a good one. He has good moves down low, but he tends to fall in love with the outside shot. Even though he can hit the jumper, I would rather have his 260 pound body banging down low and scoring close to the basket. Sherman averaged almost 9 rebounds a game in high school which shows that he's a capable rebounder. The 6'8" forward out of Texas is going to get a good amount of minutes early on, especially with the suspension to Ivan Cruz Uceda.

Chris Stowell, Freshman 6'6" 190 lbs — Tilton High School (Exeter, N.H.)

Stowell is a walk-on so he's not expected to see the court unless the game is out of reach. The life of a walk-on is always difficult, but these guys take part in practice so they have to play at a high level or they'll get tossed around against the guys on scholarship. Hopefully we see Stowell take the court aplenty with the Canes up by a couple dozen points.

This is easily Jim Larranaga's best recruiting class during his tenure at Miami and he's going to need them to perform and early. Miami gets Florida on the road the second game of the season, and the schedule doesn't get any easier after that.

New-look UM teams play exhibitions Thursday

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 5, 2014

A colander and a haunted house.

University of Miami basketball coaches Jim Larrañaga and Katie Meier got creative in the final week of preseason, employing a kitchen utensil and ghoulish costumes to get their teams ready for the 2014-15 season.

The regular season doesn't begin until Nov. 14, but both teams play home exhibition games Thursday. The UM women face Nova Southeastern at 4 p.m. and the men follow at 7 p.m. against Eckerd College at BankUnited Center. Admission is free.

Only two players are back from last year's roster on the men's team – Manu Lecomte and Tonye Jekiri. Transfers Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan are expected to start and play leadership roles, as both have big-conference experience. Rodriguez, a Miami Krop grad, was voted All-Big 12 with Kansas State, where he averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 rebounds. McClellan transferred from Texas after scoring 13.5 ppg for the Longhorns.

Others to watch are Deandre Burnett, James Palmer, Omar Sherman and Miami native Joe Thomas. Ivan Cruz Uceda, a Spaniard suspended until January for breaking an eligibility rule, can get some minutes because the exhibition is not an official game.

Larrañaga, concerned with the Canes' porous defense, used a colander to demonstrate how water is contained when you clog the holes.

"I'd like another six months of practice, but the players are ready to play a game," he said. "Coaches want to see them against

outside competition."

The women's team doesn't have as many newcomers, but Meier still has questions.

"I thought I'd have more clarity about my team coming in," Meier said. "We're still a work in progress. There isn't one player who doesn't deserve playing time on this team. Everyone has looked good in preseason, so now I want to see who can handle pressure and decisions in game conditions."

Meier and her staff lightened the mood on Halloween by surprising players with a locker room haunted house, complete with strobe lights and coaches dressed in costume. "They've been working so hard, wanted them to have a little fun," she said.

Suriya McGuire is looking for a big senior season. Sophomore guards Jessica Thomas and Adrienne Motley and senior forward Necole Sterling lost weight in the offseason and spent extra time in the gym. "They completely reshaped their bodies," Meier said. "They're leaner, stronger and quicker."

Motley made the ACC All-Freshman team last season with a team-leading 11.1 points per game. She averaged 30 minutes per game and proved such a clutch player her nickname is "Money Mot."

Guard Michelle Woods is back after spending last season as a medical redshirt for injuries sustained in a car accident. "It's been a joy to have Michelle back," Meier said. "She is so excited to be playing again, and she's had a great preseason. She's a veteran newcomer."

Who Left, Who Stayed

Canes Warning

Juan Toribio

Nov. 5, 2014

College basketball is baaaaack. That means that it's almost exhibition time and that's no exception for the Miami Hurricanes basketball team. Jim Larranaga and his squad will take on Eckerd College on Thursday night at the BankUnited Center for their only exhibition game before their opener against Howard on November 14th, also at the BUC.

We're all ready to welcome college basketball into our lives, but before that, we're going to get you ready for Thursday's exhibition game by previewing everything about the 2014-2015 Canes Hoops team.

First up, let's take a look at the guys who left, and the guys who are back for another season in a Miami uniform.

Who Left?

Garrison Adams: Adams was also a member of the squad that took home regular season and tournament ACC championships home in 2013, but he didn't play because of a knee issue. Adams was a fifth-year player last year and he performed okay. He never found his touch from behind-the-arc and shot 25% from three. Adams averaged over 10 points per game last season and was the only Hurricane to play in every game.

Raphael Akpejori: Akpejori was the second returning player from the most successful Miami team ever, but he wasn't much of a contributor that season. His workload, however, increased during his senior season and averaged double-digit minutes a game. Akpejori is now part of the football team as a tight end, but he has yet to appear in a game.

Rion Brown: Brown was Miami's best player last season. He was inconsistent at times, but he was one of two returning contributors from the 2013 ACC championship team. Rion Brown holds the record now for most games played in a Miami uniform (136) and he averaged 15.5 points per game as a senior last season. His leadership will definitely be missed by this team this season.

Justin Heller: Heller was a walk-on his first three seasons but earned a scholarship letter during his senior season. Heller didn't play much while at Miami, but he

always seemed to be a crowd favorite. I still wish he would've hit that three during senior night.

James Kelly: It was a really up-and-down lone season for James Kelly in Coral Gables. The junior college transfer from Michigan was suspended at one point during the season, and he never really seemed to find his way in Miami. Kelly decided to transfer to Marshall at the end of the season and considering the need in the front court, Miami would've really used him this season.

Donnavan Kirk: Kirk is a two-time Miami Hurricane. He transferred to DePaul as a freshman but then came around full circle and finished his career with the Canes as a fifth-year guy. Kirk was another inconsistent performer last year. There would be games where he was the best Miami player, but there were games where people couldn't wait for him to take a seat. Kirk, however, competed hard and manned down a weak center position for Miami. His interior presence is something Miami could definitely use this season.

Erik Swoope: Watching Erik Swoope throw down dunks last year was probably the most exciting aspect of this team last season. The team itself wasn't very good, although they competed at an extremely high level, but a lot of the time you just caught yourself looking at Swoope because you knew something great was about to happen. Everything he threw down a dunk, I thought the building was going to collapse because of how strong he is, and how angry he would dunk. Swoope would easily be one of my first picks in a dunk contest. Good luck to Erik as he pursues a football career now with the Indianapolis Colts.

Is Anyone Coming Back?

*only players who were eligible/were healthy enough to play

Mike Fernandez (soph.): Walk-on out of Belen Jesuit played in three games last season. Living the life of a walk-on is hard but Fernandez does have some talent, he's just not ready for any real game action.

Tonye Jekiri (junior): Tonye Jekiri is perhaps the biggest piece to Miami's puzzle this season. The 7-footer is entering his junior season now, and he's going to get the bulk of the minutes at the center position with Donnavan Kirk graduating.

Last season, Jekiri was able to get stronger but his production didn't really increase to the likings of many people. This season, he'll have to step up and be a dominant force on both ends because of the team's lack of depth in the front court. The Nigerian product will be the key to any success Miami wants to have this season.

Manu Lecomte (soph.): The sophomore out of Belgium had a pretty decent season as a freshman. You could tell that it took him a while to adjust to the collegiate game as opposed to the international game, but once he figured out how to use his quickness, he got better. Lecomte averaged a little under 8 points per game last season, to go along with 2.3 dimes per game. Lecomte went back to play some international ball during the summer for Belgium and he was able to drop 20 points and 5 assists a game in the FIBA U20 European Championship. Canes fans should expect an improved Manu Lecomte this season, especially on the offensive end.

Davon Reed (soph.): Reed had a really good freshman season last year for Miami. He only averaged 6.6 points per game but there were games where he was Miami's best player on both ends of the floor. Coming into this season, Reed was expected to be in the starting lineups and probably guard the other teams' best offensive wing, but he suffered a knee injury that will keep him out till at least February. I don't know how quickly he'll heal, but I wouldn't be entirely shocked if the staff just decides to give him the year off and put a redshirt on Reed. Losing Reed is a huge blow to this team.

As you can see, one list is way longer than the other. Miami is only returning 11.9 points, 7.6 rebounds, 3.0 assists, 1.2 steals and 0.9 blocks per game from the 2013-2014 team that won 17 games. The good thing is, Miami brought in some reinforcements via the transfer market and recruiting, and should be just fine, even with all these departures.

College Basketball's Top Transfers for 2014-15

Athlon Sports

Nov. 3, 2014

Few trends have changed college basketball more in recent years than the wave of transfers each season.

Some teams, like Iowa State and Florida, have made an art form of recruiting transfers as key cogs of their programs. Other teams are just looking to fill holes and don't always have to look too far to fill gaps on the roster.

The 2014-15 season will feature its fair share of impact transfers. Iowa State and Florida are here as usual, but teams like Gonzaga, Ohio State and Miami picked up key players in the transfer market this season as well.

Angel Rodriguez, Miami (from Kansas State)

Miami cobbled together 17 wins with a depleted roster largely because two of its better players — Rodriguez and fellow Big 12 transfer Sheldon McClellan — were sitting out. Now ready to play, the 5-11 Rodriguez will man the point for Miami. In his last stop at Kansas State, Rodriguez averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists per game for a team that won 27 games.

Miami Hurricanes Preview: Part 4 & 5

CaneInsider
Austin Sapin
Nov. 2, 2014

After analyzing the Miami Hurricanes roster, we now take a look at their opponents this season. The biggest part of making the NCAA Tournament is accumulating big wins, and for this Miami team, that opportunity certainly exists.

Question 4: Can they deal with the schedule?

One part of the ACC you can always expect is an extremely tough schedule, and once again the Canes certainly have their work cut out for them.

Over the course of ACC play, Miami will play five games against teams ranked in the top 10 of the AP Preseason Poll. Tough matchups include the ACC opener at home against No. 9 Virginia as well as an away game at No. 4 Duke, a home and home with No. 8 Louisville and a home game against No. 6 North Carolina.

"The ACC in my mind is the best basketball conference in the country. Every night you are playing against a Top 10 or Top 20 team in the country," said Larrañaga. "Whether you are at home or on the road, you had better be at your best, or you will be defeated."

Besides the games against preseason Top 10 teams, the Canes also travel to play at No. 23 Syracuse and play a few teams that just nearly missed out on the Top 25. These games include a home matchup against NC State, home and away games with Florida State and an away matchup at Pittsburgh.

Miami's non-conference schedule includes the second game of the year at No. 7 Florida and an ACC-Big Ten Challenge game against Illinois.

The positive side of their rough schedule is the opportunity that exists for the Hurricanes to bolster their resume with high-quality wins. The committee for the NCAA Tournament will more often take a

team with a slightly worse record but with bigger wins than a team with an average record but no quality wins.

The stretch that will make or break the season comes over a month from January 3rd to February 3rd. This portion of the schedule has nine games featuring four teams in the AP Preseason Poll Top 25 and a great chance to boost their resume.

The schedule goes as follows: No. 9 Virginia, Boston College, at No. 4 Duke, at Notre Dame, NC State, at No. 23 Syracuse, Georgia Tech, at Florida State and No. 8 Louisville.

Coming out of that stretch at 6-3 or better will certainly bode well for their NCAA Tournament chances and provide them with confidence leading into an easier end to the season.

If Miami can pull out a few games against ranked opponents and avoid too many bad losses this season, their resume will certainly be appealing come March.

The Miami Hurricanes have a very tough schedule this season, but also, a very real chance at getting back to March Madness. Even with a revamped roster, the experience of Coach Jim Larrañaga could lead them back to the sport's biggest event.

Question 5: Can the Hurricanes make it back to the NCAA Tournament?

This is the one question that at the end of the day everyone cares about. A shot in the tournament could lead to upsets and glory, while just missing on the bubble creates regret and agony.

As we looked at yesterday, the Hurricanes have an extremely tough schedule, but a difficult schedule results in an opportunity to boost your resume. Thoughts of the tournament could dissipate quickly though if the team is unable to gel early in the season.

"This is going to be a very challenging team with nine new players. They are going to be asked to bond and play well together

very very quickly," Larrañaga said.

I believe that this team may take time to get used to each other, but having one of the best coaches in the country could expedite that process.

The true key to this team's success is the play of Jekiri. In his third year, he should be at the point where he at least is a force on the glass and on defense. The Canes look to be solid in the backcourt, but lacking an experienced power forward puts even more pressure on Jekiri.

In the end, I believe they may just miss out on a tournament spot. The team went 17-16 last season with less talent and experience and they should certainly improve on that record, but in the end, their lack of depth in the frontcourt will be their downfall. A team cannot go through much of the year with only three of four active big men especially in the ACC.

The Canes certainly have a chance with the marquee games on their schedule and the return of Uceda and possibly Reed. If both return, I could see them getting hot in January.

With so much uncertainty, the one constant is Larrañaga. He has shown time and time again that he will get the most out of his team. Although you usually can't doubt him, I believe the Hurricanes are a year away from becoming players again in the ACC, but with Larrañaga maybe he has us right where he wants us.

ACC nearing quality to match hype

Pittsburgh Post Gazette

Paul Zeise

Nov. 2, 2014

Last year at the ACC's media day the narrative among coaches, administrators and observers was that the addition of Pitt, Syracuse and Notre Dame meant the league had become the best in the nation, if not the best ever.

Then the games began and the results gave rise to legitimate arguments that the ACC wasn't the best league last season, much less ever.

The ACC didn't win the ACC-Big Ten challenge (the two conferences tied), didn't have the most teams make the NCAA Tournament (it was one of four conferences with six teams in while the Big 12 had seven), had just one team (Virginia) advance to the Sweet 16, and it was eliminated before the Elite 8.

"I think we were a little premature in announcing our supremacy last year, because the league is really new," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said Wednesday at media day this year. "We have a lot of new components but I think we are moving in that direction, but the true test is time and I think that is going to happen in time."

Larranaga's sentiments were shared by many in the room. While the consensus was that the league wasn't as strong as they had hoped last year, the belief is it will take a big step closer this year.

With the addition of Louisville, the expected improvement of the mid-level ACC programs, the renewed commitment of programs such as Virginia Tech -- which spent millions to lure Buzz Williams from Marquette -- it is pretty clear that the conference is well on its way to becoming the dominant conference that league officials had hoped it would be when they decided to expand three years ago.

ACC commissioner John Swofford said that when you look at the league on paper and the potential it has to grow, the future is bright, but teams must perform at a high level.

"[The dominant conference] is the conference we can become and hopefully will become; all the ingredients are here," Swofford said. "But you have to go do it. This is an unbelievable collection based on tradition and history and that history comes from doing it.

"So we have to step up year in and year out and reach our potential as individual programs and then collectively as a league."

Clearly, though, with only five of 15 teams ranked in the USA Today coaches preseason Top 25 there are many still not sold on the league's dominance. But as Swofford said, the ingredients are in place.

Three of the top five, four of the top nine and five of the top 11 winningest programs in the nation are in the ACC now and six of the past 14 national champions are now members of the conference as well.

And the league now has four -- Rick Pitino, Mike Krzyzewski, Roy Williams and Jim Boeheim -- of the five Hall of Fame Division I coaches who are still active.

Krzyzewski and Boeheim are first and second on the all-time winningest coaches list, Williams has the highest winning percentage of any active coach with 20 years and Pitino is five wins shy of becoming the 20th head coach to get 700 wins.

Those four have good teams this year and none of them appear to be slowing down, so Duke, North Carolina, Syracuse and Louisville almost annually will give the ACC a stronger top four than any other league.

Krzyzewski said the addition of Louisville is huge.

"Louisville is a tremendous asset, the total history of Louisville, the passion for the game, how religiously people follow it," Krzyzewski said. "But then you add Louisville with Rick Pitino coaching it, who is one of the giants in the game. If we were in business, the acquisition of Louisville basketball would be off the charts. Just off the chart."

Beyond those top four programs there are coaches such as Virginia's Tony Bennett, Pitt's Jamie Dixon and Notre Dame's Mike Brey who have impressive resumes at their current posts. There are also some savvy veterans, such as Larranaga and Florida State's Leonard Hamilton, whose teams have won the ACC championship in recent years.

In all, the league has eight coaches, more than half, with 300 or more wins (Dixon, with 288, likely will join that club this year) and the group has combined for 80 Sweet 16 appearances, 30 Final Four appearances and nine national titles.

"When you start to get double-digit teams in the NCAA Tournament, then you have become the Big East, southern style," said Pitino, who said the standard for excellence is what the Big East had become before some of its members left the conference. "When that day arrives, and it may next year, then you know you have arrived."

"When there are 10 teams in the mix and any can win the ACC, now it is getting that way, now you have Virginia wins it, North Carolina and Duke are top teams, you have Syracuse -- and forget the names of these teams -- you have Pittsburgh, [who] is going to be there every year because of the way they defend."

To Pitino's point, the top of the league is strong but it should also be deeper as teams that missed the tournament, including Clemson, Notre Dame and Florida State, should all be better given the players they return. Bottom-dwelling teams such as Georgia Tech and Virginia Tech should be better as well.

That improvement in the middle and bottom of the league is what the ACC really needs to happen to become more dominant but as Larranaga pointed out, it is becoming more balanced, evidenced by the fact that the past three ACC Tournament champions -- Florida State, Miami and Virginia -- are not named North Carolina or Duke.

It all looks good on paper and the future indeed appears to be bright, but Dixon was one of the few coaches last year who was cautious in his projections. He took the same approach this year.

He said the ACC has potential to grow but before it can claim it has arrived as the dominant conference, it must regularly win games against the other major conferences, get eight or more NCAA bids annually and do well in the tournament.

"I think the bottom line is the ACC is the best conference in the country and that is what the ACC is becoming," Dixon said. "I don't think we ever became that last year but we are headed in that direction. I said that last year and I think we are headed there in that direction."

Miami Hurricanes Preview: Part 2 & 3

CaneInsider
Austin Sapin
Nov. 2, 2014

Yesterday we looked at both the transfers and freshmen that will give the Hurricanes experience and energy this season. Today, we look at the returners, and while that includes just a few players, their production will certainly dictate the success of the team.

Question 2: What can the returners produce?

Four. That is the number of returning players from last year's squad and even more intriguingly, only two look to be featured heavily this season.

With a decimated frontcourt one of those returning players, Tonye Jekiri, may be the Hurricanes most significant player this season. The 7' 0" center is the only player left from the ACC Championship squad of 2012-2013 and will need to improve for Miami to have any chance at an NCAA Tournament bid. Jekiri averaged only 4.2 points and 5.5 rebounds a game last season and especially with limited depth up front, the coaching staff has high expectations for the center.

"Tonye needs to step up in every category. He is such a vital part of this team this year," Larrañaga said. "Having been a starter last year he understands that with each year his responsibilities grow and into this year where we expect him to be a double-double guy and anything less than that he can expect me not to be happy."

Jekiri was dominated at points last year on the offensive and defensive ends and with little depth behind him, similar play to last season will cost the Canes in many games.

Manu Lecomte also returns as a starter from last year but is now faced with stiff competition from Rodriguez, Burnett and Newton.

The Belgian point guard started 17 of 33 games last season and averaged 7.7 points and 2.3 assists a game.

Lecomte proved himself as a calming force and with the veteran Rodriguez coming in, look for the 5' 11" guard to establish himself as a solid back up point guard or at times possibly playing alongside Rodriguez for more ball handling.

With limited depth up front, smaller players

like Lecomte will need to fill a number of different roles.

"We've got an abundance of guards," Larrañaga said. "There's going to be a lot of responsibility put on their shoulders to do things that they don't normally get asked to do at a high level like rebounding or defending much bigger guys."

Davon Reed returns but is sidelined with a left lower extremity injury and Coral Gables native, Michael Fernandez, will enter his sophomore season as well.

After examining what the returning players will contribute this season yesterday, we look today at two members of the team whose absence throw off the initial plans of Coach Larrañaga. With so much roster turnover will Miami be able to overcome the loss of a stalwart and a potential significant piece? Find out below.

Question 3: How much will Reed's injury and Uceda's eligibility issues hurt?

When news came out that Davon Reed was out 4-6 months with a left lower extremity injury, both the Miami coaching staff and its' players were devastated. The 6' 6" guard provided size and an explosive scoring ability that flashed itself in many games last season and will certainly be missed for most of this season.

The timetable looks like he will certainly be out until January and beyond that, it all depends on how he heals.

Reed made only 10 starts for Miami last season and averaged 6.6 points and 1.7 rebounds per game but shot 36% from 3-point range.

The guard also seemed to have a knack for exploding during big games. Reed scored 16 against Syracuse and averaged 11.5 points in Miami's two games at the ACC Tournament.

Those big game performances will surely be missed for at least the first of the season and his absence affects the rotation that Coach Larrañaga had planned. Reed would have been able to slot in at the small forward position with McClellan at shooting guard creating a strong backcourt with Rodriguez.

Instead, the loss of Reed slides McClellan to small forward and will put one of the younger, less experienced players starting at shooting guard. Deandre Burnett or Ja'Quan Newton

will have to step up and fill in for the experience and scoring Reed would have provided.

Although we don't know as much about Ivan Cruz Uceda, his potential and again, his size, will be missed by the Hurricanes. Uceda is ineligible for the first half of the season due to an NCAA rule requiring enrollment into college one year after high school graduation. Although he cannot return until Jan. 13 against Duke, he will still be able to practice with the team.

The Spaniard stands at 6' 11" but plays a very international style as a "stretch four" or more simply a big man that can shoot jumpers and even threes.

Uceda averaged 14.6 points and 9.6 rebounds a game at Harcum College in Pennsylvania and shot an amazing 45.5% percent from three-point range.

As stated many times, these Hurricanes don't have much size and losing Uceda hurts but on a positive note he will be eligible for the majority of ACC play as well as the ACC Tournament and anything that would come after that.

Without Uceda, more pressure will be heaped on Tonye Jekiri as well as freshman Omar Sherman. Coming into the season you never want to add pressure on players but Uceda's loss certainly does so.

The prospects of the team would look much better if Reed and Uceda could play immediately but both do have the potential to come back for the stretch run.

"We will get better in the frontcourt when Ivan Cruz Uceda becomes eligible and if we are fortunate enough to get Davon Reed who is also a very good defender back," Larrañaga said. "The most critical area for us without those two guys is going to be rebounding."

If these two are reintroduced into the team with their size and scoring abil

Miami Hurricanes Preview: Part 1

CaneInsider
Austin Sapin
Nov. 2, 2014

For the second straight year, the Miami Hurricanes feature a completely retooled roster filled with promise, but also, with great uncertainty. After a 17-16 (7-11 ACC) year, the Canes hope that the addition of veteran transfers as well as talented freshman will return them back to March Madness. Over the next five days, we will look at the five key questions that will answer whether Coach Jim Larrañaga can lead the Hurricanes back to the big dance or if the second straight year of a revamped roster will be too much to overcome.

Question 1: How will the new additions fit in?

For any basketball coach one of the most important parts of creating a good team is familiarity. The past two seasons though, Coach Larrañaga has not been afforded that luxury.

After losing seven players including starters Rion Brown, Garrius Adams and Erik Swoope, the Miami Hurricanes feature nine new players on this year's roster. The most anticipated additions are transfers Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, both of whom sat out last season.

Rodriguez, a point guard coming from Kansas State, will be looked upon as one of the leaders this season. The 5' 11" redshirt junior was an all-conference defender in his last year for the Wildcats averaging 11.2 points and 5.2 assists per game.

Coach Larrañaga saw early in the preseason what Rodriguez would bring to the team.

"Angel will be our floor leader. He has great leadership skills," Larrañaga said. "He's a very natural leader in terms of barking out directions and being very energetic. He commands a lot of respect from his teammates and he'll compete for all-conference honors on defense."

With many of the guards lacking experience on the floor, Rodriguez will certainly start and bring a calming influence to this very young team.

While the Kansas State transfer will be looked at as the floor general, the Texas transfer will be looked at as the go-to-scorer for the Canes. Sheldon McClellan comes to Coral Gables after averaging 13.5 points per game in his last season in Austin, while shooting 38% from the field.

The Houston native is a true threat from behind the arc as well, shooting close to 30% from three-point range during his career.

The 6' 5" guard showed off his offensive ability during the summer preseason trip to Spain where he led the team in scoring.

"We are expecting Sheldon to do what we saw in Spain except against much better competition,"

Coach Larrañaga said. "He needs to be what we refer to as a high-octane scorer.

These two Big 12 transfers will be key in how successful the Canes are this season. They bring a veteran presence to an otherwise young team and can provide the leadership and scoring the team may have missed last season.

While these two look to make an impact with the starting five, Joe Thomas, a transfer from Niagara, will look to be a key contributor and role player off the bench.

The 6' 7" forward who attended the same high school as Angel Rodriguez at Miami Krop, may be able to fill a role as a power forward off the bench due to the lack of depth in the frontcourt. Thomas is the oldest member of the team as a graduate student on a team with no seniors and is looked at as a high-energy player on defense and on the boards.

With only two other active big men that will likely see minutes at the beginning of the season, Thomas will need to provide solid minutes off the bench.

"Of the three players in the frontcourt, only one has ever played for Miami," Larrañaga said. "Our frontcourt is very thin, lacks experience and we are going to be very focused on developing that aspect of the frontcourt."

Ivan Cruz Uceda, a transfer from Harcum College, was looked at as another forward that could give the Hurricanes key minutes on the frontcourt. Due to eligibility issues, the Madrid native will miss the first half of the season, which could prove costly for the Canes.

In addition to the transfers, Coach Larrañaga will be happy to see some exciting freshman in Coral Gables.

Redshirt freshman Deandre Burnett and true freshmen Ja'Quan Newton and Omar Sherman look like interesting prospects that could make an impact this season.

Burnett missed last season due to a wrist injury, but the former high school All-American could be an impact scorer coming off the bench. The Miami, FL native averaged 37 points per game at Carol City HS and has the potential to start at shooting guard. While the team lacks depth in the frontcourt, the addition of Newton shows how much depth the Canes have in the backcourt. The 6' 2" guard from Philadelphia, PA. was ranked No. 58 in the ESPN Top 100 for the 2014 recruiting class and will fight to get minutes on this guard-heavy team.

Newton averaged 21 points per game in his senior year of high school and is certainly talented but may take a year to learn behind Angel Rodriguez at the point guard position. The true freshman does have good scoring ability and could also see time at shooting guard as an offensive spark off the bench.

Omar Sherman may be just a true freshman, but he could be forced into a starting role early in the season. Due to Reed's injury and Uceda's eligibility issues, the 6' 8", 250 lb. forward could start beside Tonye Jekiri.

In high school, Sherman averaged 17.1 points and 8.4 rebounds per game and was ranked No. 94 overall in the ESPN Top 100. This young big man might not have expected to get serious minutes, but the opportunity is there for him to secure a starting spot before Reed and Uceda return.

With the likes of Jahliil Okafor at Duke, Montrezl Harrell at Louisville and other talented big men across the ACC, Sherman will be key for the Canes guarding the big men and rebounding, something Miami struggled with last season.

James Palmer and Chris Stowell are wild cards off the bench that could help at the small forward position off the bench.

Palmer was the No. 1 recruit in the Washington, D.C. area according to ESPN and averaged 15.7 points per game. Stowell is the only walk-on on the team and attended the same high school as Nerlens Noel at Tilton School in New Hampshire.

When Miami lost the majority of its team after a very successful season in 2012-2013, Coach Larrañaga had to find a way to replace all that scoring. Once again he'll need to find the magic touch this season.

A 17-16 (7-11 ACC) record could be considered a disappointment for some teams, but seeing how much talent they lost, Miami surprised many who picked them last in the ACC. Even after losing 80% of the scoring, the Canes are now more prepared to replace what they lost with the inclusion of these transfers and the freshmen.

The season looks promising but the uncertainty still exists when a team undergoes a complete rebuild.

"We have some of the most unusual circumstances you'll ever see," Coach Larrañaga said. "We have nine players on a 12-man roster that have never worn a Miami uniform and of the three players returning from last year, one of them is injured and isn't expected to play for awhile, if at all and that creates a situation as a coach where you are not 100% certain what you're going to get."

The team could change significantly later in the season, but the new additions will certainly need to build cohesion before the extremely tough ACC schedule. If they can, this Miami Hurricanes team may surprise many.

The improbable rise and growth of Shane Larkin

New York Post
Fred Kerber
Nov. 1, 2014

Everybody who had Shane Larkin in the pool as starting for the Knicks at point guard against the likes of Derrick Rose, Kyrie Irving and next-up Kemba Walker, please stand up.

Liars. Sit down.

"Those are all All-Star caliber guys, so as a second-year guy coming off an up-and-down rookie season with an injury, being able to be thrown into that type of fire and just go out there and play, it's a great experience for me," Larkin said after Knicks practice in Tarrytown on Saturday. "It's just going to make me better and that's what I want to do: keep getting better."

One man's injury is another man's opportunity. So Larkin grabbed the chance when Jose Calderon grabbed his calf. The planned starter, Calderon, who arrived with Larkin and Samuel Dalembert in the trade that sent Tyson Chandler and Raymond Felton to Dallas, has a left calf strain that is expected to sideline him for two-to-three weeks.

Calderon said he aggravated his calf during warmups on opening night and stressed both he and the Knicks want to be cautious with the injury.

"That's for sure. That's what we're going to try," Calderon said. "I don't want to be out again, the only problem is we have so many games right now."

All the more chance for Larkin to grow. After Walker and the Hornets on Sunday, John Wall and the Wizards roll into the Garden on Tuesday. It doesn't hurt that Larkin's primary asset is friction-burn speed. But speed alone won't do it so Larkin has taken advice from veterans Calderon and Pablo Prigioni.

"I talk a lot to Shane. He's been great. He played a really good game Thursday. I was with him in Dallas as well, so it's

not like we just met. I try to always advise him," said Calderon, who has witnessed the growth in Larkin on two teams.

"Last season was tough for him. He even says that. He got the injury in summer league, so he came kind of late to training camp. He didn't have a lot of minutes for a big part of the season. He's learning. He's progressing every day. He has played more than any of us in the triangle because of the summer league."

Larkin was awful, just like everybody else, against Chicago opening night. But in Cleveland on Thursday, he played well, hit some open shots and began proving he is more than the answer to "Who is baseball Hall of Famer Barry Larkin's kid?"

"Shane has been really good for us," coach Derek Fisher said. "To think about a young guy that didn't have a preseason or a training camp last year, misses a lot of games, gets traded over the summer, new team, new coach, new way of playing basketball, 10 minutes before opening night, finds out that he's the starting point guard for the New York Knicks. That's a lot."

The Knicks, however, let the midnight Friday deadline pass for picking up Larkin's third year \$1.675 million option (they also did not extend Iman Shumpert, which likely leads the shooting guard to restricted free agency). Larkin still can re-sign and knows it's strictly business.

"That's a business deal," Larkin said. "Obviously they want to build a championship team here and they need as much money as they can next summer to be able to bring in the big free agents that they're looking at. It's not like they told me, 'We don't see you as part of our future, we don't want you.' If that was the case I'd be sitting on the bench."

Or in another city. And Larkin did not see motivation arising from it.

"I'm as motivated as I've ever been in my life to go out there and prove to everybody I'm an NBA player," Larkin said.

"If they didn't believe I can play they definitely wouldn't have me starting. It's not like we're going into this year thinking, 'Let's just throw our young guys out there, have a bad year and let's get in the [draft] lottery.' They're the Knicks who are a proud organization and want to win."

Top 100 players in college hoops for 2014-15

CBSports.com

Gary Parrish

Oct. 30, 2014

The CBSports.com Preseason All-America teams are done by me with input from colleagues. But our List of Top 100 College Basketball Players is pure democracy, meaning I voluntarily relinquished my veto power in the spirit of making what amounts to a poll.

In other words, what you see here won't exactly match what you saw there.

That's the first thing you need to know.

The second thing you need to know is that I apparently have radically different opinions about what makes a top-100 player than my colleagues Matt Norlander and Sam Vecenie. They're the two people who helped me do this, and we did the first 94 spots by voting for players in groups of 10. What I learned pretty quickly is that they, for the most part, value big-stat guys on average teams in below-average leagues way more than I do, and that'll be reflected in these rankings. Which is fine, honestly. Reasonable minds can disagree, and that's what makes this fun. And Norlander will forever be the person who once upon a time fought like crazy to include Nate Wolters, and, because that turned out OK, he deserves the benefit of the doubt, I think.

Or, at least, I guess.

Either way, dive in and enjoy.

Again, we voted for the first 94 spots in groups of 10 and slotted them accordingly. Then we each selected two players that we wanted to make sure were included, and we included them at the end. What you see below is the finished product.

87. ANGEL RODRIGUEZ (MIAMI)

The former Kansas State guard is entering his first season at Miami, where he'll take his 11.4 points per game and excellent defense with him as he tries to lead Jim Larranaga's Hurricanes back to the heights they reached just as recently as 2012. --
SV

More from "ACC Operation Basketball"

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 29, 2014

Miami is quite the mystery to ACC Media.

Heck the coaching staff and the players themselves are still learning about each other.

As Coach L pointed out, this squad will have 9, count em, 9 players who have never worn a Miami uniform before when they kick off action Friday 11/14 Vs Howard at the Bank United Center.

So despite a roster that is clearly talented, should we be surprised that they were picked to finish 10th in a super deep and talented Atlantic Coast Conference?

For the record I have them 8th.

My predicted order of finish would be (1-15):

Duke, Louisville, UVA, UNC, FSU, Pitt, Syracuse, Miami, Notre Dame, NC State, GT, Wake, Clemson, BC, VT

I may have a slight UM bias, but I also feel the media may be underrating Coach L's ability to get the most out of a team and get a unit to finish strong.

Plus I like the 'Canes once versatile 6'10 PF Ivan Cruz Uceda returns (he has to sit out the first 17 games for an obscure NCAA rule) and should 6'6 wing Davon Reed return from injury (could be back in 4 months).

Here are some of the highlights of the media day, plus the full poll results below.

Coach L as always, was a great listen.

Some highlights from the player interviews:

Q. Since you were around the program and the league last year and at least got to observe what it's all about, how much of a transition will it be for you if any coming from a different conference and a different school into Miami and the ACC?

ANGEL RODRIGUEZ: Well, you know, the Big 12 was very, very competitive. They had a lot of very good teams, so I think the level is still going to be the same. It's going to be as high. But it's a new experience because pretty much every team I have not played against yet besides Virginia Tech my freshman year. So there's a lot of new faces, maybe a new style of play. I don't know if the tempo is faster or whatever the case might be, but I'm still playing at the highest level, so there's not much you should adjust to. I guess it's a new experience just because you've got to scout new teams and new players that you never faced before, so you don't know their tendencies.

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to scout new teams and new players that you never faced before, so you don't know their tendencies.

Q. Sheldon, what have you seen in Angel so far?

SHELDON McCLELLAN: I've seen a pit bull. Just from Miami, my freshman and sophomore year at Texas, just a bulldog on defense and just playing with a lot of fight and just wants to win.

Q. Sheldon, since this is almost a completely new team with just a couple of guys back, who is emerging as the leaders? Is that becoming clear at this point?

SHELDON McCLELLAN: It's still a work in progress. Obviously Angel and I are looked at as two of the leaders on this team, and as far as us being leaders, we just have to guide the freshmen in the right direction. We're just being confident and staying positive with the freshmen. We don't want to get too hard on them or whatever where they'll lose their confidence.

20 under-the-radar freshmen

CBS Sports.com

Jon Rothstein

Oct. 29, 2014

We know all about the McDonald's All-Americans who are singled out even before they set foot on a college campus. But what about some hidden first-year players that could have impact? We've come up with 20 under-the-radar freshmen entering the 2014-15 season. And in no particular order:

Miami guard Deandre Burnett: Don't be surprised if this kid winds up leading the Hurricanes in scoring. The 6-4 redshirt freshman averaged 14.3 points during Miami's four-game August trip to Spain and had 16 points in 22 minutes last October before he went down for the year because of a wrist injury.

Ken Pomeroy Rates Miami 57th

Canes Warning

Juan Toribio

Oct. 28, 2014

We're in the middle of Miami Hurricanes football and at the University of Miami that's a big deal. But what if I told you that the Miami Hurricanes basketball team is going to be pretty good this season, too?

The Hurricanes, who received one vote in the initial USA Today's Coaches Poll, were ranked 57th in Ken Pomeroy's initial rankings released Monday.

Coach Jim Larranaga and his group will have a rough schedule this season with the superb talent in the ACC (oh how different it is from football) but the Canes are not going to be an easy opponent for the college basketball powerhouses.

Based on kenpom.com's initial ratings, Miami will play Duke (1st), Louisville (3rd) twice, Florida (7th), Virginia (8th), Syracuse (11th), North Carolina (20th) and Pittsburgh (21st). That's a really tough road for the Hurricanes, who are coming off a 17-16 season after winning the ACC regular season and tournament championships in 2013.

Not everything will be difficult for the 'Canes, though, as they play South Alabama (297th), Savannah State (300th), and open up their season on November 14th against Howard, who is ranked 348th out of 351 teams. Pomeroy gives Miami a 98% chance of winning in that one.

With all of that, kenpom.com has the 'Canes finishing with a 16-13 record this season.

Miami Projected No. 9 seeds for NCAA tournament

Syracuse.com
Patrick Stevens
Oct. 28, 2014

Miami
Last year's record: 17-16 (7-11 ACC)

Last NCAA tournament: 2013

Best-case scenario: The Hurricanes' Big 12 transfers (ex-Kansas State guard Angel Rodriguez and former Texas wing Sheldon McClellan) prove plenty capable of thriving in another power conference, and Miami's young core that received plenty of playing time last year takes another step forward to push Jim Larrañaga's team into the top six in the ACC.

Worst-case scenario: Larrañaga's tactical acumen did a lot to keep the Hurricanes afloat last year, and there's a case to be made he did an even better job with that team than Miami's ACC championship outfit of two years ago. Miami will be better, but there's a chance depth (especially up front) will limit this team's upside this winter.

Hurricanes will be young and small but talented

Associated Press

Steve Wine

Oct. 27, 2014

CORAL GABLES, Fla. (AP) — When Tonye Jekiri kicks the ball around with the University of Miami women's soccer team, he makes an impact, thanks to his size-16 feet.

Soccer is Jekiri's first love and the sport he played growing up in Nigeria. He moved to Florida in 2010 to begin a basketball career, and now he's a 6-foot-11 starting center for the Miami Hurricanes.

Jekiri said his passion for hoops grew toward the end of last season as his play started to improve.

"It didn't come natural, because I was a soccer player," Jekiri said. "Every day I would go home and want to know what soccer game was on TV. But now I want to put a basketball game on. I want to take this game further after college."

Coach Jim Larranaga is counting on Jekiri to become an offensive force for the Hurricanes, who are inexperienced but face a much brighter future than a year ago, when they went 7-11 in the Atlantic Coast Conference and 17-16 overall.

Jekiri's progress is among the things to watch this year with Miami.

CENTER OF ATTENTION: Jekiri averaged 4.2 points per game, 5.5 rebounds and 21 minutes per game last season. Partly out of necessity, Larranaga expects a lot more from the redshirt junior. "Tonye needs to step up in every category," Larranaga said. "He is such a vital part of this team this year. We expect him to be a double-double guy. Anything less than that, and he can expect me to not be happy." That's a tall order for a player with one double-double

in his career. Jekiri was the backup to the backup center on the 2012-13 team that won the ACC title. Last year he started 16 of 33 games, his minutes often limited because of foul trouble. But Jekiri said Larranaga's faith in him is contagious. "Last year my offense was not there," Jekiri said. "The confidence is there, and I now have more passion for the game. Everything has clicked."

COMING UP SHORT: While the Hurricanes will be young, they're small, too. Six of their top players are guards, and Jekiri is the only forward or center who has played previously for Miami. Larranaga says he might start four guards, and 6-5 freshman James Palmer could be forced to play power forward. "We could have a guy 6-5 guarding someone 6-10," Larranaga said. Of the 12 players on the roster, only three have worn a Hurricanes uniform before. One of the three — 6-6 Davon Reed — will miss much of the season with an injury. "We've got some of the most unusual circumstances we've ever seen," said Larranaga, who is entering his 31st year as a college coach.

FLOOR LEADER: The most experienced player is point guard Angel Rodriguez, who helped Kansas State win a share of the Big 12 title in 2013. The junior transferred and sat out last season because he wanted to be closer to his family in Puerto Rico. Rodriguez says he'll enjoy mentoring the Hurricanes' young players. "The one thing every freshman has to prove is that you're able to guard your opponent," Rodriguez says. "In the ACC, you're going to face lottery picks. Are you able to guard them? If you are, you're going to have a big year. If you don't, you've got to get it right."

PREACHING DEFENSE: The Hurricanes struggled to score last year but ranked 11th in the nation in defense, allowing only 59.5 points per game. That doesn't

necessarily mean Miami will be good on defense again, Larranaga said. "Every year you start over," he said. "It's not like you begin where you ended. Every year it's washed away. They've forgotten all the fundamentals and you start from scratch."

LOOKING AHEAD: Last season required a reboot for the program after six seniors from the ACC title team departed. The outlook is now much rosier, Larranaga said. "The difference between last year and this year is next year," he said. In other words, he anticipates this group of players to blossom into a good team, although it might not happen until late 2015. "Could we see it this year? Yes, but not early," Larranaga said. "Should we see it next year? Yes, and early. All the pieces are in place."

Season Preview: The best lead guards

NBC Sports
Scott Phillips
Oct. 27, 2014

The importance of elite lead guards was stressed last March when senior point guard Shabazz Napier helped lead UConn to the national championship to cap off a magnificent senior season. Napier's play on both ends of the floor made a huge impact for the Huskies, especially in tournament play, and it proved once again that an elite guard with the ball in his hands can lead a good supporting cast to glory.

20. Angel Rodriguez, Miami: Jim Larranaga has to be pleased the 5-foot-11 All-Big 12 selection is eligible this season.

Six teams on the rise

Yahoo! Sports

Jeff Eisenberg

Oct. 27, 2014

Our 2014-15 season preview continues with the Dagger's look at six teams on the rise. Check back every day for more college hoops preview content.

Miami (17-16, 7-11): For a program that will rely almost exclusively on newcomers this season, Miami has the potential to ascend in the ACC this season. The reason for that is a loaded backcourt fueled by a pair of coveted transfers. Angel Rodriguez, a second-team all-Big 12 point guard in his final season at Kansas State two years ago, will immediately assume the role of offensive catalyst and team leader. He'll be aided in the backcourt by wing Sheldon McLellan, a Texas transfer who led the Longhorns in scoring two years ago but clashed with coach Rick Barnes. Throw in redshirt freshman Deandre Burnett, true freshman Ja'Quan Newton and returner Manu Lecomte, and it's clear the Canes have plenty of options at guard. The key will whether the Miami frontcourt can survive without suspended junior college All-American Ivan Cruz Uceda for the first 16 games of the season. Seven-footer Tonye Jekiri will be the only true big man available for the first half of the year and will have to provide defense and rebounding.

Canes Looking for C Jekiri to Step Up

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Oct. 26, 2014

Jim Larranaga has not held back when talking about his expectations for junior center Tonye Jekiri.

Jekiri is coming off a disappointing sophomore season after showing flashes as a key reserve on UM's ACC regular season and tournament championship team as a freshman.

The 7-footer from Nigeria averaged 4.2 points shooting 45.6 percent from the field to go with 5.5 rebounds in 33 games making 16 starts—numbers which Larranaga hopes improves tremendously this season.

"Tonye needs to step up in every category and I told my coaches that Tonye can expect me to be a blanket on him," Larranaga said. "He's going to wear me and I'm going to wear him out because he is such a vital part of this team this year. He's got the experience on playing on a championship team as a freshman, having been a starter last year he understands each year his responsibilities grow and this year it's grown that we expect him to be a double-double guy. Anything less than that, then he can expect me to not be happy."

Jekiri, who has added 12 pounds in the offseason and is up to 242 pounds, is glad that Larranaga has been on him about his development.

"I just thank him for pushing me hard each day," Jekiri said.

Although there is more attention on Jekiri needing to improve offensively, he also needs to improve on the defensive end.. While he's considered a solid team

defender, the 7-footer averaged less than a block a game last year (29 blocks in 33 games) and averaged a foul every 8.1 minutes. In the four games in Spain in August, Jekiri piled up 16 fouls.

"Going into the season and before we started official practice, he has been on me about fouling a lot because he and the team want me on the floor playing and fouling is a major problem," Jekiri said. "Most of my fouls come from rebounding like pushing guys in the back so he's gotten off me several times going into Spain and showed some videos of great guys who rebound very well and I've really learned a lot from him and not going to from behind to push somebody to grab a rebound and to go around. That move he has showed me and me putting my mind to learning it has really helped me in practice. In practice I hardly foul because I know what to do, I have to get a rebound."

Larranaga, who said prior to last season that Jekiri is a potential first-round draft pick, is hoping to instill confidence in Jekiri.

"If he had as much confidence in him as I do, he'd be one of the guys that everyone would be talking about," Larranaga said. "He's very conservative as a personality, he's a very team-oriented guy, which is great, but what team-oriented means to me is that you do what the team needs you to do and we need him to step up and produce more numbers, more rebounds, more points, more assists, higher percentages, all of the things it takes to be an ACC-caliber big man."

Junior point guard Angel Rodriguez is hoping to help Jekiri be more productive.

"In high school I used to play with a big that it was very limited on how you can throw the ball to him," Rodriguez said. "To a certain extent, it's the same with

Tonye so I have some experience with that. I understand when coach tells me not to throw a pass because he's not going to catch it even if it seems like he should have caught it, but I feel like I'm that player that knows what to do with them and what not to and how to adjust." The importance to Jekiri to this season? "It's huge," Rodriguez said. "A rim-protector, he's actually very good on defense, might be a little underrated, but he's very good and people are going to notice so he's definitely a key because offensively we're not so limited, but we have to be good on defense and he's a big, big, big part of that."

Although the team has a number of new faces, Jekiri is optimistic that this year will be a successful one.

"My own personal expectation is to see us go to the Final Four, try to get to get in the NCAA tournament, win the ACC regular season and the ACC tournament, and I think we can do it because we have the team," Jekiri said. "We have guys who really have the mind to win a championship and I've seen and been there before my freshman year with the older guys and I know what it takes to win. Coach shows us videos every day of guys winning championships like the San Antonio Spurs and when we won the ACC tournament."

The Hurricanes begin their regular season on Nov. 14.

"The way we start is really going to (show) what how we are going to end the season," Jekiri said. "So I'm just hoping injuries doesn't come into this team with what we have planned coming into the season."

How will the season play out?

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 25, 2014

Last week, we asked who would be Miami's best freshman, and which player was the most important?

Today we examine the expectations for the season, how many games UM wins, and will they make the big dance?

Let's see that the staff thinks, and why?

Scott Salomon is counting on 20 wins and the team to go dancing based on Coach L's wizardry.

I see Miami getting 20 wins, which will propel them into the NCAA Tournament. I think that Miami will surprise some people at the ACC Tourney and have some momentum built up before the dance. I am going to be counting on the coaching staff to get us "smart" wins where Coach L pulls a rabbit out of a hat on a few nights to get us magical wins that we might not otherwise be counting on. I think that having Coach L on the sidelines is good for a few extra wins anyway. He seems to get the most out of the talent that he has and I think that he has a lot more to work with this year than meets the eye.

Josh Kaufman also went with 20 wins, and predicted a celebrator dinner after.

I see the 'Canes going 20-10 - and advancing to the 3rd round of the ACC tournament. I expect to see more offensive firepower - especially from the guard positions - than we've seen in years - maybe ever at Miami. The 'Canes will make the Tourney and celebrate with a giant crab dinner provided by Winston's Catering!

I saw the 'Canes as a tourney team as well,

with a slight variation in wins, despite a projected slow start.

The 'Canes play 30 regular season games (maybe more depending on some in season tourneys) this year before heading to the ACC Tournament in Greensboro, and I see them going 21-11. With so many new faces I expect a slow start. But I think once Jim Larranaga and staff figure out what works best for this team, they will maximize the talent and UM will be a tough out in both the ACC and NCAA Tournaments. Once Ivan Cruz Uceda returns to the mix, Miami will have a complete team inside and out. Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan will make ALL ACC second teams, and James Palmer will be an all conference freshman. Miami will be on the bubble come Selection Sunday, but will get a mid to late seed in the field of 68, where no one will want to face them.

Charlie Strauser is concerned about depth but still has UM down for 19-22 victories.

Before the injury to Davon Reed and the half year suspension by the NCAA for Ivan Cruz Uceda I thought this team could win 22-24 regular season games. I think both factors could cost us a few games and now can see us with between 19 and 22 regular season wins and needing at least 2 wins in the ACC tournament to get us into the dance. My prediction: Regular season 20 wins, 2 ACC wins and we squeak into the dance with 22 wins, which is what bought NC State a ticket last year. The Canes have a strong schedule, facing 11 teams that have received votes in the USA Today pre-season coaches poll (6 in the top 25) and what should prove to be a solid non-conference RPI schedule. If the year plays out this way Miami's RPI and SOS should help land them in the big dance.

Miami kicks off the season in just over two weeks.

Five teams that will rise during the season

CBS Sports.com

Jon Rothstein

Oct. 24, 2014

Which programs are primed to break through this year? Check out our list below for five teams that will rise during the 2014-15 college basketball season. In no particular order ...

Miami

Guards win in college basketball and Jim Larranaga boasts several of them. The Hurricanes will add two potential starters in transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan along with a red-shirt freshman in Deandre Burnett, who could wind up leading this team in scoring. Larranaga also welcomes back a quality piece in sophomore Manu Lecomte and adds two first-year players in guards Ja'Quan Newton and James Palmer, who should contribute immediately. But what about the front court? Miami needs 7-foot junior Tonye Jekiri and 6-10 JUCO transfer Ivan Cruz Uceda (eligible after first 16 games) to protect the rim and rebound on a regular basis if this team is to advance to the NCAA Tournament for the second time in three seasons. The Hurricanes went 17-16 last season and have significantly better personnel heading into this season. Does that mean a trip back to the field of 68 out of an ACC Conference that features heavyweights like Louisville, Duke, North Carolina, and Virginia? With a coach like Larranaga and a perimeter this deep, it's definitely within the realm of possibility.

Transfers will have major impact

ESPN

Dick Vitale

Oct. 22, 2014

As the new season gets underway soon, there is a major trend in college basketball. Transferring is almost at an epidemic pace. ESPN.com's Jeff Goodman listed over 500 players who switched uniforms in Division I.

More and more players are turning into Marco Polos, exploring for greener pastures. College basketball's version of free agency is here to stay. Some are looking for instant gratification and leave for a bigger role. Some are junior college stars looking for that Division I scholarship. Others are recent graduates who have one year of eligibility left and are looking for one last shot at glory with a higher-profile program.

In past years, I have limited the number of members on my All-Marco Polo team. This season, I could have easily picked 30 legitimate players for this squad. There are that many guys who will step in and make an impact on their respective programs.

I have decided to come up with a Sweet 16. They are all players going from one Division I school to another. Time to unveil the 2014-15 All-Marco Polo team:

Sheldon McClellan, Texas to Miami (Fla.): Miami has so many new faces, including the 6-5 Longhorns transfer. He averaged 13.5 PPG as a sophomore for Texas. McClellan also gained valuable experience on a preseason trip to Spain.

Angel Rodriguez, Kansas State to Miami (Fla.): Rodriguez is returning home as he played his high school basketball in Miami. He was a second-team All-Big 12 performer at Kansas State.

Rodriguez Hoping to Put Injuries Behind Him

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Oct. 19, 2014

When Rodriguez first transferred to Miami last summer he had wrist surgery, knee tendinitis kept him from participating in the team's trip to Spain in August, and his latest injury, a sprained right ankle, has kept him out of preseason practices this month.

"If you take a shower, you get wet. If you play sports, you get hurt," Rodriguez said. "That's just how it is."

Rodriguez, a transfer from Kansas State who is expected to be one of the team's top players this year during his junior season, admits the injuries have been frustrating.

"If I told you it's not frustrating, I'd be lying," Rodriguez said. "It has been frustrating, but what can I do? Do I complain or do I just do what I got to do to get back on the court? A negative attitude is not going to help you get anywhere in life so I just have to take it and do what I have to do to be healthy, get back on the court, and be myself."

Head coach Jim Larranaga is hopeful that Rodriguez's inability to practice with the team and being limited to just individual drills will help him be available for the start of the season, which begins Nov. 14 against Howard.

"I'm hoping what it means is that he's getting good rest because he's a vital part of our team and we need him to be 100 percent when we open up in November and hopefully he'll stay healthy," Larranaga said.

Rodriguez played through his wrist injury at K-State and playing through injuries is something he's used to doing while playing

in 65 of 68 games with the Wildcats.

"I think he believes that he can play through pain, he also believes he plays better when he's not in pain," Larranaga said. "I would agree with both so we'll just have to monitor his status constantly."

Rodriguez's toughness and leadership will be much-needed for the new-look Hurricanes in addition to his speed, quickness, and playmaking ability (9.9 points and 4.2 assists in his career at KSU). In addition to being a vocal leader, his playing style also inspires others.

"One of the things about a player like Angel Rodriguez, he plays with a reckless abandon so he has more opportunities to get hurt because he throws his body all around the place," Larranaga said. "He'll be mixing it up with the big guys and you'll wonder what a little guy like Angel is doing in there, but he's a very hard-nosed competitor and he's a great guy to have as a leader."

Rodriguez insists that his ankle injury—or other injuries—won't be an issue this season.

"My body feels great," Rodriguez said. "The only problem I have is my ankle, but I will be on the court (last Friday), probably not doing full scrimmage, but the way I think of it is once you step on the court you're just a step away from being yourself. At the same time I have experience with the two years at K-State, I was playing with injuries and I found a way to have some success. My ankle is not a concern whatsoever; I'm going to do what I'm going to do no matter what."

"The season starts in almost a month so by then I'll be fine."

McClellan leads hoops' projected top transfers

Sports Illustrated

Luke Winn and Dan Hanner

Oct. 17, 2014

This week on SI.com, we've been releasing data from a college basketball statistical projection system developed by economist Dan Hanner with assistance from SI's Luke Winn. Part I featured our projected top 100 scorers, top 20 rebounders and top 20 in assists, and it contains a more in-depth description of the statistical model. Part II featured the projected top 50 freshman scorers, and part III was the top 50 breakout scorers. Today, we unveil our forecast of the top 100 transfer scorers according to raw points per game.

The most difficult players to project in college basketball are transfers. Recruiting rankings help us do a decent job of identifying high-impact freshmen, and for returning players, shot volume, efficiency, rebounding rates and assist rates are all correlated fairly highly over time. But transfers between Division I teams often perform quite differently as a result of switching coaches, teammates and offensive systems. We've adjusted their projections for changes in competition level, and plugged them into their new rotations, but don't be surprised if some players on this list significantly out- or under-perform these stats due to changes in environment.

What we're certain of is that there are a lot of important transfers in 2014-15, including players who will have big roles on potentially ranked teams. Dan Hanner ran projections on every transfer with D-I experience from the top 11 conferences -- the football power five plus the Atlantic 10, Big East, AAC, Missouri Valley, Mountain West and West Coast -- and it wasn't difficult to find 100 potential rotation players.

Sheldon McClellan (1) played his first two seasons at Texas, where he was quietly one of the country's most efficient freshman scorers in 2011-12. The model projects him to regain that form at Miami, which lost its primary shot-taker from last season, Rion Brown, and needs McClellan and new point guard Angel Rodriguez (10) to carry a significant load. Marquette should benefit greatly from Matt Carlino's graduate transfer from BYU; the Golden Eagles got next-to-no offense out of the point-guard spot in '13-14, and will look to Carlino (3) and Deonte Burton to emerge as double-digit scorers.

Hurricanes looking for leadership from Rodriguez

Associated Press
Steve Wine
Oct. 16, 2014

Now that junior transfer Angel Rodriguez plays point guard for the Miami Hurricanes instead of Kansas State, he does his grocery shopping unrecognized.

Rodriguez was a celebrity in Manhattan, Kansas, where he helped the Wildcats to the Big 12 co-championship in 2013. But the college town of 56,000 is a little different from Miami, Rodriguez notes with a smile.

"It's a very small town with barely anything to do, just basketball and school," he said. "But there are great fans there, and wherever you go, they know who you are. Grocery shopping, they know you. The drive-through, they know you. You rent a movie, they know you. It's great. It's a real college experience."

But Rodriguez wanted to be closer to his family in Puerto Rico, so he transferred to Miami, sat out last season and is now poised to start at point guard for a young and small but promising team. He walks across campus unnoticed, but that could change if his season goes the way the Hurricanes hope.

"Angel will be our floor general," coach Jim Larranaga said. "He has great leadership skills. He's a very natural leader and commands a lot of respect from his teammates."

Rodriguez will be the most experienced player on a team with only three players who have played previously for the Hurricanes — and one of them will miss the start of the season with an injury.

The Hurricanes have been rebuilding since the end of the 2012-13 season, when the

top six players on their Atlantic Coast Conference championship team were seniors. They went 17-16 last season and 7-11 in the league, and six players from that team have departed.

There are no seniors on this season's roster, and only three front-court players.

"They're all back next year," Larranaga said Thursday at media day. "So whatever we do this year will be the foundation for what we've been building for. But right now, everything is new."

Rodriguez is happy to be part of that new foundation, and he's especially eager to play after sitting out a year.

"The time has gone slowly, but it has been really productive," he said. "I put in a lot of work in the weight room and training room. I'm going to be more athletic."

The 5-foot-11, 178-pound Rodriguez became a starter midway through his freshman season at Kansas State. As a sophomore he averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists and made 55 3-pointers to help the Wildcats win a share of the league title. He was selected to the All-Big 12 second team and the All-Big 12 defensive team.

He also became fluent in English.

"In high school I knew enough English to survive, to get into college, to be on my own and order food and talk to coaches and friends a little bit," he said. "But in Manhattan, Kansas, obviously nobody spoke Spanish. I was forced to learn English. My teammates helped — I used to mess up a lot, and they would laugh. I told them I didn't mind as long as they would help me after they laughed."

Despite the friendships Rodriguez developed in Kansas, he felt the tug of

family. He was born in San Juan and lived there until he was 15, when he came to Miami to play high school basketball.

His brothers, ages 15 and 9, are both basketball players in San Juan. They and their mother will now be able to watch Rodriguez play in person for the first time since he left Puerto Rico.

"That's the main reason I came back to Miami," he said. "College only happens once, and I have two years left. They're going to get to see me in person, and that's special to me."

The Hurricanes can use their support. Unlike at Kansas State, attendance is a persistent problem for Miami in an area with an abundance of beaches, and teams in all four professional sports.

"It's a challenge and a goal to bring a crowd wearing orange shirts to our arena," Rodriguez said. "I know there's other stuff to do in Miami, but if we win, we're going to bring people in."

Rodriguez happy to be back home in Miami

South Florida Sun Sentinel
Christy Cabrera Chirinos
Oct. 16, 2014

In a little more than a year, Angel Rodriguez has dealt with a nagging wrist injury, tendinitis in his knee that sidelined him during a trip to Spain with his new teammates and an ankle injury that has kept him from practicing in recent weeks.

Still, the former Kansas State guard couldn't help but smile as he stood on the court at the BankUnited Center on Thursday and recounted the journey that brought him from chilly Manhattan, Kansas, back to South Florida, where he'll get to be a Hurricane.

"I wouldn't trade this for nothing. It feels great being close to my family and friends and home. Nobody would understand because they're not in my position, but being home, I wake up every day in such a great mood, no matter what," said Rodriguez, a native of Cupey, Puerto Rico, who moved to Miami when he was 15. "There's no better feeling than waking up, looking out the window and seeing the sun shining. It just puts me in a great mood... everything is great. Everything is great, man."

Rodriguez, who starred at Miami's Dr. Krop High before signing with the Wildcats, sat out last year to comply with NCAA transfer rules, but he is expected to play a vital role for the Hurricanes, who are looking to regain their ACC championship form after a season of ups and downs last year.

The 5-foot-11 redshirt junior watched last season as Miami came up painfully short in so many of its ACC games, but he learned the Hurricanes system. He got used to his new teammates and adapted to the style of play Miami coach Jim Larrañaga wants

from his players. He even helped bring the Hurricanes a much-needed big man in fifth-year player Joe Thomas, a former forward at Niagara who happened to be one of Rodriguez's state tournament teammates at Dr. Krop.

"One of the main reasons I came here was because of Angel," said Thomas. "I played with him in high school and he's a great point guard. He shares the ball. He's an excellent teammate. It's great to play with him...he's extremely mentally tough. He works extremely hard."

For Rodriguez, part of that hard work has included the rehabilitation efforts he's put forth to deal with the injuries that have plagued him throughout his college career. Still, even through discomfort, he started 33 games as a sophomore and averaged 11.4 points on 36 percent shooting with the Wildcats.

He's prepared to play through pain again at Miami, if that's needed, though he said his tendinitis and wrist both feel better. On Thursday, Rodriguez said he expects to return to practice on Friday, though it will be to do lighter work.

"You take a shower, you get wet. You play sports, you get hurt. That's how it is," said Rodriguez, an All-Big 12 second team selection as a sophomore. "If I told you it wasn't frustrating, I'd be lying. It has been frustrating, but what do I do? Do I complain or do I just do what I have to do to get back on the court? A negative attitude is not going to help you get anywhere in life, so I just have to take it and do what I have to do like I said to be healthy and get back on the court and be myself."

Canes still looking for power forward to emerge

South Florida Sun Sentinel
Victoria Hernandez
Oct. 16, 2014

The Hurricanes basketball team is loaded at four of five positions, but Miami still needs a power forward, and settling on one will be a priority for coach Jim Larrañaga in the days ahead.

All three guards are stable with Angel Rodriguez, Deandre Burnett and Sheldon McClellan. The center position is in competition between Tonye Jekiri, Omar Sherman and Ivan Cruz Uceda. Of that group, Jekiri, a junior, has the most experience with the Hurricanes, but the most questionable position right now for the Hurricanes is at power forward, where Omar Sherman and James Palmer could see time.

Larrañaga said Thursday he also is considering Uceda and Davon Reed to fill that role, though both will be missing time early in the season with Uceda complying with an NCAA eligibility rule and Reed dealing with a knee injury.

"The coaches are trying to figure out the best way to play offense and defense with both a smaller lineup or with two big guys in the game," Larrañaga said.

Burnett will be returning after sitting out last season with a wrist injury. Larrañaga said that even though Burnett is a scorer, he is working on sharing the ball and creating shots for his teammates.

"The more he does that, the better team we'll have," Larrañaga said.

Rodriguez still isn't practicing with an ankle injury, though he said he expects to practice Friday. Larrañaga explained that Rodriguez is a physical and aggressive player who is prone to injury, comparing

him to former Hurricanes guard Garrius Adams.

Adams suffered various knee injuries throughout his career at Miami, but last season, stepped up as a leader and played in every game, scoring his career-high 22 points in the season finale against Wake Forest. Larrañaga is hoping for Rodriguez to have similar success.

"He believes that he can play through pain," Larrañaga said. "He also believes he plays better when he's not in pain. I would agree with both. We'll just have to monitor his status constantly."

*The freshmen are getting adjusted to college basketball. Larrañaga pointed out Sherman as a pleasant surprise and he used a story from practice to make his point.

"(He) does not appear to be that athlete who runs and jumps and impresses you with his athletic ability. We had some guests on the side, who were kind of saying, 'He doesn't look like the other guys.' I said, 'He's not. But he'll bury three threes in the next five minutes.' And he did. They were like, 'Ooo. He does belong.'"

Fellow freshmen Ja'Quan Newton and Palmer said they are excited for the season to start. Since Newton is from Philadelphia and Palmer is from Washington, DC, they are both enjoying the Miami weather. Newton followed the Hurricanes from their Atlantic Coast Championship run and was being recruited by the program at the time.

"It was exciting to see 'cause at the time they had offered me, so I was looking into the schools I wanted to go and when I see that, I just thought I want to be a part of that," Newton said.

Who will be the most important player?

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 16, 2014

Last we broke down which of the freshman we thought would be the best/have the biggest impact.

Today we examine who will be the best player overall.

Will it be 6'5 Texas transfer Sheldon McClellan, who could lead the team in scoring? How about Angel Rodriguez who was an All Big XII player at Kansas State? Big Man Tonye Jekiri? Someone else?

Joshua Kaufman got us started, and clearly set the tone for a staff that recognizes the values of big men (with a very comical FSU dig added).

Miami's most important player has to be Tonye Jekiri. Jekiri's improvement will go a long way to determining the success of Miami's season – especially in the first 16 games while Cruz-Uceda has to sit due to some idiotic NCAA rule. I guess if Cruz-Uceda stole a scooter, signed 1,000 autographs for \$, or engaged in BB gun fights instead of whatever he did, this wouldn't be a problem and I could answer with Deandre Burnett.

Cam Underwood seconded the notion, with a more serious response.

The most important player in my eyes is Tonye Jekiri. He's the 1 post with size until Ivan Cruz-Uceda becomes eligible, so he's flying without a net at the start of the year.

Jekiri is a good interior defender and rebounder, and will need to bring both of these traits to the table in every game for the Canes to be successful. Jekiri also showed an improved offensive game in

the 2nd half of last season, and anything he can add on that end of the floor will be a bonus. But, on a team with few interior options, and no others with real height until the 16th game of the season, Jekiri's importance to this season cannot be overstated.

Scott Salamon? You guessed it, the 7 footer.

The most important person on the team, in my opinion, is Jekiri. The Canes must have an inside presence and work their game from the inside out. They had problems rebounding last season and they are a little short on big men, no pun intended. They did not get the big man on campus this recruiting period and for Miami to be successful this season they are going to have to crash the boards hard and it all starts with the man in the middle.

Yours truly made it a nearly unanimous response in favor of Jekiri.

If I was asked who was Miami's best player, I would have to pause and decide between 6'5 wing Sheldon McClellan, who looks like an NBA prospect in skill and physicality, or former All Big XII PG Angel Rodriguez, who is a battle tested leader.

However, since I asked who was the most "important," my answer is easily Tonye Jekiri. Until Ivan Cruz Uceda comes off suspension, the 'Canes do not have another experienced BIG on the roster. Why is Jekiri so important? Miami has plenty of options on the wing and in the back court but TJ gives them a finisher in close and a rim protector on defense. Not to mention what he can do on the glass. He has to stay healthy and he has to manage to stay out of foul trouble most games, so the 7 footer can give UM a presence down low. Scoring is far less important for Jekiri than defensive prowess and rebounding. But because his skill set and size are unique for

this squad, he is its' most important player in my opinion.

Charlie Strauzer on the other hand, feels it will be Miami's back court that is the key,

I believe that both McClellan and Rodriguez will be equally important to the success of this team. McClellan is such a talent he will be the focus of most team's defensive strategies which will create mismatches and opportunities for Rodriguez to exploit. Angel's vocal leadership on the court along with his ability to create off the dribble should make it easy for guys like Tonye to get easy shots and/or offensive rebounds. Likewise having a threat like Rodriguez should help free up McClellan on the perimeter for threes. If McClellan continues to progress I would expect him to average high teens/low twenties per contest, which will be needed as the Canes head into conference play.

Transfers to play key roles for Miami

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Oct. 16, 2014

Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga. The difference this year? His foundation should last more than one season.

His Hurricanes begin play next month with nine players who have never worn a Miami uniform.

"It's all new," said Larranaga, in his fourth year at UM. "We're evolving into the kind of team we want to become, but evolution takes time. The world, I understand, took seven days to build. This is going to take a lot longer than that."

Junior center Tonye Jekiri and sophomore point guard Manu Lecomte will take the court when UM opens Nov. 14 against Howard. The only other returning player, sophomore swingman Davon Reed, will be out until at least January with a knee injury.

Two transfers, point guard Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and 6-foot-5 guard Sheldon McClellan (Texas) will be critical pieces. Both sat out last year to satisfy NCAA transfer rules.

"We have to get familiar with everybody, first," McClellan said. "We have to play defense. We're small this year. Everyone on the team can score. That won't be a problem."

The Hurricanes will play a guard-heavy rotation that relies on Rodriguez, who helped lead Kansas State to a share of the Big 12 title two seasons ago, and McClellan (13.5 points per game in 2012-13). Talented 6-2 scorer Deandre Burnett, who sat out last year as a freshman with a wrist injury, and 6-2 freshman Ja'Quan Newton will play significant minutes.

Size will be Miami's main issue against ACC competition. The Hurricanes will need Jekiri (6-11, 242) to increase his output of 4.2 points and 5.5 rebounds. The power forward spot is a question mark since 6-10 forward Ivan Cruz Uceda, a strong

rebounder, is not eligible until January after transferring from junior college. Until he returns, one of two freshmen — Omar Sherman (6-7) or James Palmer (6-5) — or 6-9 graduate transfer Joe Thomas (Niagara) will fill the role.

A year ago, Miami lost five seniors and one NBA draft pick from an ACC championship team. After going 17-16 (7-11 ACC) last season, UM lost another six players to graduation.

Even if the Hurricanes do not equal that record, the future seems bright.

In addition to returning all but one player next year, Miami will be able to use Kamari Murphy, a 6-foot-9 Oklahoma State transfer who must sit this season. Plus, a drawn-out NCAA investigation — Rodriguez and McClellan said it affected their view of UM when they were high school prospects — is in the rear-view mirror. Larranaga said he's now able to get in the door with higher-profile recruits.

"Whatever we do this year will be the foundation," Larranaga said. "The difference between last year and this year, is next year."

@CanesHoops Receiving Votes in Coaches Poll

HurricaneSports.com

Oct. 16, 2014

The University of Miami men's basketball team was receiving votes in the USA TODAY Sports Top 25 men's basketball preseason coaches' poll released Thursday.

The Hurricanes welcome nine newcomers to the 2014-15 roster, which includes six recruits – Kamari Murphy, Ja'Quan Newton, James Palmer, Omar Sherman, Joe Thomas and Ivan Cruz Uceda – along with two Big 12 transfers – Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) – and redshirt freshman Deandre Burnett, who sat out the 2013-14 season with an injury.

Miami will face off six teams in the top 25, including five in the top 10: Duke (No. 3), North Carolina (No. 6), Florida (No. 7), Virginia (No. 8) and Louisville (No. 9). In addition to a ranked Syracuse team (No. 24), Miami has five other opponents receiving votes on its 2014-15 schedule: Pittsburgh, Providence, Notre Dame, Illinois and Florida State.

Miami finished the 2013-14 season with a 17-16 overall record. The Hurricanes are 66-36 overall in three seasons under head coach Jim Larrañaga.

Palmer Looking for a Role

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Oct. 15, 2014

The 6-foot-5 shooting guard from Washington, D.C. enrolled in June and played four games in Spain finishing fourth on the team in scoring averaging 11.5 points a game and led the team in shooting making 68.0 percent of his shots from the field.

"I think I did OK, I contributed and that's what I wanted to do," Palmer said.

The Hurricanes won all four of their games in the 10-day tour of Spain in August.

"I think it was a good experience," Palmer said. "We had a good team bonding, everybody played together. It was a just a good trip on and off the court."

Palmer says the transition to UM has been smooth after averaging 15.7 points as a senior at St. John's College High School.

"I feel real comfortable," Palmer said. "We're running basically the same system as high school so there's no difference."

Getting used to South Florida has also been a smooth transition.

"It's not a big adjustment at all," he said. "Back home it's not that different. Here is just a little bit hotter. Going to class, I switched classes in high school so it's not that big of an adjustment."

With sophomore guard Davon Reed injured and possibly out for the season, it's an opportunity for Palmer to earn a key role on the team.

"I definitely see that as an opportunity because I got to step up," Palmer said.

"I'm just trying to contribute as much as I can."

Preseason practices began last week in preparation for the 2014-15 season, which begins on Nov. 14.

"Just keep putting in work every day, shooting drills, working out, and staying consistent with my shot," he said. "I want to keep working on my overall game, but mostly defense—help side, on-ball pressure, hands high."

2014-15 ACC Preview: Miami Hurricanes

DukeReport.com

David Aldridge

Oct. 15, 2014

The Miami Hurricanes are on the menu today in our latest ACC basketball team preview.

We're going in alphabetical order through every team in the new-look ACC, but we'll be excluding Duke – seeing as how the Blue Devils already receive a fair amount of coverage on this site.

If you've missed any of our previews, I encourage you to check them out to get an idea of the landscape around the ACC. We've already covered Boston College, Clemson, Florida State, Georgia Tech and Louisville.

Jim Larranaga had a tough year last season after leading the Hurricanes to the ACC Championship in the 2012-13 season. Here's a more in-depth look at what's ahead for Miami this year.

2013-14 Record: Overall – 17-16 | ACC – 7-11 (10th Place)

Games against Duke this season: Tuesday, January 13 at Duke

Last Season

Everyone expected the Hurricanes to take a step back last season after losing so much talent from the previous year, and that's exactly what happened. You simply can't lose so many experienced playmakers and not suffer.

However, Jim Larranaga still deserves credit for guiding Miami to a 17-16 record and seven wins in the ACC, including victories on the road against North Carolina and N.C. State, two NCAA Tournament teams.

It was a year of transition in Coral Gables and many of the faces from last year's team are no longer with the squad, including leading scorers Rion Brown and Garrius Adams. However, unlike last season, this year's group appears to have more potential and should be ready to

immediately compete in the ACC.

Key Players: Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan

Coach Larranaga has had success with the Miami program in part because of his effectiveness in getting impact transfers and junior college players. This season will be no different.

Angel Rodriguez is a transfer from Kansas State who should give the Hurricanes one of the better true point guards in the conference. He was an all conference player (and a member of the Big 12 All-Defensive Team) during his sophomore season at Kansas State and should be able to provide steady leadership for the team and playmaking ability – something that was lacking last season after the departure of Shane Larkin to the NBA.

Along with Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan is another transfer from a Big 12 school who should play an important role in the Miami backcourt. At 6'5", 205 pounds, McClellan offers good size at the combo guard position and he averaged 13.5 points during his sophomore season as a Texas Longhorn. He's a guy who can create his own shot and has a good chance to emerge as the primary scoring option for the team.

X-Factor: Tonye Jekiri

With 6'10" junior college player Cruz Uceda ineligible for the first half of the season, it's critical for Tonye Jekiri to become a consistent presence in the paint for the Hurricanes. Jim Larranaga has said he expects the 7'0", 235-pound junior center to be the type of guy who averages a double-double, and that's the type of contribution this team will need from him if it's to get back to the NCAA Tournament.

Prediction

Miami is emerging as one of the trendy picks to be one of the surprise teams in college basketball this season. With Manu Lecomte, Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan, and redshirt freshman Deandre

Burnett the Hurricanes certainly have a backcourt that will be able to match-up with any team in the ACC. The biggest question is whether or not there will be enough production in the frontcourt to provide balance.

With home games against Virginia, North Carolina and Louisville, the Canes will have opportunities to notch some signature wins that would look impressive to the selection committee. I just don't know if they've got the pieces needed to contend in the paint with guys like Montrezl Harrell, Kennedy Meeks, Jahlil Okafor and Mike Tobey.

2014-2015 Season Preview: 23 Impact Transfers

NBC Sports

Terrence Payne

Oct. 14, 2014

6. Angel Rodriguez, Miami (via Kansas State): The Hurricanes new point guard took a year off to recover from a wrist injury and now is the key piece to a revamped perimeter for Miami, which includes fellow transfer Sheldon McClellan, four-star freshman JaQuan Newton and returners Deandre Burnett and Davon Reed. The former K-State floor general was second-team all-Big 12 in 2012-2013, averaging 11.4 points and 5.2 assists per game.

Burnett Ready to Make an Impact

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Oct. 13, 2014

Burnett was impressive in his debut scoring 16 points in 22 minutes in an exhibition game against Florida Tech last season.

However, the encouraging performance quickly turned to disappointment when he was ruled out for the season with a hand injury suffered in practice before the season opener.

"It was pretty tough, but with the coaches and my team, family being close, I was able to stay mentally focused and come back ready for this year," Burnett said.

Burnett was unable to practice with the team during the season, but was able to work on his conditioning and lift weights to stay in shape. He was finally cleared to practice after the season over during the spring workouts.

He hasn't had any issues lately.

"My hand feels great," Burnett said. "I feel like it's 100 percent now. No problems, no pain."

Burnett showed his scoring touch during the team's four-game tour of Spain in August averaging 14.3 points on 48.8-percent shooting.

"It was a great experience, something new, a different culture and being back on the court after not being on the court in about a year," Burnett said.

The 6-foot-2, 195-pound guard also averaged 2.5 rebounds and 1.5 assists.

"I think I played well gradually," he said. "Each game went on I just got better and better each game with timing and my

rhythm started coming back. The coaches and the team was constantly in my ear reminding me that I had been out for a while."

The team will have four new starters this season from last year's 17-16 team. Burnett will be looking to be one of those four although he's not too focused on what exactly his role will be.

"I just want to win, just help my team win in whatever role they need me to play because the amount of time you have on this team your role might be different each night so whatever role I have each night, I'm willing to step up to the challenge," he said.

The 6-foot Carol City product has also been considered a combo guard, who is a better scorer than a distributor. With Angel Rodriguez handling the majority of the point guard responsibilities, Burnett will be off the ball a lot although he did play both in Spain.

"Both guard spots I believe I'll play this year," Burnett said. "I played a little bit of both in Spain. With the offense we run, each guard can handle the ball so we don't too much label who is who."

He believes his biggest improvement in the past year has been his defense.

"Coach (Chris) Caputo has stayed on me about defense, I watch a lot of film on defense, and when I was hurt I was paying attention to defense and different schemes so I know our defense very well so I think my defense has gotten even better," Burnett said.

Rodriguez, who has been an all-conference defensive player at Kansas State, and Sheldon McClellan, who is the best athlete on the team, has also been an improved

defensive player.

"We preach defense a lot because the coaches understand we have a lot of talent and guys that can put the ball in the basket so if we can stop people, then sky is the limit," Burnett said. "Who knows how far we'll go."

The new-look, but talented Hurricanes, have high goals for themselves this season although it's hard to know what exactly what kind of team they will be.

"We talk about goals, we want to win an ACC championship," Burnett said. "Eventually we want to be able to win a national championship."

The strength of the team?

"I think putting the ball in the basket," Burnett said. "It's going to be hard to match up against us. We can go four guards at a time so it's going to be hard for teams in the ACC to match up against us."

Miami has an exhibition game on Nov. 6 before opening the regular season on Nov. 14 against Howard at home.

Sherman Expected to Contribute Immediately

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Oct. 10, 2014

Sherman, a 6-foot-8, 260-pound lefty from Duncanville, Texas, will be counted on to provide solid production in the frontcourt, which is limited to just three players until January when Ivan Cruz Uceda is eligible to join the team.

Sherman is the likely candidate to start over Niagara senior transfer Joe Thomas, who has been described by head coach Jim Larranaga as a role player, alongside center Tonye Jekiri unless the team goes with a four-guard lineup.

"Hopefully I get to play quite a bit, it's unfortunate that Ivan doesn't get to play—he's a good friend of mine," Sherman said. "I just want to do my part and be the best teammate I can be whether I get minutes or I don't or I'm coming off the bench."

A potential starting five includes guards Angel Rodriguez, Deandre Burnett, Sheldon McClellan, Sherman, and Jekiri.

"I think we're going to be a well-rounded team," Sherman said. "The bonding and everything that we've done up to this point, I think we're just going to explode into a great team this year."

Sherman averaged 4.0 points, 5.0 rebounds, and 1.5 blocks in the four games in Spain in August, which was a valuable experience for him.

"It was a great experience for me," Sherman said. "It was my first time being out of the country so it was a new experience. I feel like we got some good team chemistry going. It was just an exciting trip. I looked forward to it when I first got recruited and they told me about it."

As a player, he's comfortable scoring in the post and finishing at the rim and also stepping out and knocking down a shot.

"I like to shoot a lot, I can make 3s—I know I didn't make any in Spain, but that's a part of my game as well as playing in the post," Sherman said. "I'm just trying to evolve my game and be an overall great player."

He's noticed that he's had to make an adjustment at this level compared to high school where he led Duncanville to a 20-12 season averaging 17.1 points and 8.4 rebounds a game.

"In high school everything is kind of slower and at your pace when you're a higher-level player so coming to somewhere where everybody has been the best player on their team, it's great and I feel I've gotten a lot better as far as conditioning and strength," Sherman said. "I'm feeling good overall."

By not being the best player on the floor, it's been a humbling experience.

"It's very humbling," Sherman said. "For example Ivan and Tonye, they're amazing players and I didn't really have the competition like that in high school so to have that competition and there's going to be more out there like them, it just opens my eyes to how much I need to get better and how much I can improve."

The team spent 10 days in Spain playing games and touring the country.

"It was just different from the United States, just the whole atmosphere, the buildings, landmarks, and monuments, it was a lot different," he said. "The culture was a lot different and another thing, I don't speak Spanish like that so that's a lot different."

Who will be the best of the freshmen?

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 10, 2014

The University of Miami Men's Basketball Team opens the season with a game against Howard on 11/14. With the season right around the corner, it's time to look at some of the most intriguing factors the team will face.

Today the staff tackled the question of which of UM's freshman players, among RS frosh Deandre Burnett, true freshmen Ja'Quan Newton, James Palmer, and Omar Sherman, would have the biggest impact in 2014-14.

Basketball Guru Charlie Strauzer, who put together this detailed look at Miami's improved scoring options, got us started,

I'm going to say Deandre will be most productive of the 4 but of the 3 true frosh I believe Omar will have the greatest contribution. Burnett is a natural scorer, he finds ways to get points and should come out like he was shot out of a cannon given he's 2 years removed from high school and has yet to take a shot in a regular season game. Omar will almost certainly benefit from Ivan Cruz Uceda's half year eligibility related suspension. He came in overweight and out of shape but has dropped 25+ pounds and has really impressed the staff with his talent and work ethic. Coach Chris Caputo likens him to a Sam Perkins type, someone who can score from the perimeter or the block and shoots free throws well if he's fouled. If the Canes get anything close to a Perkins in Sherman they will be in great shape.

Next up, the loquacious Cam Underwood chimed in with his always well thought out analysis:

This might seem like the easiest answer, but if we're counting De'Andre Burnett as

a freshman, he's gotta be the choice. I saw him play in his Senior Year at Carol City 3 years ago (yeah, it's been a while since he played), and he is an electric scorer. He averaged nearly 38ppg facing constant double teams and traps designed to get the ball out of his hands. His handle isn't the greatest, but it is good enough to allow him to get to whatever scoring spot he wants. And, he has deep range, which only aids in putting the defense on their heels. Even with adding Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez to the backcourt, Burnett is the best scorer on the team the instant he steps on the floor.

Where Burnett might struggle is on the defensive end. He's only 6'1", but he's a pure scoring 2 guard. Going up against much taller players, Burnett will be tested often. I'm not sure how much we'll see the player he's guarding inverted down to the post, but if they are, that could be a struggle for Burnett to defend. Grizzled SOTU vet Scott Salomon is never shy with his opinions, and offered this insight,

I think that Deandre is the key to this class because with him being here for a year already and having been exposed to the system, he needs to lead by example. Also, with him being a Miami kid he can help the newcomers adjust to the big city life. Miami has had a tough time putting the ball in the hoop and opening up leads in games and he can lead in this area. They need his shooting touch to come back early so when they get to the ACC part of their schedule, he will have a hot hand and keep them in the games with the big boys.

Highly skilled Hoops Authoritarian Joshua Kaufman agreed that Burnett was the man as well:

Deandre Burnett - It was expected that Burnett was going to take this mantle

last season and either become the leading or 2nd leading scorer on an offensively-challenged 'Canes team. Sadly, Burnett was lost for the season before it even started. I find no reason to not pencil Burnett in as the frosh most likely to make a huge impact again. Even with some more capable scorers on this year's squad (McClellan & Rodriguez) and some other talented newcomers (Newton & Palmer), I expect Burnett to light up the scoreboard. I'm not talking 25pts a game here, but 12-15ppg with explosions in the 20's when the 'Canes need him is definitely not out of the question.

Last and least, yours truly offered a slight variation from the rest:

I am going to go with a sleeper in James Palmer. I like his size at 6'4, since he might be forced to play some 3 in smaller line-ups. From what I have seen he is a very smooth, if not spectacular player. And of the bunch I think he has the most consistent jumper. This could come in very handy with the penetration of Manu Lecomte and Angel Rodriguez. He was incredibly efficient in Spain, and shot team best 68% from the floor, hit 57% (8-15) from distance en route to 11.5 ppg. He also chipped in 10 assists and 8 steals in 4 games. Impressive numbers, albeit we have no idea what the level of the opposition was like. He will also benefit from the absence of injured wing Davon Reed. If Palmer can defend half as well as he shoots, he will see major minutes.

The amazing thing? Not one of us picked PG/SG and Philly Native Ja'Quan Newton, the highest rated of all the freshmen among all of the recruiting services.

This further illustrates what a deep and talented group of newcomers Miami has.

Player Profile: Sheldon McClellan

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 9, 2014

Junior - 6'5 205 - Houston, Tx (Bellaire H.S. - transfer University of Texas)

In 2012-13 averaged 13.5 points, 3.9 rebounds, 0.9 assists, and 0.8 steals with the Longhorns.

4 star recruit and #49 prospect overall according to ESPN coming out of H.S.

Really stood out in UM's summer trip to Spain, averaging 20.0 ppg on 62% shooting, and with 5.5 rpg and 3 steals a contest.

Summary: 'Canes fans say hello to your leading candidate to be the top scorer, and arguably the best player, on the UM roster for 2014-15. McClellan struggled with his shot in Austin, but still put up big numbers. We suspect shot selection will be less of an issue under Coach Larranaga. Former Miami players Justin Heller and Donnavan Kirk raved to us about this guy's abilities. Blessed with terrific handles, a 44 inch vertical, and excellent size for a 2/3, McClellan has is the type of player that could catch the eye on NBA Scouts if he puts it all together. He might even be asked to play some 4, given the Hurricanes dearth of depth in the front court. Look for Coach L and staff to unleash him in the open court, and bring out his best as a defender as well. Miami has plenty of perimeter options, but none quite as special as Shel Mac. If the 'Canes are to have a huge season, he will need to play close to or at the level an ALL-ACC performer.

15 transfers who will make biggest impact

Yahoo! Sports

Jeff Eisenberg

Oct. 9, 2014

Our 2014-15 season preview continues with a look at transfers most likely to make an immediate impact next season. Check back every morning for the next five weeks for more college hoops preview content.

4. Angel Rodriguez, G, Miami (From Kansas State)

Assuming lingering knee and wrist injuries don't hamper him this season, Rodriguez should serve as the offensive and defensive catalyst for a guard-oriented Miami team. The former second-team all-Big-12 selection at Kansas State averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists in his final season with the Wildcats, excelling as an on-ball defender and leading the team in 3-pointers, assists and steals. Rodriguez is part of a talented backcourt that could propel Miami into NCAA tournament contention this season. Manu Lecompte will either back up Rodriguez or start alongside him, while wings Deandre Burnett, Ja'Quan Newton and Sheldon McClellan are each gifted scorers.

Programs on the rise and the decline

NBC Sports

Terrence Payne

Oct. 8, 2014

It's been a long offseason for some programs. The NBA Draft, graduation, off-the-court issues and transfers have altered some tournament team's rosters. While those teams look to regroup in the 2013-2014 season, others are looking to take a major step forward, returning to postseason play or attempt to make an NCAA tournament run.

FIVE PROGRAMS ON THE RISE

Miami: After a rebuilding campaign this past season, Jim Larranaga has a pair of impact transfers in the back court: Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan. The depth in that back court is added with four-star guard Deandre Burnett (redshirted 2013-2014) and JaQuan Newton. Though, an injury to Davon Reed and first-year forward Ivan Cruz Uceda ruled ineligible for 16 games has been a setback this fall. The Hurricanes aren't ACC contenders, but they are trending back toward postseason play.

UM Best Defense may be its Potent Offense

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Oct. 7, 2014

With just three players who saw court time last year returning, and one of them out with an injury for several months, the Canes are full of new faces, even to the most ardent fan. Though continuity is important, that's not necessarily bad news. "We've got a little bit more firepower than we had this time last year going into this season with Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Deandre Burnett," Coach Caputo told us. The three, all guards, were on the bench last year as transfer rules, in the case of Rodriguez and McClellan, and injury in the case of Burnett kept them off the court.

"This time last year, we did not return a double digit scorer and you had to think about how to manufacture points," said Caputo. That is no different this year, with sophomore Manu Lecomte the leading returner at 7.7 points per game from a team that scored only 61.5 PPG. But this year, the Hurricanes will have proven scorers. Rodriguez and McClellan both scored double-digits per game at Kansas State and Texas, respectively, and Burnett was known as one of the most dangerous scorers in all of prep basketball before coming to Miami. The Canes coaches would like to have four to six double-figure scorers, similar to the 2013 ACC Championship team - which did not quite meet that mark, but were a deep team with three scorers north of 12.9 PPG (Shane Larkin, Durand Scott and Kenny Kadji) and Trey McKinney-Jones at just over 9 PPG, and three others averaging more than 6 PPG.

"With that being said," Caputo explained, "we had very good chemistry. Although you certainly want to be in the NCAA and compete for a league championship," added Caputo, "I think last year's team by all accounts was an overachieving group in a lot of ways," said Caputo. The Cardiac Canes lost by fewer than seven points in 10 of those contests, including a thriller at then second-ranked Syracuse. Coach Larranaga adapted his defensive philosophy from a man-to-man into a heavy diet of zone defenses that slowed the tempo of the game and gave opponents fits.

Caputo told us that players like "Manu, Tonye [Jekiri] and Davon [Reed] got very

good experience last year," though "all of them had very good moments as well as learning moments that comes with guys being freshman." Caputo continued, saying that continuity is critical and the "biggest adjustment will come from all the new guys, whether it's the guys that sat out or the ones we brought in (freshmen Ja'Quan Newton, Omar Sherman, James Palmer, and junior college transfer Ivan Cruz Uceda). Caputo added that "even the guys that played last year that will be adjusting to new roles on the roster."

One Hurricane who will not be adjusting to a new role, but will be depended on more than ever, is junior center Jekiri. After playing as a regular starter for the first time last year, he progressed slowly throughout the season, but looked like an ACC-caliber starter by the end of the season. Though still inconsistent, in his last 10 games of the year, he produced his career high in scoring (15) at Florida State and his first career double-double, adding 14 points to a career-high 13 rebounds at NC State. As the season progressed last year so did Tonye's skill set, albeit slowly.

One number that stands out was Tonye's rebounding in the last month of the season. Caputo explained that minutes per rebound is "a big number the NBA people look at because they feel it translates. Anything under 3.5 is terrific and (Tonye) was at 3.3 in the last month." The team is also expecting improved offense from Tonye, in no small part due to the presence of Rodriguez. While he improved individual skills, including his free throw shot and other "facets of his game offensively," Caputo told us that "we always felt that Angel was going to be a tremendous help to Tonye. Angel's ability to get in the lane and draw in the defense and put the ball up in the air for Tonye gives him opportunities to get some very easy shots, which if you're a big frontcourt player, those are the shots you want those guys taking." Caputo added that he also expects for McClellan and Burnett to help space the floor for the Hurricanes big man.

Defense and conditioning have been at the center of early practices. "First week or so, we focus them on defense. That's how you win championships, with defense," Coach Huger told us. "All of the freshmen need to get better at defense. All of them can score and put numbers up, but the key is defense, getting them stronger, and getting them adjusted to college defense and not high school defense."

But what of Coach L's patented "scramble" defense, which he has rarely utilized at Miami? Don't expect the Canes to fully scrap the zone package that was installed last year. Huger explained that the team "has more to work with this year, but it was such an effective weapon for us that we can't go away from it. I'm sure that's something we'll still have in and introduce it to this group." Caputo added that the expectation that all Larranaga teams play a high-intensity press is somewhat of a misconception. At George Mason, his early teams were "very heavy scramble, but later on the teams we had were bigger, and with the Final Four team (in 2006), we scrambled more in situations versus every possession." That is more likely what fans will see this year, with Caputo indicating that the Canes will likely play more "small ball" due to the depth at guard. "Even in our league there are going to be teams you want to matchup smaller with. Sometimes, you actually want to go smaller and faster against some bigger teams. Our game against Florida State, three years ago at home when we beat them, we had gone bigger up there (in Tallahassee), but then Reggie was out so we went small and were able to spread them out more."

Another key tenet of Coach Larranaga's is that teams with the best conditioning ultimately put themselves in a better position to win close games. Coach Huger said that the team has taken to the weight room in the off-season. "Coach Felde has been doing an awesome job turning them into men," Huger explained. "When you see them now, the improvement on their bodies and the muscle mass they've put on its tremendous for such a short period of time." Caputo added that "those guys have committed to our way of doing things; we've got a very hard working group, guys taking pride in getting into the gym."

Both coaches are pleased with the early results in fall camp. "I'm expecting big things. With the talent we have this year, we should be very good," Huger told us. "I'm excited for the guys and for the opportunity to coach them; I'm really looking forward to it." But he did caution that with all of the new players, chemistry will need to be built and that fans should be "patient with us. We're a new squad, learning each other and its going to take time for us to gel."

Miami Basketball Player Profile: Angel Rodriguez

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 7, 2014

Junior - 5'11 180 - Miami Krop H.S.
(transfer Kansas State)

2012-13 Second Team All Big 12 performer at K State where he averaged 11.4 ppg, shot 34.4% 3P%, added 5.2 assists, 2.1 rebounds and 1.5 steals.

Also earned All Big 12 defensive honors.

Known for his leadership and competitive nature.

"He's not afraid to bark out directions and motivate his teammates. His best attribute is his ability to generate confidence in his teammates." - Coach Jim Larranaga on Angel Rodriguez

Summary: Has a great all-around floor game, with an exceptional assist/turnover ratio because he always plays smart and under control. Fiery competitor. Is not a pure shooter, but likely to improve given the year off to work on his jumper, and with the promise of better shot selection under Coach L's tutelage. At his best when creating for teammates. Can get in the paint and kick to open shooters as well as any PG in the country. Is also an outstanding on ball defender. In Summary, is just a fantastic player, and could easily be in the top 2 or 3 PGs in the ACC. However, did not play in the Spain trip because of a balky knee, which could be a concern given he also had knee issues in H.S. as well and decided not to seek a waiver following transferring UM in part to get healthy. However if he is 100% Rodriguez is the kind of player you can build a team around. Should combine with Manu Lecomte to give Miami one of the

best PG combos in the country. Should project for somewhere around 10 ppg, 5 apg, and 1-2 steals with his relentless defensive style.

UM hopes summer trip to Spain gives 'Canes edge

South Florida Sun Sentinel
Victoria Hernandez
Oct. 3, 2014

The Miami Hurricanes are hoping to keep reaping rewards from their trip to Spain.

UM was among the college basketball teams throughout the country that opened regular-season workouts Friday, but the Hurricanes hope the time they spent playing together overseas this summer gives them an edge.

The Hurricanes went 4-0 and beat each opponent by an average of 24 points during the unique bonding experience. The NCAA allows teams to periodically play international exhibition games before the start of the fall semester. During Miami's trip, four players averaged double-figure scoring. However, the victories were not the topic of conversation on Friday, the team synergy was.

"I thought it definitely created a much closer unit," UM coach Jim Larrañaga said. "Our upperclassmen roomed with our underclassmen. They got to know each other better. We were able to practice and put in some things so that we could play games. But the best part is that coaches were able to see under practice conditions, what direction we need to go in now that today is the official start of practice."

Sheldon McClellan was the standout of the trip. He averaged a team-high 20 points per game. He also led defensively with 12 steals.

"We're expecting Sheldon to do what we saw in Spain, except against much better competition," Larrañaga said. "He needs to be what we refer to as a high-octane scorer, meaning that he's got the green light."

He will be expected to balance all aspects of his offensive game: attacking the rim, shooting from the perimeter and getting to the free-throw line.

McClellan, who sat out last year after transferring from Texas, said he was satisfied with the overseas expedition.

"It helped us just to get familiar with everybody's game," he said.

Fellow redshirt junior Angel Rodriguez didn't get to play in Spain because of an injury, much to his and Larrañaga's dismay. But he did join the team for the trip and appreciated the bonding experience nonetheless. Now, in part because of the experience abroad, don't expect uncomfortable silence on this squad.

"I don't think there's a guy who's awkward or shy to talk to any other teammate, which is pretty special because we have a whole bunch of guys that have never been a part of the team or even college basketball," Rodriguez said.

Larrañaga added, "The guys are into it. They love basketball. We don't have any high-maintenance guys. We don't have any lazy guys. We don't have any problem children. What we have is a group of guys that would like to be very good and know they have to learn a lot. They know they have to come together as a team and learn how to maximize their strengths, but also maximize the strengths of their teammates."

The veterans know what it's like to start a 30-plus game college season. The new players are giddy to start their first college seasons at UM. Ja'Quan Newton averaged 13.5 points per game in Spain. Fellow freshman Omar Sherman averaged five rebounds and started two of the games.

He said he is ready to take what he learned on the trip and apply it.

"It was an exciting trip. I looked forward to it when I first got recruited and they told me about it," Sherman said. "I feel like we've gotten a lot closer. We're gonna take all that and take it into the season and our first day of practice today."

UM's first exhibition game is Nov. 6 against Eckerd College on November 6. The regular season tips off at home for the Hurricanes at 7 p.m. Nov. 14 at the BankUnited Center.

Inexperienced Canes hoops team will rely on Jekiri

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Oct. 3, 2014

It remains to be seen how the University of Miami men's basketball team will do in the 2014-15 season, but one thing seemed certain as the Hurricanes opened practice Friday afternoon: Nobody in the Atlantic Coast Conference has less experience.

Seven of the nine scholarship players on the active roster are newcomers. There are no seniors. The only two returnees are junior forward Tonye Jekiri and sophomore point guard Manu Lecomte, who combined for 11.9 points and 7.6 rebounds per game last season on a team that finished 10th in the ACC with a 7-11 league record and a 17-16 overall record.

There was supposed to be a promising third returning player, sophomore guard Davon Reed, a tenacious defender, but he underwent surgery on his "left lower extremity" and is out four to six months. Junior college transfer Ivan Cruz Uceda, a 6-10 Spaniard expected to be a key rebounder, was declared ineligible for the first half of the season because he didn't sign with a college team within a year after graduating high school.

Coach Jim Larrañaga enters his fourth season at UM with more questions than answers.

"As a coach, you're not 100 percent certain what you're going to get," he said. "When a coach has coached a player for a year or two, he has seen what he's capable of, strengths and weaknesses. In this case, it's going to take us a while."

Larrañaga said his six guards will have to rebound and defend taller players, and he challenged Jekiri to step up.

"Tonye needs to step up in every category, and I told my coaches Tonye can expect me to be a blanket on him. He's gonna wear me; and I'm gonna wear him out because he's such a vital part of this team this year. He's got experience of playing on the [ACC] championship team as a freshman, having been a starter last year. With each year his responsibilities grow, and this year we expect him to be a double-double guy. We need numbers. Anything less than that, he can expect me not to be happy."

The Hurricanes will rely heavily on transfers Angel Rodriguez ("Our floor general," Larrañaga said) and Sheldon McClellan ("a high-octane scorer"), both guards who sat out last season.

Rodriguez is a Miami Krop High grad who left Kansas State after earning second-team All-Big 12 honors as a sophomore. A native of Puerto Rico, he is delighted to be closer to home and family, surrounded by friends, immersed in Latin culture. His mother and younger brothers booked tickets to see him play and will spend Christmas in Miami.

"I won a Big 12 championship, had a great experience at K-State, but do I miss it? No. I'm too happy here," Rodriguez said. "I love the city of Miami so much. They had great fans in Manhattan [Kansas] ... good ribs and steak, but I needed some rice and beans and all that Cuban and Puerto Rican food."

McClellan was the leading scorer at Texas two years ago (13.5 ppg), but never clicked with coach Rick Barnes. He decided to transfer to UM after watching the Hurricanes play in Austin during the 2013 NCAA Tournament. He was the Canes' leading scorer on their summer tour in Spain, and is eager to make an impact.

"It felt great to get back in playing mode," McClellan said. "I was a little nervous at first, but once I hit my first basket, I was fine. I'm excited to play with Angel because I've always played against him and I'd rather have him on my side of the court."

Freshmen to watch include Ja'Quan Newton of Philadelphia, a 6-1 guard; James Palmer, a 6-5 guard from Washington; and Omar Sherman, a 6-8 forward from Duncanville, Texas. DeAndre Burnett, the former Carol City guard, returns after missing last season as a medical redshirt.

Miami opens the season Nov. 6 with a home exhibition against Eckerd College. The regular-season opener is Nov. 14 against Howard. UM has three ACC home games against opponents that finished in the Top 25 in 2014, including preseason No. 7 North Carolina (Feb. 28), league newcomer No. 10 Louisville (Feb. 3) and No. 12 Virginia (Jan. 3). The Canes play on the road against preseason No. 2 Duke (Jan. 13) and No. 21 Pittsburgh (March 4).

Hurricanes basketball starts a season of challenges

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
Oct. 2, 2014

On a recent night in his offseason, Jim Larranaga watched a documentary on World War II leaders. He found himself analyzing their different approaches.

He especially liked Winston Churchill, England's no-nonsense prime minister, who had a long road through military service and politics and was elected at age 65 to steer England through the war.

In his profession, Larranaga's leadership will certainly be tested this fall.

"We have a lot of challenges this year," said Miami's fourth-year basketball coach, who turned 65 on Thursday and opens practice Friday. "We have nine players who have never worn a Miami uniform, and we've got to blend those nine with only three returning players, one of whom is hurt."

Two players in the Hurricanes' rotation are out for at least half the season. Sophomore guard Davon Reed (knee surgery) is expected back in January at the earliest. The NCAA ruled transfer forward Ivan Cruz Uceda ineligible for 16 games – until January.

UM faces Eckerd in an exhibition game Nov. 6, then opens its non-conference schedule Nov. 14 against Howard in Coral Gables.

Aside from Reed, only junior center Tonye Jekiri and sophomore point guard Manu Lecomte played for UM last year, so early practices and non-conference games will be where UM hopes to find its rhythm. What they won't find is length. The absence of Uceda means the Hurricanes will start the year with just three scholarship forwards.

That makes Jekiri (7-0, 245) even more important. UM hopes he can average close to 10 points and 10 rebounds, stay out of foul trouble, and become a top-flight defender. Last year, he averaged 4.2 and 5.5, falling into foul trouble against more physical teams. Niagara transfer Joe Thomas (6-7, 245) is still an unknown. After UM missed on four other transfer forward options, Thomas was signed despite not taking an official visit. UM hopes he can contribute minutes and fouls, at least. Freshman Omar Sherman (6-8, 260) has shown a good 3-point stroke in

practice and has bulk, but needs to improve strength and conditioning.

Uceda (6-10, 237), a Madrid, Spain native who played last year at Harcum (Pa.) Junior College, did not satisfy an NCAA rule which requires players to enroll in college for one year after high school graduation, UM said. Uceda turns 23 on Oct. 24. He won't be eligible until Jan. 13 at Duke (which, Larranaga noted, is a fine time for him to return). He averaged 11 rebounds per game in UM's four-game August trip to Spain. Larranaga called him a Bill Laimbeer-style rebounder: "Not a high-riser, but he's very clever."

Another player who will be missed is forward Kamari Murphy, who transferred from Oklahoma State but must sit out this year due to NCAA rules. Murphy (6-9, 216) led OSU in total rebounds and blocks last year. Reed, who started at point guard at times last year, would have played small forward in some lineups.

The good news for Miami: its backcourt is deep and talented. The Hurricanes will often play three- and four-guard lineups with point guards Angel Rodriguez (5-11, 180) and Lecomte (5-11, 170), two-guards Deandre Burnett (6-2, 195) and Ja'Quan Newton (6-1, 185) and three-guards Sheldon McClellan (6-5, 105) and James Palmer (6-5, 200). All are talented scorers, though their collective ability to defend at an ACC level is a question mark.

Rodriguez, a former Kansas State starter who sat out last year due to transfer rules, will be the key. The redshirt junior has played and practiced through lingering wrist and knee injuries and earned team-wide respect for his aggressive leadership. He averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists in 2012-13 and was a second-team All-Big 12 selection. He is Miami's best facilitator and on-ball defender, can drive and is a strong three-point shooter (34.4 as a sophomore).

Lecomte is bulkier (up 10 pounds) and better defensively than his freshman year, when he averaged 7.7 points and 2.3 assists in 28 minutes. The Belgian can run the point or play alongside Rodriguez and has become a more confident shooter.

Burnett, a 2012 Parade All-American as a senior at Miami-Coral City, redshirted last year with a wrist injury. He averaged 37 points in his senior season. His defense needs improvement. Newton, a top-60

recruit from Philadelphia, is a creative guard who also needs to work on his defense. That description also fits Palmer, who surprised with his versatile play in Spain. Miami's 2014 class was ranked 29th by Rivals and 35th by ESPN.

McClellan, a redshirt junior who sat out last year after transferring from Texas, has a variety of moves to the basket and is a strong three-point shooter. He averaged 13.5 points and shot 83.3 percent at the line.

"There's no combination there that I have to worry about, 'They can't play together,'" Larranaga said. "All very capable of scoring in double figures. The difference will be at the defensive end of the floor. Which of these guards are best prepared to defend other outstanding college players?"

Rodriguez is Miami's best on-ball defender, while Larranaga said McClellan shook a habit of checking out defensively and is now highly capable. He believes McClellan could be an All-ACC-level defender this season – he compared him favorably to Durand Scott, who was the ACC Defensive Player of the Year in 2012-13. "Hopefully Sheldon can make that jump," Larranaga said. He added Lecomte has improved, while Burnett, Newton and Palmer need work at that end of the floor. "We can be a very small, quick, skilled team," Larranaga said. "But to win, we're going to need to defend and rebound. Those guards can do certain things, but they're not big."

Two years ago, Larranaga felt his team could win the ACC. It did. Last year, he knew it did not have the skill or experience, but believed it came very close to its potential. With all the unknowns and injuries this year, he doesn't know this team's potential.

"We've got a lot of work to do," he said. "We've got a very good group of guys who are working hard. We're going to be evolving this year into the type of team I'd like us to be, that I think we can become, but it's not going to happen overnight, I'm certain of that."

McClellan Poised For a Big Year

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Oct. 1, 2014

The 6-foot-5 transfer from Texas, where he averaged 12.4 points in 68 games, was Miami's leading scorer during their Spain trip and is excited for the 2014-15 season.

How excited?

"On a scale of 1 to 10, 11," McClellan said.

McClellan sat on the sidelines during Miami's home games and had many late-night shooting sessions on gamedays with fellow transfer Angel Rodriguez. The two of them developed a strong bond while watching the team play.

"We are sitting there watching the losses or the barely wins while you know you can play," McClellan said. "It was tough. So I am ready to play."

McClellan averaged 20.0 points on 62.3 percent from the field along with 5.5 rebounds, 2.3 assists, and three steals a game in Miami's four games in Spain.

He had been working to improve his perimeter shooting and his shooting percentage (41.1) and his defense, both of which showed in Spain.

"When I first got here I know when to shoot and when to drive, but sometimes I would do the opposite because I wasn't confident in my jump shot, but now I'm confident in my jump shot and I take shots when they're open and drive when I have to drive," McClellan said.

Even though he's a very athletic player, his defensive ability wasn't where it needed to be.

"At Texas I wasn't into (defense)," he said. "I knew I wanted to leave so my heart wasn't into it. It was just a bad year for me."

As McClellan puts it, "my defense got way better because it really sucked when I got here."

Miami head coach Jim Larranaga didn't know much about McClellan until Angel Rodriguez recommended the staff consider bringing him in.

"I had never seen Sheldon play in high school or at the University of Texas, but what I had heard from Angel Rodriguez is that this guy is really talented and I think he'd be a great addition to the Miami program," Larranaga said. "And Angel had only signed with us that week. So when that became a possibility, we had to do some research and the description was that Sheldon was a very gifted athlete, but not as consistent at certain areas of the game.

"So when he came we started focusing on those things and he's dramatically improved in both areas (perimeter shooting and defense) so I'm very, very happy for him. I think he's going to have a heck of a season."

Improvements have been made and McClellan will be looking forward to beginning preseason practices on Friday before Miami opens their season on Nov. 14 against Howard.

"I expect that we'll get to the tournament, no doubt," McClellan said. "I think we are going to surprise a lot of teams. I don't know if teams think we are going to suck or whatever, but I know for a fact that we have a lot of little-bitty parts that are going to make the team very good."

McClellan expects the Hurricanes to play more up-tempo than last year's 17-16 team that averaged 61.5 points a game.

"We got to be running more this year," he said. "And we got to get up and down better. Last year there was like they were dead last in fastbreak points. That's already changed in practice. It's going to be a big improvement plus our defense."

Once again, the conference will be tough.

"There is no doubt that this year ACC to me is the best conference in the country so it's going to be everything is going to be pretty tough we got to play every game," McClellan said.

Athlon Sports Magazine: Miami preview

Athlon Magazine
Sept. 2014

Somehow, Jim Larrañaga and the Hurricanes managed to win 17 games last season. The previous season, Miami swept the ACC regular-season and tournament titles but lost just about everyone of note from that dominant team. Last year was supposed to be of the rebuilding variety in preparation for 2014-2015, when two key transfers would become eligible and the Canes would add a top-60 recruit to the mix.

Miami lost six players off last year's squad – but all of them are replaceable, even leading scorer Rion Brown and fellow senior guard Garrius Adams. This year's group will be guard-heavy with the addition of a pair of former Big 12 standouts – point guard Angel Rodriguez and wing Sheldon McClellan. This roster will have talent, but questions surround the team chemistry with so many new faces tossed into the mix and whether there is enough up front to compete for a postseason bid. Right now the starting center is offensively challenged, and there is no one who appears ready to step in and play at the power forward spot.

Larrañaga did get a jump-start with this group with a preseason trip to Spain in August in which team-building was as much a focus as anything else.

FRONTCOURT

Larrañaga will almost certainly start defensive minded 7'0" junior Tonye Jekiri, who finished last season strong, in the middle. Jekiri is limited offensively but will provide defense, rebounding, and shot-blocking. Plus, having a quality point guard like Rodriguez should allow him to get easy opportunities around the basket.

The question is, who will start alongside Jekiri at power forward? There are three options: fifth-year transfer Joe Thomas, a Miami native who averaged 3.4 points at

Niagara last season; skilled junior college product Ivan Cruz Uceda; and freshman Omar Sherman. Thomas is a strong, athletic and physical forward who won't provide much on the offensive end. Cruz Uceda help lead Harcum (Pa.) College to the junior college national semifinals. Sherman is a lefty who can shoot and has high upside but isn't a great athlete.

There's a chance that Larrañaga could opt to play four guards at times if one of the power forwards doesn't emerge.

BACKCOURT

The arrival of Rodriguez and McClellan instantly makes the perimeter the strength of the team. Rodriguez will assume the point guard duties from Manu Lecomte, who progressed as a freshman last season but will be best served at this level coming off the bench. Rodriguez, a native of Puerto Rico, was an All-Big 12 player after averaging 11.4 points and 5.2 assists for Kansas State two years ago. He is a quality defender who will immediately give the Canes a floor leader with toughness who can score and also make his teammates better.

McClellan averaged 13.5 points at Texas as a sophomore and gives the Hurricanes a guy who can get to the basket and also make plays in the open court. He does, however, need to improve from 3-point range. He shot only 29.1 percent from beyond the arc in two seasons at Texas.

Ja'Quan Newton is a top-60 national prospect from Philadelphia who can play either backcourt spot. He was a huge recruit for the Canes. Deandre Burnett is a talented shooting guard who was forced to redshirt as a freshman due to a broken wrist suffered in practice.

Sophomore Davon Reed gives the team length and versatility off the bench. Corn Elder, on scholarship for football, won't join the basketball team until January – at the earliest.

FINAL ANALYSIS

If it wasn't already clear that Larrañaga could coach – he did guide George Mason to the Final four in 2006 and win an ACC title with the Hurricanes – it was proven last season when he took a bunch of anonymous players and managed to rack up 17 victories. Now he has legitimate talent again with the addition of guys like Rodriguez and McClellan. The perimeter corps is strong and deep, but the key will be whether the Hurricanes can produce enough up front return to the NCAA Tournament.

Miami Basketball Player Profile: Omar Sherman

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 30, 2014

Sherman was ranked as the #93 overall player by Scout.com and ranked as a 4 star prospect and the #14 center in the country by ESPN.

Led his team with 17.1 points per game and 8.4 rebounds per game as a senior.

Inside-out power forward with a mature post game and range out to the three-point line.

Summary: Sherman brings much needed size to the 'Canes front court. But he definitely needs to work on his strength and conditioning to make an impact in the rugged ACC. He has range on his jumper all the way out to the three point line, and Miami Head Coach Jim Larranaga has compared his game to that of Sam Perkins. However, UM will need him to not only stretch defenses, but also bang some down low. Early on it may be a lot to ask. Most freshman bigs struggle as they adjust to playing against players as strong and fast as themselves. Hopefully he gets his feet under him fast, as Miami will need to count on their talented Texas freshman for minutes, with only have 3 other true front court players (Tonye Jekiri, Joe Thomas, and Ivan Cruz Uceda) on the roster. With Uceda out fr the team's 1st 16 games, Sherman is going to have a steep learning curve. If he can give them solid play, it would be and major boost. When Uceda comes back, the combination of the two might help a very good Hurricanes team take it to the next level. Look for Sherman to be one of the top rebounders on the team, while it waits for Uceda's return, and progressively develop into a good stretch 4 even if he struggles some at the onset of the season.

Miami Basketball Player Profile: Manu Lecomte

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 29, 2014

Sophomore - PG - 5'11 170 - Brussels,
Belgium

As a true freshman averaged 7.7 points,
2.3 assists, 2.1 rebounds in 17 starts.

This summer, led Belgian team to
championship game of FIBA U20 European
Championships, Division B, held in
Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina. Named to
U20 Men Division B 2014 All-Tournament
Team. Averaged 20.0 points, 5.0 rebounds,
3.0 assists, 1.1 steals in 30.4 minutes per
game.

Also averaged 6.8 ppg and a team best 4.0
apg in 4 contests during Miami's tour of
Spain.

Summary: After a slow start to his first
season in Coral Gables, Lecomte emerged
as excellent PG on both ends of the court by
season's end. His offensive abilities were
never in question, but his decision making
and defense improved dramatically over
the course of the year. One could argue
that he worked his way to the upper half
of all ACC PG's over that span. Lecomte
is an unselfish player and gets everything
started with his incredible quickness and
smooth handles. He also has a very good
jumper, and is crafty and speedy enough
to finish at the hoop, despite his diminutive
stature. Is a perfect fit for UM's high screen
offense, and will only get better after
getting even more valuable international
experience this summer. Everyone knows
that Angel Rodriguez is going to start at
point, but few teams in the country will
have a better option coming off the bench
than the 'Canes with Manu Lecomte.

Miami Basketball Player Profile: Ja'Quan Newton

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 28, 2014

Ja'Quan Newton

Freshman - G - 6'1 185 - Philadelphia, Pa
(Neumann-Goretti HS)

Consensus 4 star prospect chose the 'Canes over schools like UCLA, Syracuse, and Oregon.

58th ranked player overall in ESPN's top 100. Averaged 21.3 pg his senior season and led his H.S. to the Catholic League Championship.

Averaged 13.5 ppg in 4 games on UM's summer trip to Spain, 3rd best on the team.

Summary: Fearless and relentless competitor should be an instant part of the Hurricanes rotation. Loves taking the ball to the cup, but also has a wide array of pull-ups and medium range shots in his arsenal. Because of how intense he is, should develop into a pretty good on ball defender in time. My biggest concern for Newton is that his biggest strength will be a weakness, at least in the beginning of his college career. Against the faster/elite athletes he will face in the Atlantic Coast Conference, over dribbling and daring dives to the hoop often lead to turnovers, especially charges. As he learns the speed of major college hoops he will have to be more selective in his takes. Also comes in advertised as a combo guard. Will be interesting to see how he handles PG duties when/if he is called upon to do so. Overall I love the passion and energy he brings to the game. Should have a nice freshman season overall and could be future star in the program.

NCAA rules forces Miami suspension

CBS Sports
Matt Norlander
Sept. 26, 2014

Miami will be without the services of two scholarship players for at least the first two months of the season.

The Hurricanes announced Spanish-born Ivan Cruz Uceda, a junior college transfer, will sit for the first half of Miami's season due to NCAA-mandated suspension. Because Cruz Uceda did not immediately go from high school/prep school to college within a year of graduating, he is subject to missing 50 percent of his first eligible season of Division I basketball.

Here is the rule, edited down:

"A student-athlete who does not enroll in a collegiate institution as a full-time student in a regular academic term during a one-year time period after his or her high school graduation date or the graduation date of his or her class, whichever occurs earlier, shall be subject to the following:

(a) The student-athlete shall be charged with a season of intercollegiate eligibility for each calendar year after the one-year time period (the next opportunity to enroll after one calendar year has elapsed) and prior to full-time collegiate enrollment during which the student-athlete has participated in organized competition per Bylaw 12.02.7.

(b) After the one-year time period, if the student-athlete has engaged in competition per Bylaw 12.02.7, on matriculation at the certifying institution, the student-athlete must fulfill an academic year in residence before being eligible to represent the institution in intercollegiate competition."

So, if anything, it looks like Cruz Uceda was given a bit of relief from the rule.

The Canes will also be without sophomore Davon Reed, as he's going through rehab for leg surgery and will be out until at least early January.

Miami will have nine scholarship players available when its season begins Nov. 14. The Hurricanes will have seven players on this year's squad who didn't wear a Miami uniform last season.

"We feel very bad for Ivan," Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said in a statement. "Sitting out half of the season is very tough on him and us. Ivan is working very hard to prepare himself for when he does become eligible. He is an excellent rebounder and skilled big man. It is unfortunate that he is being impacted in such a way. We will miss him greatly during the first half of the year."

The first game Cruz Uceda will be eligible for the road tilt against Notre Dame on Jan. 17. Cruz Uceda earned JuCo All-American status by putting up 14.6 points, 9.6 rebounds, 2.0 assists, 1.1 steals and 1.1 blocks at Harcum College (just outside Philadelphia) last season.

Projecting the 68 NCAA tournament teams

USA Today

Scott Gleeson

Sept. 26, 2014

Is it March yet? Hardly. But the 2014-15 college basketball season is right around the corner. And that means the annual debate for which teams make the NCAA tournament has already begun.

In the months leading up to this year's tip-off (Nov. 7), USA TODAY Sports' Scott Gleeson counts down to the start of the season team by team from No. 68 to No. 1 after speaking to every coach in the projected 2015 tournament field. Find breakdowns on all the teams that made the preseason bracket here, in order:

No. 40 Miami (10 seed, ACC at-large bid): Veteran transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) are eligible this year and can help bring Miami back to relevancy in a jam-packed ACC after a rebuilding, pedestrian finish — 17-16 overall, 7-11 ACC — in 2013-14.

Miami Basketball Player Profile: Joe Thomas

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 26, 2014

Senior (Graduate) - F - 6'7 245 - Miami, FL
(transfer from Niagara)

Comes to UM after 3 seasons at Niagara.

Former H.S. teammate of 'Canes PG Angel Rodriguez (Krop H.S.).

Averaged 3.4 points and 2.7 rebounds last year, and also led the Purple Eagles in blocks.

"Joe joins us at the perfect time. We needed a front court player with experience and a fifth-year senior was exactly what my staff and I hoped for. He provides us with some size and strength and rebounding toughness." - UM Head Coach Jim Larrañaga

Summary: While not as high profile as touted transfers Angel Rodriguez or Sheldon McClellan, Thomas could still play an important role on next season's team. He's never going to look to score (as evidenced by the 3 shots total he took in 4 games this summer in Spain), but you can not underestimate the value of a good screener and a guy who loves to defend and rebound. With Miami featuring just 3 other true front court players (Tonye Jekiri, Ivan Cruz Uceda, and Omar Sherman) Thomas may be called upon for big minutes against some of the more powerful front courts in the ACC, especially with aforementioned Uceda out for the team's 1st 16 games. He's built like an NFL defensive end, but will he be able to overcome his lack of height? It will be interesting to see how Coach L and staff use him, but the hope is that he brings an element of toughness that helps the 'Canes get to the next level.

Miami Basketball Player Profile: Deandre Burnett

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 23, 2014

RS FR - G - 6'2 195 - Miami, FL (Carol City, H.S.)

As a senior in HS averaged an incredible 37 ppg and was a 2012 Parade All-American.

Spent a year in Prep School as well.

Red shirted last season after injuring his wrist just before the season started, so will be a 20 year old freshman this coming season.

In UM's summer trip to Spain was the team's second leading scorer at 14.3 ppg in 4 contests.

Summary: Burnett is a pure scorer who can fill it out from deep, knock down medium range jumpers, drive to the basket, hit floaters, and also finish in transition. At 6'2 you have to wonder how he will fair at the rim in the physically imposing ACC. But he is crafty and strong enough that he should have some success inside as well as out. How good is his complete game? This is another time will tell scenario. Burnett seems most comfortable creating his own shot and/or shooting spot up J's. Can he handle the ball if needed? Is he an adequate defender? We'll have to take a wait and see approach on those questions too. What we do know is that Burnett's ability to put the ball in the hoop is already well developed. Think of a modern day college version of Vinnie "The Microwave" Johnson. Look for Coach L and his staff to put DB in the best positions possible to succeed. If he puts up double figures scoring more nights then not, it would not be the slightest bit surprising. In time this staff should help him develop all aspects of his game.

Miami Basketball Player Profile: Tonye Jekiri

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 22, 2014

Tonye Jekiri

Junior - C - 7'0 244 - Hialeah, FL - (Originally Nigeria)

Last remaining member of the 2012 ACC Regular Season and Tournament Championship team.

Averaged 4.2 points, 5.5 rebounds, 0.9 blocks, 0.7 assists and 0.6 steals and shot 45% from the floor, as a sophomore last season.

Is exceptionally fast and athletically gifted for a big man, also has a strong defensive presence, but remains very raw offensively and foul prone.

Summary: There's little doubt Jekiri can finish at the rim, and he has a world of potential as a rim protector. But he still lacks a back to the basket game, as well as a natural feel for the hardwood. These factors makes him sort of one-dimensional as a scorer and susceptible to foul trouble on the defensive end. Though he has shown the occasional ability to step out and hit 15 footers. This season UM has no shortage of offensive weapons to rely on, but is it critical that TJ play smarter and remain on the court, given the 'Canes lack of depth in the front court. In last season's ACC Tournament, Jekiri put together two solid performances in a row (5 points 12 rebounds Vs VT & 6 and 9 against NC State - 2 blocks in each contest) to close the season. If he can give UM those kind of performances on a consistent basis, Coach L and staff will be very happy.

Miami Basketball Player Profile: James Palmer

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 21, 2014

Freshman - G/F - 6'5 200 - Washington D.C. - St John's College H.S.

Palmer comes to UM as a 3/4 star recruit (depending on the service) who chose the 'Canes over Memphis, Rutgers, VCU, and Wake Forest among others.

Projects as a combo guard/wing, who has smooth handles, great size, and a well above average jumper.

In Miami's summer trip to Spain, shot team best 68% from the floor and hit 57% (8-15) from distance en route to 11.5 ppg. He also chipped in 10 assists and 8 steals in 4 games.

Summary: Initially thought there was a chance for Palmer to redshirt his first season in Coral Gables. But the more I hear/see the less this seems in the realm of possibility. Palmer's stellar play in Spain, combined with the injury to sophomore wing Davon Reed (out 4-6 months), likely assures a regular spot in Miami's rotation for the 6'5 wing. And why not? His offensive game is similar to Reed's, perhaps with less explosiveness but an even better jumper. Can he defend as well as Reed? Time will tell. But because he is big enough to play some SF, versatile enough to play both G spots, and confident enough to be a consistent shot maker, James Palmer promises to be a key performer this coming season. Even with the Hurricanes' plethora of perimeter talent, Palmer's game stands out.

College basketball countdown: No. 40 Miami (Fla.)

USA Today Sports
Scott Gleeson
Sept. 12, 2014

THE FIRST WORD: It's rare that the biggest strength on a roster with just four returnees will be experience.

But that's the scenario for Miami (Fla.) coach Jim Larrañaga, who loses three starters, including his top two scorers, from last season's ACC title hangover team — the Hurricanes finished a pedestrian 17-16 overall and 7-11 in the ACC after seeing the roster depleted from the 2013 conference champs.

The reinforcements have come in the form of transfers. Veteran guards Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) are eligible this year and can help bring Miami back to relevancy. Both players are proven double-digit scorers. Then factor in the return of blossoming 5-11 sophomore Manu Lecomte (7.7 ppg), and it's easy to label the Hurricanes' backcourt as one of the best in the ACC.

"We have a lot of new faces," Larrañaga said. "We'll be very experienced and talented around the perimeter. The talent level is drastically improved from last year. The inexperience of these guys playing together is what concerns me."

While the frontcourt won't have the same maturity as the backcourt, Miami should be back in the national picture and competing in a deep ACC.

"It's one thing to have a good team. It's another to have a great program," said Larrañaga, who guided George Mason to the Final Four in 2006. "We want to position ourselves to be a consistent NCAA tournament and top 25 team each year. That's the company we want to be in."

"The ACC in my mind is the best basketball conference in the country. Every night you are playing against a Top 20 or Top 10 team in the country. Whether you are at home or on the road, you had better be at your best."

2013-14 IN REVIEW: 17-16 overall, 7-11 (10th in ACC).

PATH TO THE DANCE: ACC at-large bid.

PROJECTED TOURNEY SEED: No. 10 seed.

NON-CONFERENCE SCHEDULE GRADE: C+.

Matchups against Green Bay, Illinois and Eastern Kentucky will boost RPI, but they're all at home. A road test at Florida on Nov. 17 will be huge. Games against Drexel and Akron or USC in the Gildan Charleston Classic aren't bad.

PLAYER BREAKDOWN: The full roster.

Guard Angel Rodriguez brings poise and experience from his time at Kansas State.

STAR WATCH: Rodriguez (11.4 ppg, 5.2 apg at K-State in 2012-13) is a true point guard who can create for teammates and score off the dribble. The 5-11 junior's energy and leadership already have been huge, Larrañaga said. "He's not afraid to bark out directions and motivate his teammates. His best attribute is his ability to generate confidence in his teammates."

McClellan (13.5 ppg at Texas in 2012-13) should complement Rodriguez perfectly. And vice versa. The 6-5 junior will benefit by having a point guard who can create for him and take the pressure off. He's a volume scorer when he needs to be, evidenced by a 27-point outing against Texas Tech two seasons ago.

X-FACTOR: The entire frontcourt. Cruz Uceda is one of the best junior college transfers in the country. The 6-10 forward should play a pivotal role in bolstering a frontcourt with many questions. Junior 7-footer Tonye Jekiri (4.2 ppg, 5.5 rpg) returns as a starter at center and 6-8 freshman Omar Sherman is expected to make an immediate impact, but Uceda's transition to the Division I level will be a major difference-maker. Niagara transfer Joe Thomas, a 6-7 forward, should provide a boost on the glass.

TEAM STRENGTH/WEAKNESS: The key will be chemistry. There are 10 players who haven't played a game for Miami so how quickly they come together will determine the success. Larrañaga runs an NBA-style offense with a lot of ball screens. Last season the Hurricanes weren't able to score efficiently (ranking 337th in scoring offense with 61.5 points a game) and dictate the game's tempo. This year they should be able to get back to the solid pace of 2012-13's roster. As mentioned, the frontcourt will be a major concern, and that's mostly on the defensive end.

TWEET THAT SPEAKS VOLUMES: While Miami Heat players often watched the Hurricanes' home games, Larrañaga was all about the fundamentals exuded by the defending NBA champions.

FUN FACT: Larrañaga's family was originally from Spain, and his grandfather was raised in Cuba. The family made Larrañaga Cigars.

BASICS: The University of Miami is in Coral Gables, Fla., and the Hurricanes play their home games at BankUnited Center, which opened in 2003 and seats 7,972.

Observations: Remember Deandre Burnett

CBS Sports

Jon Rothstein

Sept. 11, 2014

2. Remember the name Deandre Burnett

And that especially goes for Miami fans. The 6-2 guard redshirted last season after suffering a wrist injury in the preseason and figures to play a major role in the Hurricanes' hopes for the 2014-15 campaign. Jim Larrañaga's squad is loaded on the perimeter, and with Davon Reed (6.6 points in 13-14) now out for four-to-six months after suffering a lower leg injury, the opportunity for Burnett to make an immediate mark becomes even more legitimate. People from the periphery may label transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) or freshmen Ja'Quan Newton and James Palmer as Miami's most impactful newcomers in the back court, but it says here Burnett won't lose his place at the table. The former high school All-American scored 16 points in 22 minutes in the Hurricanes' last exhibition game before he got hurt last season and averaged 14.3 points in four games during this team's trip to Spain in August. Don't be surprised if Burnett winds up leading this team in scoring --- he's that good.

PG Rodriguez Anxious to Lead Hurricanes

InsideTheU

Chris Stock

Sept. 10, 2014

After a year away from playing in a game, junior point guard Angel Rodriguez is looking forward to leading the Hurricanes during the 2014-15 season.

The Kansas State transfer, who was a second-team All-Big 12 pick as a sophomore, sat out last season due to NCAA transfer rules and has established himself as one of the leaders of the new-look Canes following their 17-16 season last year.

"It was very difficult (sitting out), especially when conference games were going on because you know, that what you comes to the ACC for, you come to play against Duke, Carolina, and all of the ACC teams," Rodriguez said. "It was definitely tough but I learned a lot. It actually gave me a lot of motivation to be a better leader, because I saw, you know, a lot of things that were missing. And I don't want that to happen this year, since I have an opportunity to lead the guys on the court."

While sitting on the sidelines during the home games and watching the away games from afar, Rodriguez noticed that last year's team was missing a vocal leader—something he feels very comfortable with.

I think we were missing a vocal leader," Rodriguez said. "It kinda seemed like-- that's a skill that not everybody has, so you know, there's nothing wrong with not being a vocal leader, but I'm blessed to have that quality."

Rodriguez grew up in Puerto Rico and moved to Miami to play high school ball at Dr. Krop, where he was an all-state selection. Having leadership skills is something he's always had.

"I've always been that way," he said. "In Kansas State I wasn't as much because there was a leader before me and I gotta respect that. It just wasn't my time. I was a leader regardless. This time the role is huge and I'm taking that responsibility because I got great guys too. They kinda make it easy on you. We

have good guys that want to compete, that want to play, that want to get better. So, you don't have to say things twice with them. You just, you know, if they're slacking you let them know and if I'm slacking they'll let me know so it kinda goes both ways."

Even though Rodriguez hasn't played in a game for the Hurricanes yet, he still is very happy with his decision to return to South Florida.

"Best decision I ever made in my life," he said. "It's just so many positive things ever since I came here. I got healthy. I met the great staff that we have, from top to bottom. I'm close to my family. I see my friends. I have a life other than basketball. So my mind is not just stuck in basketball. I kinda get my time to relax. I mean I'm from Puerto Rico, I get to go to the beach and kinda feel like I'm at home too. And at the same time it motivates me to get to be close to my family because it's something I don't want to take for granted anymore. I'm enjoying every single moment that I spend with them. It motivates me to do good and make them proud, because finally they're gonna get to see me at the games."

Rodriguez has dealt with injuries during his year off had surgery on his wrist when he first arrived and has tendinitis in his left knee. He did not participate in the team's recent tour of Spain, but did make the trip.

The strong court leader and superior defender has been looking to improve his perimeter shooting, which he plans to put on display when the season begins in November.

"I wanted to improve my shot, I mean I wasn't a bad shooter but I had to improve on my release," he said. "I had to get a quicker release and as always I wanted to improve my turnover ratio I had a lot of success but I still want to get better. And I want to develop a floater and better finishes around the rim. The coaches and the GAs, the managers, helped me a lot. Definitely very confident, but you know, everything I'm going to do is not going to be possible without my teammates. So they deserve a lot of credit too because they're doing as much as I'm doing to get better."

The individual instruction he's been receiving from the coaching staff is something that he did not receive at K-State and something he believes will translate to being a better player.

"Honestly I just I never really had somebody who to work with me individually," he said. "I guess that's maybe part of redshirting too. I since I redshirted, I had the coaches work on me individually on game days. So it was basically a brand new process. Basically in the summer what I would kind work on just get a lot of shots on. Nothing, you know, nothing crazy. Being here for a whole year sitting down kinda really taught me how to -- what really hard work is about. It's not just coming to the gym and shoot, it's working on everything."

Heading into the season, Rodriguez believes this year's squad can be an NCAA Tournament team.

"Absolutely," he said. "I mean I don't want to get ahead of schedule. I don't know. You gotta take game by game. The season hasn't even started, but I mean, I played two years of college already and I've been through some talented players. And seeing what we have this year, even though it's a lot of new guys, there's no doubt we have the right pieces to make it to the tournament."

Having a positive group of supporters close by will be watching him closely as he aims to reach that goal.

"I don't really have family here in Miami, but it's much easier, a lot cheaper, and more convenient for them to come visit me, or me go over there," Rodriguez said. "And I have a lot of friends, and I have my girlfriend here, so I just feel like I'm at home."

"I'm just happy I'm here, that's all. I'm very excited."

Tapas and Turkey a Conversation with Konkol

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Sept. 9, 2014

College basketball teams are allowed one overseas trip every four years, and with only three returning players but many talented newcomers, the timing could not have been better for a transatlantic journey. While the team played four games in Spain and returned home undefeated, Konkol said that the ten full-length extra practices allowed ahead of the trip are "a huge advantage... the practices are almost more valuable than the trip itself," as practice time is limited during the season. The ability for the team to bond without the pressure of competitive games is a major incentive as well.

With some teams taking trips to close by Caribbean locations, the Hurricanes went to Spain due to the depth of competition in the country (which has one of the top international leagues and national teams). That it is the homeland of a new Hurricane sealed the deal.

"We chose Spain because of Ivan [Cruz Uceda], and because we have several Spanish speaking guys on the team," including transfer point guard and Puerto Rico native Angel Rodriguez, Konkol told us. The staff was also excited at the opportunity to have a big alumni event and even to help with recruiting down the road. Youth basketball is big in Spain and Miami has proven to be a natural fit for Spanish basketball players, with Cruz Uceda coming aboard this year, as well as fellow Madrid native Laura Quevedo on the women's team. Konkol said the team hoped to "get some traction there, so if a kid is thinking about going to college, he might think of Miami."

Konkol told us that there were "so many question marks," and while the team played well and the coaches experimented with lineups, many of those questions have not been answered. The team "needs to define roles in the next 2.5 months and "figure out which guys will help us the most and in which way."

Regarding individual players, Konkol said point guard Angel Rodriguez is a leader who has "got a way of getting that inner dog out of people," but he was unable to contribute having missed all four games and most of the practices with knee tendinitis. Sophomore Manu Lecomte, fresh off of leading Belgium's promotion campaign in the European Under-20 Championships, led the team with 16 assists and would appear to be a capable replacement. Konkol told us that he spoke with Lecomte's Belgian coach who said he "can't believe how much Manu has grown physically and

with his aggressiveness." Of freshman Ja'Quan Newton, who spelled Lecomte at the point, Konkol said he "is very talented. He's slippery but he's trying to figure out how hard he needs to go, but he's got a very savvy game." Newton was third on the team in points with 13.5 per game, but also led with 16 turnovers.

The team's leading scorer, as expected, was Texas transfer Sheldon McClellan, who started all four games on the wing. McClellan averaged 20.0 points per game while also leading the team in steals and coming in third in rebounding. Konkol attributed some of the success to McClellan's weight-room prowess, including a 60-pound gain in bench press, and a renewed commitment to defense. "No question, he's been one of the most talented guys we've ever been around," said Konkol, but now he has "grown into the type of player we wanted him to be." Fellow wing Davon Reed played efficiently, coming in fifth in scoring and leading the team in free throw percentage, but his play was unfortunately overshadowed by the knee injury that he suffered in a post-trip workout, which was expected to sideline him for four to six months. Redshirt freshman bomber Deandre Burnett finished second on the team with 14.5 points per game and got to the line almost four times per game. Perhaps the greatest surprise on the trip was freshman guard James Palmer, whom Konkol described as "very clever" and said that he has a chance to be "very good." Palmer led the team in shooting percentage and hit four of seven three-point attempts, finishing fourth on the team in scoring, while posting a positive assist-to-turnover ratio.

As expected with the Hurricanes' plethora of talented guards, Konkol said that the team "really needs someone to emerge in the frontcourt." Returning center Tonye Jekiri struggled with foul trouble and did not contribute much on offense, with only 4.8 points per game, but did finish second on the team in rebounding with 8.5 per game. Ivan Cruz Uceda, the Madrid native, led the team with 11.0 rebounds, was the leading frontcourt scorer at 6.8 points per game, and also contributed eight assists. Like freshman Omar Sherman, who showed some nifty post moves, both bigs are "skilled" but need to improve their conditioning in order to play major minutes. Konkol added that fifth-year transfer Joe Thomas "was a key pickup," as he is a "specimen physically." Konkol said that Thomas "benched 370 pounds his first day...he's a monster."

This was not Konkol's first trip overseas this summer. He recently traveled overseas to the European Under-18 championships in both Turkey

and Bulgaria, hoping to expand the school's reach to overseas prospects. Though Miami's class appears full for 2015 and there were no specific prospects that he was watching, Konkol believes the trip was successful in planting "some seeds for the future so people would say 'Okay, Miami is an option.' So it was a good trip."

There is a major difference in recruiting overseas players versus American players, according to Konkol. "In the U.S., you have the high school coach, of course, the parents, and then the AAU coach," explained Konkol. "Then you have to figure out who has the greatest influence, and most often, it's the AAU coach, though not always."

That's not how it works across the pond. "In Europe, it's different. There is no high school team," Konkol told us. "It's club teams, and because the clubs don't stop when you turn 18 - they turn into junior and professional level - the coaches don't want their kids leaving." So how does one go about securing information about the players? "You find out which kids are interested in college and just go to their parents. The other thing is that agents are a dirty word in the U.S., while over there, they are considered to be experts and they are great for information - it was important for me to get to know as many agents and Euro scouts as possible because of that."

Konkol said that the tournament featured "high level players, all under 18, but cautioned not to expect to see many of the names in college basketball, as many turn professional in Europe. Trips to Europe are also often prohibitively expensive, especially considering the restrictive NCAA rules that limit the amount of time a coach can watch European prospects far more than with an American high school player. That being said, Konkol expects for the Hurricanes to be active in Europe for the foreseeable future, especially with larger classes in 2016 and beyond.

Scheduling note: The Hurricanes have 31 games on tap, as the team used a tournament exemption to play a "non-bracketed" game versus fellow Charleston Classic participant Charlotte two days after that tournament ends. Konkol told us that "it worked out where we felt like we needed another true road game. They will be really good, it's going to be a really tough game." Miami plays only one other true road game against Florida, as well as a neutral site game in Brooklyn versus Coach Larrañaga's alma mater, Providence.

Exeter basketball captain to play in ACC at Miami

Sea Coast Online
Ryan O'Leary
Sept. 1, 2014

Basketball has led Chris Stowell to some memorable places, from his Exeter High School days to his post-grad year at Tilton School, one of the best prep programs in the country and the alma mater of big-name stars like Georges Niang (Iowa State) and Nerlens Noel (Philadelphia 76ers).

This is something different, a turn Stowell attributes to persistence, hard work and a well-timed stroke of luck. The former Exeter captain is now a freshman small forward for the University of Miami men's basketball team, making the 14-man roster as a walk-on.

"It hasn't really fully sunk in yet," Stowell said in a recent phone interview from Florida. "The season hasn't officially started, so I still kind of feel like I'm in a dream right now, being able to be a part of such a big program, such an esteemed program, especially in a conference like the ACC. It's just amazing to be at such a high level."

The experience just keeps getting more surreal. Stowell and his Miami teammates recently returned home from a 10-day trip to Spain for training and team bonding. The Hurricanes played three exhibition games and won them all; Stowell appeared in one of the games and missed his only field goal attempt, a 3-pointer.

At 6-foot-6, and 190 pounds, he knows this season will be more about learning than playing. He'll be on the back end of the team's rotation, maybe seeing some mop-up minutes in a few games.

The real goal is to soak up the experience — suiting up for the 'Canes as they travel to places like Duke, Syracuse, Louisville and Pittsburgh this season — while getting comfortable with the speed, size and strength of playing Division I ball and a new position. No longer the big man on the floor, Stowell will try to earn his spot

for future seasons at small forward, an exciting but challenging task.

"I think it's been pretty good so far," Stowell said. "Coming out of Exeter, I had to work on my shooting a lot more to be able to make the transition. I worked on my perimeter game. But I'm still playing in the post a little bit. I still have to keep that part of my game with me."

Stowell, a power forward in high school, was one of five seniors on Exeter's 2012-13 team that reached the Division I quarterfinals. The Blue Hawks were defeated by Spaulding, 50-45, and Stowell went on to graduate from the program as a two-time scholar athlete.

Still chasing his dream to play high-level college basketball, Stowell enrolled for a post-grad year at Tilton school with coach Marcus O'Neil. He made his impressions, too, as O'Neil honored Stowell with Tilton's postseason coaches award.

But that's where the basketball portion of Stowell's life met a dead end. He was garnering Division III recruitment from places like the Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston, and both Lyndon State and Middlebury College in Vermont. His most eager pursuer was probably Hamilton College in New York.

Options were in place to stay in New England and play college basketball. Stowell had his heart set on other goals.

"I kind of had almost given up on playing college ball, because I didn't want to play at the schools that were recruiting me," he said. "I wanted to play at a higher level."

The decision was to leave the Division III opportunities on the table and honor his acceptance to Miami, thinking all along that his basketball-playing days were over. That's when his fortunes turned for the better.

"Coach O'Neil at Tilton made a couple of calls for me," Stowell said, "and I don't know how it worked out. I was lucky, but I got a spot.

"It's amazing so far. Coming from Exeter

to Tilton was such a jump in the talent and the competition. Coming here was an even bigger jump. I mean, you're playing against guys who are going to be in the NBA some day. And playing for coach (Jim) Larrañaga, who's made it to the Final Four before, it's just being around a very high level. It's great being able to go in and compete with that every day."

There's also, of course, the excitement that comes along with being a college student in South Beach.

But Stowell has work to do. He's enrolled in Miami's School of Business and has plenty to keep himself busy in the gym and weight room. He's paying his own way for now, but earning partial scholarship money down the road is a realistic goal if his game continues to improve.

"Definitely, I have a chance," Stowell said. "I've got a lot of work to do. I've got to get even bigger and stronger to be able to bang with these guys, but I'm hoping somewhere down the road I get a shot of getting in there."

An Early Look At: Providence vs. Miami

BIG EAST Coast Bias

Tim Page

Aug. 30, 2014

The Providence Friars will travel to New York this holiday season to face the Miami Hurricanes on December 22, 2013 at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn. Jim Larrañaga will coach against his alma mater and the place where he played his college basketball in Providence College. The PC/UM game looks to be an exciting matchup between one-time Big East foes who share the ambition of repeating their recent success.

It's become popular in recent years for teams to play neutral site games before winter break. If a team travels to a game before the break they are able to send their players home afterwards and the school incurs the travel expenses as part of the athletic budget. The return portion of the road trip is considered sending the players and staff back to their respective hometowns and families for the holidays. For this reason, neutral site showcases like the Barclays Hoops Holiday Invitational are attractive to many programs and are becoming commonplace.

The risk of playing a game around Christmas when everyone is about to part and go their separate ways is a lack of concentration and cohesiveness among your basketball team. Both Ed Cooley and Jim Larrañaga will need to keep the Friars and Hurricanes focused on the task at hand. The matchup presents an important opportunity for each team to pad their out-of-conference resume against a quality foe.

The Hurricanes are coming off a disappointing 17-16 campaign last season in Larrañaga's third year on the job in Coral Gables. The excitement of the previous year's outstanding Atlantic

Coast Conference regular season championship, tournament championship, and an appearance in the Sweet Sixteen had quickly faded. The reality was the 'Canes were not prepared to repeat their breakout performance and need to reload and regroup.

Only 4 players are returning from the '13-'14 active roster. Davon Reed, Mike Fernandez, Manu Lecomte and Tonye Jekiri combined for just 43 starts and 18.5 points per game. The Hurricanes need to improve in scoring where their abysmal 61.5 points per game last year saw them ranked 341st overall in Division 1. UM also sees 2 transfer students returning to eligibility after sitting out the NCAA mandated 1 year. Sheldon McClellan is a 6'5 redshirt junior from Texas and Angel Rodriguez is a point guard from Kansas State. In addition, Larrañaga adds a recruiting class of 4 true freshmen into the mix and will hope for them to make immediate impacts on a team that lacks returning star power.

Monday, December 22. It seems a long way off but this contest will be upon us sooner than we think. Will Miami's newcomers help them redirect the trajectory of the program to the upward course it was on in March 2013? Will Providence recapture the magic they found in March 2014 or will their follow-up season resemble Miami's effort? Both squads will have distractions to handle with the impending holiday and the hustle and bustle of New York City. The team that remains focused and secures a win will gain valuable confidence heading into the break and the eventual grind of conference play.

Top 25 high-impact newcomers

ESPN

Jeff Goodman

Aug. 28, 2014

Kentucky has a brand-new group of freshmen, Duke has the No. 1 recruiting class in the land coming in and North Carolina also brings in a trio of talented newcomers. Louisville, Kansas, Arizona and Ohio State have also reloaded on the recruiting trail.

But newcomers also include transfers -- and as we know, the transfer wire is at an all-time high these days. Guys like DeAndre Kane, Rodney Hood, Juwan Staten, Xavier Thames and Jordan Clarkson were all transfers and made a major impact.

So I wanted to take a look at both groups when considering impact. Here are our top 25 impact newcomers for the 2014-15 college hoops campaign, with six of our top 15 coming off the transfer wire. Important: These rankings are based not necessarily on talent alone, but also on the impact that the players will have, with opportunity to help out immediately a big factor.

9. Angel Rodriguez, 5-11, 180, PG, Jr., Miami Hurricanes

He decided to transfer after two seasons at Kansas State to return closer to his home in Puerto Rico. Rodriguez is a hard-nosed kid who averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists as a sophomore, and is also a quality defender. He'll step right in and run the show for the Canes.

15. Sheldon McClellan, 6-5, 205, SG, Jr., Miami Hurricanes

The combo of McClellan and Angel Rodriguez should make one heck of a backcourt for Jim Larrañaga. McClellan averaged 11.3 points as a freshman at Texas and 13.5 as a sophomore. He's an average perimeter shooter, but he finds ways to score, and will do the same in the ACC.

A Closer Look at Miami Basketball's Trip to Spain

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Aug. 24, 2014

UM completed the trip with a perfect record of 4-0, including two blowouts at the end. The stats for the most part were impressive. And the results seem to indicate that the team improved over the course of the journey. But because of the obscure nature of the 'Canes opponents it is hard to come to too many conclusions.

Nonetheless, here are some observations:

Sheldon McClellan led the way at 20.0 ppg on 62% shooting, and added 5.5 rpg and 3 steals a contest, and even when Angel Rodriguez returns (DNP in Spain with injury), it is hard to imagine the 6'6 swing man won't be the 'Canes top player this season. McClellan is long, athletic, and skilled enough to allow him to score in a variety of ways, AND he also has the tools to be an outstanding defender, something the coaching staff will undoubtedly work tirelessly with him on.

Versatile Freshman G James Palmer was exceptional in Spain as well, shooting a team best 68% from the floor and also hit 57% (8-15) from distance en route to 11.5 ppg. He also chipped in 10 assists and 8 steals. There was some thought that with UM's deep back court he could redshirt this season. That no longer appears to be an option. He's just too good to sit the bench.

JUCO transfer Ivan Cruz Uceda collected 11.5 rpg on the trip, but because the level of competition and in particular the size of the teams Miami played, it's hard to determine just how impressive this is (as a team UM out-boarded their International foes 51.8 to 27.0 per contest) . However when examining the highlights from Spain, as well as some of his JUCO footage, you can see he has excellent hands and knows

how to position himself for boards. The biggest question long term is whether the 6'10 240 Uceda will have the athleticism and conditioning to hold up against the ACC's better big men.

Joe Thomas was just 1-3 from the field in 4 games on the trip. The 6'7 Niagra transfer did produce 5.3 rpg and 4 blocks overall. While he may not be the player on the roster who gets you the most excited, he could be a key cog. There is nothing wrong with having a guy on the roster who is only interested in doing the dirty work and defending.

At first glance, freshman Ja'Quan Newton's 13.5 ppg looks good. But he also collected a team high 16 turnovers. He is very skilled taking the ball to the hoop, but needs to do it more selectively.

Tonye Jekiri averaged just 4.8 ppg in the 4 games. We keep hearing about how hard he works and how improved his offensive game is, but he has yet to show any kind of consistent offensive presence. If Jekiri is relegated to a being a trash man and an above average defender/rebounder that would be fine for this team. The evolution of his offensive game however, would make UM all the more dangerous. At 7'0 235 and with the way he runs, one would expect more production than what he has shown thus far. Additionally the 2 DQ's (we assume he fouled out) in 4 games is also troubling. Whether he scores or not, Miami needs him on the floor as much as possible for his size.

Manu Lecomte quietly averaged 6.8 ppg and 4 apg game on the trip. But a lot of the highlights were of #20 pushing the ball up court to either directly lead to a bucket or gets things started. As loaded as Miami now is a guard, it is easy to forget how good this guy was at the end of last season. It's hard to imagine many teams

in the country, nonetheless the ACC, have better options at the point this coming season than Miami.

Team sweeps Spanish campaign

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Aug. 24, 2014

The Miami Hurricanes concluded a 10-day excursion in Spain with a perfect 4-0 record following a 116-64 win over AEC Collblanc Torrasa Thursday.

The Canes arrived in Madrid on Aug. 13. They spent the first three days touring the city, visiting Toledo, and attending a UM alumni event at the Hotel Emperador on their first night.

The team started off their campaign against Eurocolegio Casvi. Junior Sheldon McClellan and freshman Ja'Quan Newton led all scorers with 17 points each, while Madrid native Ivan Cruz Uceda also filled up the Canes stat sheet with 17 rebounds and two steals to propel the Canes to a 79-68 victory.

The Canes played their second game of the four-game long campaign against Albacete Baloncesto. UM pulled off a crucial victory with another stellar performance by McClellan, who notched 24 points and five steals. McClellan drained a couple of timely 3-pointers and a dunk to seal a 77-66 victory for the Canes.

Uceda also dominated on the boards with 13 rebounds in the game.

UM started off back-to-back games against CB Quart in Banyoles. McClellan led all scorers with 16 points, Deandre Burnett added 15 points while Davon Reed and Ja'Quan Newton contributed 13 apiece to lift the Canes to a 86-64 victory.

They wrapped up the four-game sweep against AEC Collblanc Torrasa Thursday. Deandre Burnett and McClellan both racked up a team-high 23 points respectively,

closely followed by 22 from Ja'Quan Newton.

Between games, the players had opportunities to sight-see. Many of the players relished the sights and monuments of the cities they visited.

"I like the history behind the art in cathedrals – I study religions and philosophies in my free time," sophomore Mike Fernandez said about the Catedral Primada Santa Maria de Toldeo. "The fact that everything was built and created by hand is fascinating."

The Canes will start their season off with an exhibition match against Eckerd College on Nov. 6.

This year's team will feature nine new players on the court after five seniors graduated from the program.

I'm excited to see: the ACC

ESPN

C.L. Brown

Aug. 21, 2014

Before we talk about the upcoming season, let's first glance back to 2010-11.

Back when the Big East Conference lived up to that "Beast" nickname. Back when a record 11 of 16 league teams received NCAA tournament bids.

Half of the Big East finished ranked in the final Associated Press Top 25 poll that season.

Connecticut, which finished just .500 in the league and ninth in the standings, did not lose a game outside of conference play the entire season en route to capturing the 2011 national championship.

Think about that a minute: from ninth-best in the Big East to national champions.

I'm excited to see whether the ACC has that kind of depth this season.

It could.

The league could have three teams ranked in the preseason top 10 and at least four in the top 15. (Duke, North Carolina, Louisville and Virginia.) That last happened 10 seasons ago when Wake Forest, Duke, Carolina and Maryland achieved the feat in the 2004-05 campaign.

Having four potential heavyweights at the top of the standings is fun in and of itself -- especially with Louisville making for a new rival as it replaces a Maryland program that had become stagnant.

But just having four contenders is not why the league should be so competitive this season. The strength comes in the teams that should be fighting in the middle tier:

Syracuse: I don't expect Kaleb Joseph to simply step in and do what Tyler Ennis did at point guard last season. But if he can at least stabilize the position, coach Jim Boeheim will have enough talent around him. Fellow freshman Chris McCullough could make an immediate impact at power forward, and Tyler Roberson is ready for an expanded role with C.J. Fair and Jerami Grant gone.

Pittsburgh: It's time the ACC got used to what the Big East knew: Coach Jamie Dixon always finds a way to have the Panthers in the mix. Cameron Wright and James Robinson form an experienced backcourt, and, if forward Durand Johnson comes back strong from his knee injury, Pitt will again prove to be a tough out.

Notre Dame: Guard Jerian Grant led the team in scoring and assists before being sidelined after just 12 games because of academic issues. Grant's return gives the Irish instant credibility. Pat Connaughton and Demetrius Jackson will help make them one of the best 3-point-shooting teams in the league.

NC State: Could have one of the better backcourts in the league with sophomore Anthony Barber and Alabama transfer Trevor Lacey. There's no way to replace T.J. Warren, but coach Mark Gottfried signed a solid class with three top-100 recruits led by power forward Abdul-Malik Abu.

Miami: It might seem odd to expect the Canes to make a leap with just three players and 15 percent of their scoring returning from last season. But transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) will help them get better in a hurry, not to mention redshirt freshman guard Deandre Burnett, a four-star recruit who was sidelined with a wrist injury last year.

Florida State: The Seminoles could be the sleeper of the league. They return six of their top nine players from last season, including leading scorer Aaron Thomas. Coach Leonard Hamilton's teams are always tough defensively, and, with a trio of 7-foot rim protectors, they'll be tough to score on again.

Wake Forest: The Demon Deacons return their leading scorer (Codi Miller-McIntyre) and leading rebounder (Devin Thomas). Now, if first-year coach Danny Manning can just get them to win on the road, where they have been just 2-32 against league opponents the past four seasons, he'll have them turned in the right direction.

Even Clemson, which lost K.J. McDaniels to the NBA but returned almost everyone else of note, could pull off a few surprises.

North Carolina and Duke have carried the mantle for the ACC for far too many years. This season there will be plenty more teams that can shoulder the load.

Hurricanes getting familiar on European trip

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Aug. 18, 2014

As they travel through Spain this week, from Madrid to Valencia to Barcelona, it isn't the game results that are of utmost importance to the University of Miami men's basketball team — although a 2-0 record to start the exhibition tour is certainly encouraging.

More significant is the team bonding over plates of paella and chorizo. With only three players back from last season's active roster, the trip's main purpose was for teammates to get to know each other.

UM coach Jim Larrañaga handed out world maps and had players find and discuss each other's countries and cities of origin. Players are rooming with teammates they don't know.

It is this type of unity that Sheldon McClellan was seeking when he left the University of Texas in 2013, and he is having the time of his life so far with the Canes. He scored 24 points and had five steals against Albacete Baloncesto over the weekend, and leads UM with a 20.5 points-per-game average over the two games.

McClellan, a 6-5 redshirt junior, was already thinking of transferring in March 2013, when he showed up at the Frank Erwin Center in Austin to watch a few NCAA Tournament games. As soon as he saw the Hurricanes play live for the first time, he knew where he wanted to go.

"I liked the plays they ran, the open-court stuff, and the way they all seemed to be playing for each other," McClellan said. "They seemed to be having fun, and the coaches seemed positive on the bench. I wish I had come here as a freshman."

The team's demeanor was particularly appealing because despite being the Longhorns' leading scorer that season with 13.5 points per game, he was in and out of coach Rick Barnes' doghouse. The coach felt the guard wasn't playing to his potential and publicly criticized McClellan.

McClellan contacted then-UM point guard Shane Larkin through Twitter and asked him to put in a good word with the Hurricanes coaching staff. He did, McClellan visited and committed.

"The whole chemistry was off at Texas, and it felt like I wasn't being treated right," McClellan said. "At UM, everything is positive, never any negative energy. Coach L is like a father on the court. I love him to death. I like how positive he is ... whether after a bad shot or reminding us to move on to the next play. That's how I liked to be pushed, not by negative reinforcement."

McClellan spent last season on the bench per transfer rules, along with point guard Angel Rodriguez, a Miami Krop High grad who transferred from Kansas State. Rodriguez is also enjoying basketball again but for different reasons.

Rodriguez, a native of Puerto Rico, felt too far away from home and Latin culture in Manhattan, Kansas. He made All Big-12 second team as a sophomore, was an all-league defender and was one of Florida's top recruits coming out of high school. He is a gym rat known for his leadership and vows to be the vocal leader the team lacked last season.

"Best decision I ever made in my life," Rodriguez said of coming to UM. "Close to my family, one flight for them to come see me. I see my friends. I have a life outside of basketball, so my mind is not just stuck in basketball. I get my time to relax. I mean, I'm from Puerto Rico. I get to go to the

beach, feel like I'm at home. It motivates me to be closer to my family, make them proud."

At a practice on campus last week, spectators included Rodriguez's high school coach, Shakey Rodriguez (no relation), the coach's son, Rodriguez's girlfriend, his best friend from Puerto Rico and two other friends.

He has battled wrist and knee injuries over the years, and was feeling healthy again, but a lower leg injury has him on the bench in Spain. A team spokesperson said there is "no timetable" for his return.

Larrañaga said Rodriguez and Larkin have "entirely different" personalities, but both are great leaders.

"Shane was a very quiet leader, would talk to guys individually," Larrañaga said. "Angel is much more of a floor general, barking out directions, getting on guys to make sure they are doing their job. You can't ask Shane to be a vocal leader, can't ask Angel to keep his mouth shut."

Miami's tallest addition continues to dominate the glass

NBC Sports CBB Talk
Raphielle Johnson
Aug. 17, 2014

The biggest difference for Miami in 2013-14 was the fact that six of the top seven players from a team that won the ACC in 2012-13 were gone, and one area in which Jim Larrañaga's team was affected was on the backboards. After ranking second in the ACC in rebounding margin in 2012-13 the Hurricanes were a middle of the pack team in that regard last season, ranking seventh in the conference in rebounding margin, offensive and defensive rebounding percentage (conference games only).

With Miami's depth improving the expectation is that the Hurricanes will be a better team in 2014-15, but most of the attention has been paid to the perimeter with Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez eligible and talented freshman JaQuan Newton joining the program. Yet through the first two games of their tour of Spain, it's become quite obvious that there's a front court addition worth paying attention to as well.

His name: Ivan Cruz Uceda, who's enjoying a homecoming of sorts given the fact that the 6-foot-10 power forward is a native of Madrid. Cruz Uceda played at Harcum College in Pennsylvania last season, and he's put up some impressive rebounding numbers for the Hurricanes this week.

In Miami's 77-66 win over Albacete on Sunday, McClellan led the way offensively with 24 points with Cruz Uceda managing to corral 13 rebounds to go along with eight points, two assists, two blocked shots and two steals. The 13 rebound performance comes on the heels of Cruz Uceda's 17-rebound performance in Miami's win over Eurocolegio Casvi on Friday night, and if he can continue to hit the boards hard

when the regular season begins that would provide Miami with a much-needed boost.

At the end of last season the Hurricanes bid farewell to three of their top four rebounders, with junior Tonye Jekiri (5.5 rpg in 2013-14) being their leading returnee in that department. With that being the case Cruz Uceda and freshman Omar Sherman, who's averaging 6.5 rebounds per game on the trip, are important figures moving forward.

Miami has more options after needing to slow things down to account for their lack of depth, and that should lead to a better 2014-15 for Larrañaga's Hurricanes.

Miami set up for strong pre-league run

Syracuse.com
Patrick Stevens
Aug. 14, 2014

Two seasons ago, Miami swept the ACC's regular season and tournament titles. Armed with a team loaded with fifth- and sixth-year seniors, as well as future NBA first-rounder Shane Larkin, Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga constructed what became a top-10 nonconference schedule.

Last year, not so much. Of course, Miami's roster was gutted by graduation, and there wasn't a real need to play a harrowing schedule. With a pair of Big 12 transfers (Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez) eligible, the Hurricanes should improve. But will their nonconference schedule reflect that looming progress?

LAST YEAR'S SCHEDULE IMPACT

Miami faced the nation's No. 179 nonconference schedule. It also lost its opener to St. Francis Brooklyn and nearly fell to Georgia Southern in its second game, so if there were faint concerns about the schedule strength of a team made up of freshmen and veteran role players, they dissipated quickly.

Some (but not many) power conference teams have an excuse to schedule cautiously. Miami did last year, and wound up just shy of the national midpoint.

More helpful than you'd think: Illinois

A rematch of a 2013 NCAA tournament round of 32 game might also be the sneaky-good contest of this year's ACC/Big Ten Challenge. There are some parallels here, since Illinois took a step back last season while it had transfers sitting out. John Groce's team should be able to move back toward the top half of the Big Ten, and in a best-case scenario this might be a showdown of top-50 teams.

Not as helpful as you'd expect: Providence, Wisconsin-Green Bay and Eastern Kentucky

All three programs had excellent years last season, are extremely well-coached and have solid futures. But each will be hard-pressed to replicate what it did a season ago this winter.

Providence loses Bryce Cotton, who helped carry the depleted Friars to a Big East title. Wisconsin-Green Bay had a credible shot at an at-large bid last year, but its chances of flirting with a place in the top 50 are hurt by the loss of Alec Brown (though Keifer Sykes will remain to create havoc in the Horizon League).

Eastern Kentucky, an absolute joy to watch last season, had a rotation littered with seniors. They could all still be good, but it's doubtful any of them boost opponents' schedule strength as much as last year.

Miami might regret: The bottom third of its nonconference slate

With College of Charleston in flux after Doug Wojcik's firing this summer, the Cougars (who had the talent to be better last season) might slip even more. Toss in three bottom-100 teams from a year ago, and the Hurricanes could have some dead weight dragging them down in the strength of schedule metric.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Larrañaga and his staff understood how to exploit the RPI formula during their time at George Mason, and they've done the same at Miami. What's happened with this schedule is curious. Miami plays a lot of teams that figure to be at least a little weaker than last year, and also finds itself in an extremely winnable exempt event in November.

The guess here is Miami winds up with an appealing record (perhaps 12-1 or 11-2?) against a schedule that won't do it much harm. The strength of the nonconference slate won't be as good as it looks based on last year's numbers, but it shouldn't be a hindrance, either.

Ex-hoops player turning heads with Colts

ESPN.com

Mike Wells

Aug. 10, 2014

ANDERSON, Ind. -- Indianapolis Colts offensive coordinator Pep Hamilton was in the middle of the team's offensive meeting the night before last week's preseason opener against the New York Jets when he tried to remind his players that playing in MetLife Stadium is no different than playing football in little league, middle school or high school.

It's just football. That was Hamilton's message.

Hamilton continued and asked all the players who played football growing up to raise their hands.

You'd think every offensive player in the meeting room would have raised his hand since they're in the NFL.

Wrong. And tight end Coby Fleener made sure to let Hamilton know.

Fleener got Hamilton's attention and pointed to tight end Erik Swoope. This is the first time Swoope has ever played organized football. He played basketball at the University of Miami.

"I was caught off guard, it was an honest mistake," Hamilton said. "Even so, that's more of a reason that you have to commend Swoope and (tight ends) coach Alfredo Roberts for the progress that he's made to get to this point where he was able to go out and give us a few good snaps in a pro football game. That was his first time of playing contact football."

Swoope played five snaps and didn't have a catch against the Jets, but the fact that he's reached this point is a step in the right direction for him. Swoope didn't play

football growing up in Southern California because he was too big to play with his friends. He needed somebody to show him how to put pads on after the Colts signed him as an undrafted free agent in May.

"At the point of attack he was physical. He didn't shy away from contact," Hamilton said. "He didn't have an opportunity to catch a pass, but there was a play where he released and he ran downfield and ran a seam route. He looked like he knew what he was doing."

The Colts are set at tight end with Fleener, Dwayne Allen, Weslye Saunders and Jack Doyle, but Swoope is a prime candidate to be a practice squad player because he has the necessary tools to potentially play in the NFL.

"We're still in the process of molding Swoope, but he has all the things that you can't teach, and that's amazing athleticism, phenomenal strength and balance and hand-eye coordination, and it'll be fun to watch him grow and progress," Hamilton said.

Akpejori latest Hurricane hoopster turning to football

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Aug. 10, 2014

For the better part of a week, it's become a routine sight.

Long after most of his new teammates have sought refuge from the brutal South Florida heat, Raphael Akpejori has remained outside on the Hurricanes' practice field, his eyes focused on the machine throwing him passes.

Occasionally, the 6-foot-9, 241-pound athlete is able to wrap his hands, hands long used to handling basketballs, around the football and haul in a catch.

But more than a few times during the first practices of Miami's season, footballs have fallen at Akpejori's feet while assistant coaches and teammates stand nearby and offer guidance.

The budding tight end listens to each bit of instruction intently, determined to find a way to make this transition work. If it does, he'll be the latest in a line of Hurricane basketball players to take up football.

But Akpejori isn't interested in being compared to Saints tight end Jimmy Graham or Erik Swoope, who is currently competing for a spot with the Indianapolis Colts.

Akpejori merely wants to see if he can play football and if he can, help the Hurricanes win an ACC championship, something he experienced in 2013 with Miami's basketball team.

"Four years ago, I had no idea what football was," said Akpejori, a native of Lagos, Nigeria.

"I've never played football in my life and I was given the opportunity to play for a team that has won five national championships. ... I just feel blessed. I didn't do anything to deserve the talent [I have]. I'm just tall, I can run fast, I can jump, I can catch. ... I'm just trying to make the best of every opportunity that I have, and at the end of the day, when it's time to die, I can tell my kids and grandkids that I was successful at everything I did."

As a member of Miami's basketball team, Akpejori played in 24 of the Hurricanes' 32 games this season. He wasn't a scoring machine, but his big frame helped him nab a career-high eight rebounds in a loss to N.C. State.

But that big body caught the attention of NFL Hall of Famer Cris Carter. The former Minnesota Vikings receiver was one of the first to approach Akpejori about playing football. After that, some of Akpejori's basketball teammates encouraged him to give the sport a try. Graham suggested it could work and several of Miami's football coaches, including Al Golden, provided encouragement too.

So Akpejori spent the spring and summer learning the game. He studied film. He went out and began catching passes. He tried to absorb every piece of knowledge he could from Miami's more experienced tight ends, including Clive Walford and Beau Sandland.

They, like the others, saw Akpejori's potential. "He's working on the skill set so he can become an every-down tight end, trying to develop the basics and the fundamentals of the position," Walford said. "He's out here catching balls, working on footwork ... he's trying to put the pieces to the puzzle so he can actually have the opportunity to hit the field."

Akpejori encouraged to give football a shot

FOX Sports

Christina De Nicola

Aug. 10, 2014

University of Miami men's basketball player Raphael Akpejori tailgated before football games and cheered from the student section last fall.

A few months later as his season came to a close at the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament, friends on the football team -- and even an NFL Hall of Famer -- encouraged him to become a participant rather than a spectator.

Akpejori, who is set to take graduate classes, can now be found on the Greentree Practice Fields at football camp wearing a No. 47 jersey trying to learn a sport he has no prior experience in.

"It was a long process," Akpejori said. "It started with Cris Carter. I played basketball with him somewhere in Boca and it took about an hour to convince me why I would be a good fit for football. Since that day I've been thinking about it. It was in the back of my mind. It started materializing toward the end of the season. A couple of my teammates and friends told me I would be good at it. The staff gave me the opportunity to see what I could do over the workout in the summer and see where it goes from training camp.

"He made me see the potential I have and how I could help the University of Miami achieve the goal of winning a championship in the near future."

Listed at 6-foot-9, 241 pounds, it's no surprise Akpejori shapes up as an interesting prospect. Over four years on the basketball team, he averaged 1.1 points, 1.5 rebounds and 0.4 blocks per game. He started 10 of 85 games.

Carter, who received Division I offers to play basketball before sticking with football, noticed that when he met Akpejori.

Still, Akpejori was a blank slate. Originally from Lagos, Nigeria, he didn't know about the sport until coming to the United States. The New Orleans Saints had just won the Super Bowl, so he became a fan of theirs.

This summer, former Hurricane and NFL Pro Bowler Jimmy Graham worked with Akpejori and Erik Swoope, who the Indianapolis Colts signed as an undrafted free agent. The former had never played organized football either.

Graham perfectly fits the role of mentor seeing as he's familiar with the transition. He played four seasons for the UM basketball team, finishing eighth in program history with 104 blocks and appearing in 120 games. Graham took graduate classes to return to his football roots, catching 17 passes for 213 yards and five touchdowns in 2009.

The two-time Pro Bowler, who was selected in the third round of the 2010 draft by the Saints, taught Akpejori and Swoope their first steps in football by running routes twice a week. Pro Bowl

receiver Santana Moss did the same four days a week while Graham worked through his contract situation.

To this day when Akpejori drops passes and becomes frustrated with his progress, he texts Moss. The four-year pro tells him to remember with the bad days there will also be good ones.

"When Erik and I decided to play football he was our first call," Akpejori said. "He always asked the question, 'What motivates you?' It took me a couple days to answer that, but I came up with 'a lot of things motivate me.' The first thing that motivates me is success. I want to be successful in everything I do, that I lay my hands on. He was excited for me because he went through the grind, he knows what it takes to be successful at this level in a different sport."

Senior tight end Clive Walford and junior safety Dallas Crawford, two of Akpejori's friends prior to joining the team, are also there for encouragement. Walford was a basketball player in high school and understands the challenges.

As a junior last season, Walford broke through with 454 yards and two touchdowns on 34 catches over 13 games (12 starts).

"It comes with time," Walford said of Akpejori's improvement. "It's not going to just fall into your hands. You have to work for it. At the tight-end position we have a lot of depth, so it's going to be tough for him to stand out. But with his ability -- he can jump really high, run really fast. He needs to focus on knowing all his plays, catching the ball and running great routes. If he can do those things -- the coaches will acknowledge it. They won't go unseen."

SAME SKILLS

Running, jumping and catching are nothing new for Akpejori. A basic awareness of how to play in space is also crucial yet not unfamiliar. Those elements translate.

During spring practice and the summer, Akpejori absorbed knowledge of the game by watching film and learning the terminology -- from formations to routes to block assignments. When camp opened on Tuesday, he and his fellow unit members were retaught the fundamentals.

"He's doing really good, but it's a good position for us, so that's the quandary for him right now," head coach Al Golden said. "It's a talented position and made more talented with Chris Herndon's arrival. We have some depth there and Raphael -- great spirit, great kid, great energy. Keep working hard. We'll see when we get into scrimmage situations what he can do."

Another key for Akpejori will be embracing the physicality of the game. He admitted to not being used to "exerting force on another human being."

It didn't faze Graham, San Diego Chargers Pro Bowler Antonio Gates or former NFL star Tony Gonzalez. They were all able to successfully

transfer their talents from the hardcourt to gridiron.

"The physicality of the game didn't bother them," Carter said. "Catching the ball in traffic didn't bother them. That's a skill you're going to see if he has. Can he catch the ball and can he catch the ball in traffic with contact? Besides catching the ball in traffic there are a number of things to build. Block a defensive end -- a very, very athletic guy over his nose. I don't care how good he is catching the ball, eventually he's going to have to block."

EAGER TO GROW

Players soaked in ice tubs following Saturday's practice as temperatures continued to climb. Akpejori, meanwhile, remained in his helmet and pads to catch balls from a machine.

His willingness to learn and work ethic have caught the attention of both teammates and the coaching staff.

"From when he first came out in the spring to now he's like a different player," Crawford said. "You can't get him off the field. He's always out here doing extra drills and running extra routes. He's good. He's strong, too. He's a lot stronger than you would think a basketball player coming out to play. But he's real good. He's got a lot of upside."

The Akpejori experiment offers the challenge -- and promise -- of a great learning curve. His intangibles stand out just as much as his size.

What was tight ends coach Larry Scott's first impression?

"How hard he works," Scott said. "Of course you can't help but notice how big he is. We've been working on getting his weight up. He's probably 245 now. Just his work ethic. He's come in kind of from scratch. It's the bare blocks of learning how to play football, what his stance is. Just his work ethic and his attitude to learning it all and being a part of this.

"It helps when you have the right attitude and mindset about it. If you're positive about the situation of course something will come out of it and you're willing to work. It can take you a long way real fast."

Could football be in Akpejori's future after college?

"I'm trying to enjoy the process," Akpejori said. "I can't really say too much but just work hard and be successful. Be a successful person, be successful with the team. All in all enjoy the process and see where it takes us.

"I have a lot of people tell me stuff -- as much as I want to hear it -- I don't really need to hear that right now. Like I said I'm just trying to enjoy the process and be a part of this team and win championships hopefully."

Lecomte Elevates His Game and His Country

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Aug. 8, 2014

This summer, while many of his teammates were in summer school and early workouts, Lecomte returned to Europe to again captain the Belgians through the U-20 tournament, held in Sarajevo. Lecomte said that over the course of the year, he "got bigger, spent a lot of time in the weight room and then on my shot. It's gotten better. I'm also more aggressive. I worked the whole time on that." After a year adjusting to the American game and a more balanced team, he felt his biggest challenge was "to bring my game that I learned here to make my team better and to be one of the best players in the tournament."

Lecomte accomplished both. Playing on a more well-rounded team, Lecomte led the Belgians to the final and a promotion to Division A, with their only defeats coming to undefeated host Bosnia-Herzegovina in both the opening game and the final. He again made the All-Tournament Team, averaging 20.0 points, 5.0 rebounds, 3.0 assists, and 1.1 steals in a more reasonable 30.4 minutes per game. Asked about his experience, Lecomte said, "I was proud and had fun, all my coaches said I improved a lot and got stronger."

As an inexperienced, shorthanded team struggled through adversity on the way to an ultimately successful season last year, many fans may have overlooked how well Lecomte performed compared to his predecessor. Averaging 7.7 points, 2.3 assists, and 2.1 rebounds, Lecomte's numbers appeared solid for a freshman, but not outstanding. However, in some respects, he equaled or even surpassed Larkin's freshman year - and we all know what sort of leap Larkin made in his sophomore year, ultimately leading

to his early entry into the NBA. With similar assist, turnover, and rebounding numbers, Lecomte's primary edge was as a shooter - his shooting percentage from the field and three-point line outstripped Larkin by 6.5 percent, though Larkin did outperform Lecomte at the free-throw line. His offensive rating was nearly four points higher, but Larkin's improved defense, with an extra steal per game, gave him a better defensive rating by seven points, and an overall Player Efficiency Rating of 14.2 to Lecomte's 12.1. If Lecomte can use his added physical strength and familiarity with the American style of basketball in his sophomore year, he will have the opportunity to make the same sort of improvements that Larkin did.

And Lecomte will need every edge heading into this season, as there will be heavy competition for playing time with Kansas State transfer Angel Rodriguez now eligible and top 50 freshman Ja'Quan Newton in the mix as well. The Hurricanes' upcoming exhibition trip to Spain should help the staff experiment with various lineups and gauge how to allocate those minutes, but with a thin frontcourt, look for Lecomte to be a major contributor again this year, even in a different role.

Hurricanes prepare to play in Spain

Miami Herald

Michelle Kaufman

Aug. 5, 2014

A few hundred yards from where the University of Miami football team opened camp Tuesday, the Hurricanes men's basketball team was busy at work in the campus Fieldhouse, preparing to travel to Spain for a 10-day, four-game summer tour from Aug. 12-22.

The Hurricanes will play against professional and semi-pro teams in Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona. They will also participate in educational, cultural and community service activities.

Miami has nine newcomers on the 2014-15 roster, including six recruits — Kamari Murphy, Ja'Quan Newton, James Palmer, Omar Sherman, Joe Thomas (a fifth-year senior and Miami Krop grad) and Ivan Cruz Uceda (from Spain). Other additions include Big 12 transfers Angel Rodriguez from Kansas State and Sheldon McClellan from Texas. Redshirt freshman Deandre Burnett, who sat out the 2013-14 season with an injury, will rejoin the active roster.

Rodriguez, McClellan and Burnett are expected to play major roles this season.

Only three players return from last season: junior Tonye Jekiri and sophomores Manu Lecomte and Davon Reed. Lecomte spent time in his native Belgium this summer playing for their youth national team, and UM coach Jim Larrañaga said Lecomte came back stronger and a better defender.

Larrañaga hopes the trip will be a good bonding experience on and off the court.

The Hurricanes were 17-16 last season, following a Sweet 16 berth in the NCAA Tournament the year before.

"We have nine players who have never worn a Miami uniform before going to be competing this year," Larrañaga said. "We need them to become a team, acquainted with each other, on the court, off the court, so they can function as one. Our trip to Spain will hopefully accomplish that.

"We have four games which will allow me to try different combinations of lineups against outside competition who don't know what we're running, and we don't know what they're running. Great for the players to spend time off the court; each will have different roommates in each city."

Starting Five: College teams on the rise in 2014-15

USA Today Sports

Scott Gleeson

Aug. 2, 2014

Heading into the 2013-14 college basketball season, Wisconsin hardly looked the part of a team primed to contend. Then came a 16-0 start and Final Four finish.

Every year in college basketball a team emerges from the shadows to rise to national prominence.

Here's a look at a handful of teams that missed the 2014 NCAA tournament but should be drastically improved in 2014-15.

1. Miami (Fla.): Jim Larrañaga's motto is simple. "It's one thing to have a good team, it's another thing to have a great program," the fourth-year Miami coach says. This year could determine just how good the program is following a pedestrian finish last season — 17-16 overall, 7-11 in the ACC — because of a decimated roster from 2012's ACC title and Sweet 16 finish. The Hurricanes have reinforcements with transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas). The duo, both double-digit scorers, will make for a potent backcourt in the country's toughest conference.

Canes begin prepping for season, trip broad

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
July 30, 2014

After winning the ACC and advancing to the Sweet 16 in 2013, Miami found itself in the unenviable position last season of having to replace all five of its starters and nearly 90 percent of its offense.

Needless to say, last season had more than its share of frustrating moments.

The Hurricanes, who sometimes struggled to score and lost eight games by five points or less, finished the season 17-16. Their season ended with a 67-58 loss to N.C. State in the ACC Tournament.

There was no NCAA tourney berth, no chance to play in the NIT.

But there was reason to look forward to the 2014-15 season.

Last year, Miami played without incoming freshman Deandre Burnett who averaged 37 points his senior year of high school at Miami Carol City but injured his wrist in the preseason and was redshirted.

Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, meanwhile, sat out after transferring to Miami.

So even though the Hurricanes will have nine newcomers on their roster this season, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga has plenty of reason to believe things will go differently this season.

"Even though we have a lot of new guys, we also have a certain amount of experience that we actually didn't have last year," Larrañaga said Tuesday after the Hurricanes' first summer practice session. "We have a veteran point guard... we actually have two of them. Angel has

played two years of college basketball and Manu [Lecomte] has played one, so that combination of two guys together gives us great confidence that we can compete at the point guard position. At the two guard spot, we've got Deandre Burnett, who didn't play last year. It would really help if he had quality experience. We have Ja'Quan Newton, who can play the one or two, but he doesn't have any experience. But we also have Davon [Reed], we can move him to the two guard spot. He does have experience. At the three, we have Davon and Sheldon so we have really good experience at the three spot. It's the four spot where we're struggling."

But with a trip to Spain looming where Miami will have the opportunity to play four games as part of a 10-day summer tour, Larrañaga is hoping to learn more about what his Hurricanes can do and he's hoping the shared experience will help his team bond ahead of the season.

Here are more notes from Tuesday's practice:

*Junior center Tonye Jekiri spent plenty of time connecting on free throws and mid-range jumpers during the early part of practice, something Larrañaga said the Hurricanes' big man has done consistently throughout spring workouts. Now it's time to see if Jekiri, who averaged 4.8 points last year, can carry that into game situations.

"He's been doing that in our individual workouts, [but] a game is very different from a skill workout. Skills, you get to shoot the same shot over and over again, so a miss is just followed by another shot," Larrañaga said. "You miss a couple, you just keep shooting. Under game conditions, you miss a shot, all of a sudden, you start to think about it. Should I shoot that shot again? Is it my shot? What is coach going

to say? Is he going to take me out? Those are all things that run through a guy's mind. We've been trying to work on his confidence and his skill level so he can do that consistently. If he can hit a 15-footer consistently, if he can free throw consistently, if he can score a little bit with his back to the basket consistently, that gives us another weapon."

*Larrañaga said that physically, Burnett is "100 percent" after the injury to his left wrist. Burnett's had to tape the wrist to prevent further injury, but Larrañaga said the redshirt freshman has gotten stronger and is in good shape heading into the season.

*Ivan Cruz Uceda missed Tuesday's practice with an ankle injury. Larrañaga said the 6-foot-10, 240-pound forward from Spain will likely be back in time for the Hurricanes trip next month.

"He's a very diligent worker. He wants to get back," Larrañaga said.

*Though the Hurricanes haven't been officially measured yet, Lecomte and Jekiri both looked to have bulked up since last season and Larrañaga said his point guard's game has improved in recent months.

Lecomte returns as Miami's leading scorer from last year's team where he averaged 7.7 points. He also leads the Hurricanes returning players in field goals (85), 3-point percentage (39.7), free throws (56), free throw percentage (77.8) and assists per game (2.3).

"I liked the progress," Larrañaga said. "He's stronger, he's better defensively on the ball. He got really good off the ball defense toward the end of last season. He's an excellent 3-point shooter and a very good free throw shooter..."

Canes Hoops: Day One Practice Notes

State of the U
Alejandro Narciso
July 29, 2014

New year, new players, fresh start. Miami Basketball was back in action on Tuesday in day one of practice. The team started off with a quick huddle in the middle of the court and separated.

Manu Lecomte has gotten significantly bigger and faster since last season. "He's gotten a lot better on the ball and off the ball," said Coach Larrañaga post practice. "He's a lot faster and a lot stronger." Lecomte was Belgium's leader in this year's FIBA U20 European Championships.

Deandre Burnett will be crucial in the UM's success this year. His ability to create his own shot will work wonders for a team that struggled offensively last season.

The fifth year senior from Niagara University will provide some much needed experience on the front court. He reunites with his high school teammate from Miami Krop, Angel Rodriguez.

It seems as if Larrañaga wants a starting lineup of Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan, Tonye Jekiri, Davon Reed and Deandre Burnett.

Unfortunately, Coach L seemed upset with the way the team (especially the first team) practiced today. "Today felt like a loss," said Larrañaga immediately following the scrimmage.

The intensity and fast paced nature of the practice should excite fans. Speed will make up for the lack of height on this team.

The floor slap is back!!! Larrañaga clearly wants the team to be as vocal as possible on defense.

Throughout the scrimmage, the first team played sloppy. However, although upset, Coach L said it was a matter of day one sluggishness.

Davon Reed was the vocal leader for the first team. While the minutes dwindled down, Reed engaged with his teammates reminding them that they were still in it.

Ivan Cruz Uceda suffered a severe ankle sprain a couple weeks back. Larrañaga praised Uceda, saying he's a "diligent worker," and hopes that he'll be back when the team travels to Uceda's home city, Madrid, Spain, on August 12.

6'8" Forward Omar Sherman hit four straight 3-pointers during Tuesday's scrimmage. Coach L says that if that shot is consistent during regular season play, it will open the court up immensely.

Playground Basketball is Dying

ESPN

Myton Metcalf and Dana O'Neil

July 23, 2014

(Ja'Quan Newton mention)

AT RUCKER PARK in New York, people sat on rooftops and climbed trees to watch Julius Erving play. In Louisville, Kentucky, Artis Gilmore would pull up in his fancy car, still wearing his fancy suits, and just ball. Kevin Durant first measured the worth of his game on the D.C. playgrounds, and Arthur Agee chased his hoop dream in Chicago. The Philadelphia outdoor courts once boasted a who's who of the city's best ballers, and in Los Angeles, playground legends with names such as Beast, Iron Man and Big Money Griff played on the same concrete as Magic and Kobe.

That was then, a then that wasn't all that long ago.

Now? Now the courts are empty, the nets dangling by a thread. The crowds that used to stand four deep are gone, and so are the players. Once players asked "Who's got next?" Now the question is "Anyone want to play?" And the answer seems to be no, at least not here, not outside.

Playground basketball, at least as we knew it, is dying.

"That's gone now, all of it is gone," said former University of Maryland star Ernie Graham, who honed his game on the playgrounds of D.C. and Baltimore.

There is no single cause. The best players, young and old, want to be inside instead of out; they want organized games to showcase their skills, not pickup games to earn street cred. Violence has chased people off playgrounds and out of parks, and NBA and NCAA rules limit when and where guys can play in the offseason.

"I think a lot of guys don't think it's worth it," said Toronto Raptors guard Kyle Lowry, who just signed a four-year deal worth \$48 million.

That attitude starts at an early age. High school players in search of scholarships and exposure spend May, June and July in indoor, showcase tournaments and AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) events, not parks.

"AAU is a big milestone for anybody," said D'Angelo Russell, a five-star Ohio State signee from Louisville. "If you're not playing AAU, you'll be lucky to get out of your own city. AAU helps any kid. You get to play in front of top colleges, play with the top players, against the top players. You get to make a name for yourself every day you play."

But the appeal of an indoor game isn't just the quest for fame, scholarship or structure. It's also about safety. It's easier to control an indoor space than an outdoor one. Buildings have walls and private entrances; you can't put a metal detector at every park.

"You're not going to go out and see LeBron in the playgrounds unless there's a special setting, a special arrangement," said Gilmore, a Hall of Famer. "Because the other thing is security. Kids right now, the way they value individual guys' lives, it's not the same."

Even if the NBA stars are made to feel safe, they aren't likely to show up. Kobe Bryant broke his wrist on the hard concrete at Venice Beach in California. Locals swear the concrete D.C. courts at the Goodman League ruined Gilbert Arenas' knee. The fear of injury, missing games and losing money, coupled with jam-packed offseason schedules, has turned pros into occasional visitors rather than regulars at the nation's playgrounds.

"Dominique Wilkins played outside, and he could still jump," said Taras Brown, a longtime AAU coach and Durant's godfather. "They say they're worried about their knees. Your knees don't go 'til you're in your 40s. They just don't want to play outside anymore."

NBA players will not play outside anymore; NCAA players largely may not. College rules restrict summer league participation.

"Summer school is so prevalent, I almost feel sorry for our guys," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. "They get 10 days here, and then the first summer term starts up. Then another week and the second summer term starts up. It used to be you released a guy in May, gave him a workout plan and hoped they did what they were told. You wanted them to play."

Kids still want to play basketball. They still do play basketball, but not outside, not at playgrounds, not like they used to.

Tour the country, visit the playgrounds in New York and Los Angeles, Chicago and Louisville, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

See how it used to be, see what it's become, and see and hear what we've lost.

PHILADELPHIA

THE CRACK RUNS smack through the center of the Cherashore Playground basketball court, a nasty-looking gash that splits the unforgiving concrete like a fault line.

And when Ja'Quan Newton tripped right where the line snakes across the macadam, meeting the pavement with a splat and a slide, someone in the crowd summed up the that's-gotta-hurt crowd reaction succinctly.

"Damn!" he shouted.

Sitting in the stands, Joe Newton physically recoiled.

Years ago, Joe brought his son here, to the Chosen League played on a court at 10th and Olney in Philadelphia. An accomplished player himself -- he was Division II national player of the year out of the University of Central Oklahoma -- Joe knew from personal experience that tough players, especially point guards like him and his son, weren't developed on the sterile confines of high school gyms or even rec centers. They were cultivated on the outdoor courts, like the Southwest Philly ones Joe once called home.

But that was before Ja'Quan signed with the University of Miami, before so much was on the line.

"Did you see him fall?" Joe Newton said an hour later. "I was like, 'Oh no. Man, he's going to Miami. That can't happen.'"

Sonny Hill hears such talk and shakes his head. He has heard it before. He didn't buy it then; he doesn't buy it now.

For as long as he can remember, the Philadelphia playgrounds teemed with good games and the city's best players.

As a kid, he ran around those courts himself, learning the art of shooting from Philly legend and 12-year NBA vet Guy Rodgers during Around the World games; the love of competition from Rodgers and Temple star Hal Lear, who would jump at the chance to challenge a guy who purportedly dropped 50 points in a pickup game in Camden or Chester; and the grace and beauty of pure talent from his Baptist Church League and high school foe, Wilt Chamberlain.

Hill is credited with starting the first professional summer league in this country, the Charles Baker Memorial League in 1960, answering a call from area pros who wanted to keep their games sharp in the offseason.

Hill turned his own dream into the Sonny Hill Community Involvement League, which housed a college and high school division, then watched his vision spread across the city to other playgrounds, such as 16th and Susquehanna, where the North Central Philadelphia Basketball League took root.

But today even the always optimistic Hill can't help but be a little disillusioned by what he sees in his own city and across the country -- empty playgrounds and "sissy" star players who fear the macadam.

He faults the players, but more he blames the almighty dollar. It was a problem then, when the Baker League fell apart in large part because Bulls forward Gene Banks tore his Achilles and violated his contract by playing there. With today's salaries, it is an even bigger obstacle now.

"Too much money," Hill said. "When I see the game, I don't see the purity of the game, the love of the game, the dedication to the game."

There is, as Ja'Quan Newton learned, so much to lose.

Potential scholarships or pocketed salaries outweigh whatever joy an outside game might offer.

Of course, players earned scholarships and salaries back in the day, too.

Yet they played -- all of them. The games moved from Hill's 25th and Dauphin courts outside of the Moylan Rec Center to 16th and Susquehanna, but that didn't stop the city's best from grabbing a game. A who's who put on a show for the hundreds, sometimes nearly 1,000 people who came to watch -- Hank Gathers and Bo Kimble, Doug Overton and Lionel Simmons, Maureece Rice and Cuttino Mobley, Rasheed Wallace and Kyle Lowry.

And now? Hill's high school league is indoors, at Audenried High School. College guys meet at the Hank Gathers Rec Center or McGonigle Hall. The park at 16th and Susquehanna is an overgrown, barren space, the league unable to survive the 2004 passing of organizer Omjasisa Kentu.

Ask city college coaches or former players where to find a good outside game and the answer is a collective shrug. Count Lowry among them.

"I don't even know where you can play outside anymore," Lowry said.

The Raptors guard said he never plays in the playgrounds anymore -- "No, no," he said with a laugh. "That's not what I need to be doing anymore, not as a professional."

The only legit outside run is Rahim Thompson's Chosen League, for high schoolers, and that's only because Thompson practically willed it into existence. A regular spectator at 16th and Susquehanna, Thompson started his league 12 years ago with money out of his own pocket.

On Thursdays, he would cash his check from his job at the parking authority, pay the officials and rent 40 chairs to offer more seating than the half-sawed-off bleacher he had. Even after two robberies forced him out of his home, he kept the league going, packing the scoreboard, game clock and his clothes into a 76ers bag and flopping at one friend's house or another until he could take time to find a new home.

Through connections via a part-time job at Slam magazine, he slowly drummed up sponsors, including sports clothing company Mitchell & Ness. Today, with Nike's full backing, he has brand-new backboards, more bleachers and nice uniforms. His all-star players all wear brand-new KDs.

The only thing missing? Most of the city's best players. Eighty-one Division I players have come through the Chosen League, but even as Thompson adjusts his schedule -- he stops games during the open recruiting window in July -- it's getting harder and harder to attract the top names.

"You got these so-called coaches and advisers who don't even have a background in basketball telling kids where to play and not to play," Thompson said. "How can some guy from down the corner tell you kid he shouldn't play outside?"

"I get it. AAU is great for exposure, but you get toughness outside. You got the crowd on top of you screaming; you hit the ground hard as crap. So you get inside when there's 2,000 people and it's all air conditioned, and someone starts screaming at you, it's like, are you serious? I just had dudes under the basket talking about my mama."

That's what led Ja'Quan to the Cherashore Playground. He spent three years in the Chosen League and believed it helped turn him into a Philly guard -- a brand of player known for his fearlessness as much as his ability.

Now prepping for Miami, he had to beg his father to let him play in the Chosen Game -- "How do you say no to a kid who just wants to play?" Joe said. But after his fall, Ja'Quan suddenly understood his father's reluctance. "I grew up here, but it's a lot tougher on your body," Ja'Quan said. "When I fell down, man, that hurt. I don't need to be doing that. I don't really think I should be out here anymore."

Hoops poised for big rebound

CaneSport.com

Staff

July 22, 2014

Two years ago coach Jim Larrañaga walked into a UM Board of Trustees meeting and told them to keep a close eye on his ultra-talented hoops team.

That team reached the NCAA's Sweet 16.

Last year, with huge graduation losses and Shane Larkin going pro early, Larrañaga said before the season that his words to the Board would be to "Be patient."

Indeed, the team didn't qualify for any post-season berth.

So what would Larrañaga's words to the Board be this time around?

"I'd tell them this team and program is evolving," Larrañaga told CaneSport on Monday. "What we can be is virtually unknown right now because we haven't been together, have nine new guys. We're not going to be nearly as good in August, September, October as we're going to be in February and March."

Certainly on paper this might look like another long season. After all, the team returns just two of its top seven scorers - point guard Manu Lecomte (third in scoring with 7.7 points per game, 16 starts) and shooting guard Davon Reed (6.5 points, 10 starts).

But under the surface there's tons of talent.

And that's not the only thing that has Larrañaga smiling. For the first time in his Cane tenure the roster is set to even out after this coming season - instead of a ton of upperclassmen or a load of freshmen he will have a better balance of four sophomores, three juniors and four seniors. That helps recruiting, since prospects won't be scared away by big numbers of seniors that might prevent them from starting as a freshman ... or an unknown with a team that has a tremendous number of young players.

"One of our challenges when we came to Miami three years ago was trying to get balance in our classes," Larrañaga said. "In the first year we really had three seniors and one of them got hurt, Julian Gamble. And Julian became a junior (by redshirting) - well we already had five juniors. So that gave us a sixth senior for the following year. We signed Shane Larkin, who left us (as a junior) - that gave us seven scholarships in one year that was available to us and Bishop Daniels left. That gave us an eighth scholarship and you only can have 12 kids visit officially so you have to go eight-for-12. You don't want to ever be in a position where you have eight scholarships again. I told my coaches we have to get to the point we have three kids in each class."

That's getting close to reality.

Larrañaga expects to sign two players in the Class of 2015 (Anthony Lawrence is committed and he says "we'll find a way to get a second").

It was so important to Larrañaga to get rid of the skewed classes that he passed up the chance to take another freshman in this year's class. He tried to go after three different fifth-year senior transfers in the spring but struck out.

"I was frustrated, was like 'What are we going to do? We're not going to have a senior on our roster,'" Larrañaga said.

So he prepared to leave that scholarship spot open ... until Angel Rodriguez talked to coaches in mid June about one of his former high school teammates.

"He says 'Hey, one of my high school teammates just graduated from Niagara, he's looking for a place to go,'" Larrañaga said. "'Oh yeah, who's that?' And he said 'Joe Thomas, he's about 6-6, 230, is a power forward.'"

Larrañaga quickly found out the fifth-year senior averaged only 3.4 points and 2.7 rebounds per game as a redshirt junior. But with a spot that wasn't going to be used, and since he didn't want to fill it with a freshman, Larrañaga didn't mind taking a chance.

He says he offered Thomas a visit and a scholarship without ever watching his game tape. That's a first for the long-time coach.

"I asked 'What kind of student is he?' He's a very good student. He had a release, but we had no visits left (to offer). But he's from Miami, so he came over on a Tuesday and I said 'Would you like to come here?' I'd never seen him play, never looked at tape. We needed to balance our classes."

Thomas already has starred in the weight room - he broke the team record in the bench press at 370 pounds. The record was previously set by Erik Swoope, who benched 365.

"If the young man that was a senior in high school were a top 50 player in the country, a very strong student, someone that would have made an impact, we would have signed him (instead)," Larrañaga said.

But there wasn't a high school recruit like that out there for UM to ink.

"Whatever contribution (the incoming freshmen that Miami could have signed late) could have made this year, this senior [Thomas] could make the same contribution and maybe even more," Larrañaga said. "And to get classes balanced is absolutely huge."

Thomas may or may not wind up making an impact.

But there is certainly plenty of potential scattered all over this team.

Sharpshooter DeAndre Burnett, who Larrañaga believes would have averaged in double figures as a freshman last year if not for a season-ending wrist injury, is back fully healthy.

And transfer Sheldon McClellan, who sat out last season per NCAA rules, is a scoring machine with excellent three-point ability. Another transfer who sat out, Rodriguez, is an impact point guard and was elected team captain. Add in a sprinkling of new arrivals Ja'Quan Newton, James Palmer and Omar Sherman, JUCO arrival Ivan Cruz Uceda and Thomas, and this team just might make some noise in the ACC and post-season.

Of course it's early, and the pieces have to fall into place. And Larrañaga knew that was the case - that's why he scheduled a summer tour in Spain Aug. 12-22 - to help give this team a chance to gel.

"That gives us a head start on where we want to be in November," Larrañaga said.

How are the position battles shaping up?

At point guard it's Lecomte and Rodriguez that will battle to start, and Larrañaga says both could play on the floor together at times. Reed played some point guard last season but won't be there this year.

"That was out of necessity (in 2013-14)," Larrañaga said.

At shooting guard Newton, Burnett and Reed will compete.

"There are a number of possibilities," Larrañaga said.

Reed can also play small forward, and McClellan and Palmer also play there. The power forwards are Thomas, who Larrañaga affectionately calls "the mystery man," along with Sherman and Uceda.

It's expected the starting center will be returner Tonye Jekiri, and Sherman and Uceda can also factor in there.

"(Jekiri) has a leg up on anyone competing for the five spot for sure," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga attributed Jekiri's sophomore falloff last season to working in a freshman point guard compared to when he had Larkin.

"He didn't get some of the opportunities that were created by an experienced point guard," Larrañaga said. "This year he'll be playing with two experienced point guards, so we're expecting better production."

Larrañaga added "He still was uncertain what he could or couldn't do - he's playing with a lot more confidence than he did."

Larrañaga is excited about McClellan, saying "He's an extremely gifted athlete. Running, jumping, changing directions, balance. He's as high a level an athlete as I've coached in 43 years. He has a certain way of playing that's very, very good. His game needs to evolve into a more well-rounded layer. Sheldon is very good at driving to the basket. He is terrific in the open court, is very good at drawing fouls and is a very good free throw shooter. He is also one of the best guys we've ever had at shooting three-pointers in practice in the drills. But he rarely shoots the three (in games). If my coaching staff can convince him that about one-third of your shots (are three-pointers) you're going to be really hard to guard."

Larrañaga also shared his thoughts on several of the other key players:

* Last year Rodriguez sat out with wrist and knee injuries. The wrist is healed but he has tendonitis in his knees that flares up at times.

"Guys that play like he does with that relentless abandon, they've always got something that bothers them," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga calls Rodriguez "a floor general."

"He's got Shane's style of play where he can get other people shots, he can score, but what he's really great at is directing traffic," Larrañaga said. "He loves to direct traffic. When you watch him play you'll think to yourself 'You know, one day he's probably going to be a coach.' His court presence is outstanding. He does it at the defensive end of the floor, offensive end of the floor, just has a great all-around game."

* Larrañaga says while Burnett can score in bunches, there are other aspects of his game that need work.

"That's what this year will be about," he said.

* Larrañaga said he's proud of what Lecomte accomplished with the Belgian national team at the FIBA U20 European Championships held in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina. He averaged 20 points and made 80 percent of his free throws including 11-for-13 in a July 14 game vs. Cyprus.

* Of Newton, Larrañaga said, "One of the things about Ja'Quan, he played in a very competitive league in high school, is versatile so he can play with a lot of different types of guys. And he knows how to score. He and Deandre should have a heck of a battle for that two guard spot."

* Asked about Palmer, Larrañaga said, "Not necessarily as a freshman, but during the course of his career he could be one of our best players. James has size, he has skill, can pass, dribble, shoot, can shoot threes. He's very good. As he matures he's going to be a terrific player."

* Of Reed, Larrañaga said, "I really like the progress he's made. Everything he did last year he's doing better."

* Larrañaga said that Sherman, who is listed officially as a 220-pounder, is actually a 265-pounder.

"He's 6-8, 265 - Omar has great hands and a great (shooting) touch, a beautiful jump hook inside and an outstanding three-point shot," Larrañaga said.

Sherman is working to cut down his weight to help his stamina - Larrañaga said his goal weight is 245.

Homecoming: The Angel Rodriguez Story

HurricaneSports.com

Eric Todoroff

July 2014

It has been two weeks since Miami basketball fans began mourning the highly publicized decision by superstar free agent LeBron James to leave Miami and return to northeast Ohio to play for the Cleveland Cavaliers. Last May, a similar homecoming occurred in Coral Gables. It lacked the same media attention as LeBron's and was not a topic of debate between Stephen A. Smith and Skip Bayless on ESPN's First Take, but it brought an impact basketball player back to his Miami roots.

Angel Rodriguez, a Puerto Rico native that moved to Miami as a teenager to pursue his dream of playing college basketball in the United States, returned to finish his collegiate career with the Miami Hurricanes. As a child, Rodriguez always imagined playing college basketball. But as he grew up and developed as a basketball player, his goals faded and the vast ocean that separated him from his dream seemingly grew larger.

In order for Puerto Rican basketball players to garner the attention of Division I coaching staffs, it is a necessary part of recruitment for the player to attend some high school in the United States. Rodriguez said the most important step of that process is having a connection and fortunately for him, he had one.

"If you don't have connections, you won't get here [to the United States]," Rodriguez explained. "I was fortunate enough that I had my cousin [Javi Gonzalez] who actually played for NC State. He went to high school in Miami and in the off season he went to see me play and he liked how I played and asked me if I wanted to go to the U.S." Rodriguez knew he wanted to play high school basketball in Miami, but needed to speak with his mother first. After his father passed away when he was a child, Rodriguez's widowed mother raised him in Puerto Rico. He could not make a move to the United States without her approval.

After receiving his mother's blessing, Rodriguez moved to Miami and enrolled at Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School. He was just 15 years old and in a completely new city, but he did not have anything on his mind "other than basketball." Transitioning to the fast-paced life in Miami was a challenge. It was different than what Rodriguez was accustomed to in San Juan and his new basketball competition was unlike anything he had played against.

"Basketball here was a lot different," he said. "But, it was what I expected. I expected to play against much bigger people, more athletic. That actually gave me a lot of trouble when I got here, but I got used to it and it was normal." The improved competition forced Rodriguez to elevate his game. As a sophomore Rodriguez started at guard on the varsity team, leading the squad in scoring and assists. He guided the team to a district title and was named first team All-Dade County by the Miami Herald. Rodriguez's sophomore campaign was the first of three that ended in all-county honors.

Following his junior season, Rodriguez was tabbed the Miami-Dade County Player of the Year. By the time he was a senior, Rodriguez was the No. 4 rated player in the state of Florida. The talented guard was averaging

23 points per game along with six assists and was garnering recruiting interest from the likes of Rick Pitino at Louisville and Billy Donovan at Florida.

As a native Spanish-speaker, Rodriguez was attracted to the program Cuban-American and Miami native Frank Martin was building at Kansas State. Martin is highly regarded in Miami basketball circles, where he began his career locally at Miami Senior High, coaching high-caliber players such as the Miami Heat's Udonis Haslem. "My high school coach had a good relationship with Frank and he always showed loved from the beginning and I built a good relationship with him," Rodriguez said, reminiscing on his recruiting trip. "I felt like I was at home. Frank is Cuban and back then I didn't know much English and it was comfortable for me to have a good relationship with my coach going that far away from home." Rodriguez was also intrigued by the success transfer Denis Clemente had at K-State after playing at the University of Miami. Clemente was also a Puerto Rican guard from Miami and the system the Wildcats played was something Rodriguez looked forward to becoming a part of.

As a freshman, Rodriguez made an immediate impact in Manhattan, starting in 17 games including the team's two NCAA Tournament contests. As quickly as Rodriguez defined his role at K-State, he was not sure if he was to remain a Wildcat for the remainder of his college career. At the end of the season, Frank Martin stepped down and accepted the head coaching position at South Carolina. "I was lost when Frank said he was leaving," he said. "I didn't know what to do." Bruce Weber was named Martin's successor at Kansas State, and after speaking with his AAU coach and mentor Marcos "Shakey" Rodriguez, Angel decided to stay in Manhattan and play for Weber. "Shakey told me to relax," Rodriguez said. "They signed Coach Weber and I figured I might as well stay. He had a good reputation with guards and we figured we should stay because regardless if I transferred, I still had to sit one year and try a new coach. It was the smartest decision to stay."

Rodriguez was in a new system under Weber, but he was still the same dynamic player. As a sophomore, he started all 33 games for Weber, leading the Wildcats in 3-points field goals (55), assists (173) and steals (50) and earning spots on the Big 12 All-Defensive team and All-Big 12 second team.

Despite two winning seasons at K-State and surviving a coaching change, Rodriguez believed it was time to move on from Manhattan. "When I made that decision, I really wanted to come and get close to my family," Rodriguez said. Kansas State granted Rodriguez his release and schools immediately began calling the highly-coveted point guard, including Jim Larrañaga's Miami staff. Rodriguez's first and only recruiting trip as a transfer was to Coral Gables, but this time he did not arrive in South Florida alone as he did as a 15-year-old.

Angel's mother joined him on his visit and he will always remember how Coach L and his staff embraced her. "We went around the campus on the golf cart, they were showing me everything and as Coach L was talking to me, my mom was riding in the back and they had a translator for her because she doesn't speak English," Rodriguez said. "It felt special. Coach L wanted her to feel like she was part of it, which she was, and no school

had actually ever done that." His visit to Miami assured Rodriguez that the Canes were the program for him. "I couldn't ask for anything better once I said I was going to transfer," Rodriguez said. "That's why I didn't even waste my time visiting other schools."

This past season, Rodriguez was unable to play, sitting out a year due to transfer rules. While he could not make an impact in games, he was an active member of the Hurricanes in practice. But his biggest impact may have been drawing the attention of another talented Big 12 player looking for a new opportunity. "Shortly after Angel made a decision to come to the University of Miami, Sheldon McClellan announced that he going to be transferring and Miami was going to be one of the schools he was going to consider," Larrañaga explained. "Angel was instrumental in helping us recruit Sheldon."

Confined to bench, the highly competitive Rodriguez watched helplessly as his team lost close game after close game, seven of which were decided by five points or fewer. Rather than sulk with his teammates in defeat, Rodriguez provided support by motivating them and ramping up his efforts in practice. As the point guard, Rodriguez was the quarterback for the scout team and simulated the opponents' game plans. Larrañaga ensured that his tenacity in the gym "made every scrimmage situation very competitive because he was trying so hard to win." In practice, Rodriguez would become angry and frustrated if his team would not win.

With the 2014-15 campaign only months away, Rodriguez has begun to cement his role as a leader, using his experience and work ethic as cornerstones. "I'm definitely a bigger leader because I have a lot of experience and I know what it takes to get where we want to go," he said. "I can lead the guys based on my work ethic and how hard I practice and I can lead them to the right path." Rodriguez has become a court commander, being more vocal in practice. No longer simply leading by physical example, Rodriguez now has the confidence to call out directions and plays like the team leader that he is. Coach L has witnessed his tenacity translate into a relentless style of defense from the point guard.

"Angel is a bulldog on defense, he's one of those guys that clenches his teeth, sinks his teeth into you and doesn't let you go," Larrañaga described. "You've got to try and shake free from him. It's a great characteristic for a point guard and a great way for a coach to build the team defense."

Rodriguez's homecoming has brought him back to the city that provided him the possibility to chase his dream of playing college basketball. While some would feel pressure playing in their home city, the Puerto Rican is finally comfortable in his adopted hometown and is eager for the chance to play in front of family and friends. "I never feel pressure," Rodriguez said. "I am excited. I'm looking forward to having a great year so the BUC will be packed every game. You attract fans by winning and that's what we're trying to do."

11 Most Impactful High-Major Transfers

Bleacher Report
Ari Kramer
July 15, 2014

8. Angel Rodriguez and 7. Sheldon McClellan, Miami (FL) Via Kansas State and Texas

Miami took a step back last season, and the point guard and scoring situations were big reasons why.

In come Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, and the Hurricanes have a stable point guard and a scorer who have already played in a high-major conference.

Rodriguez isn't the quickest point guard, but he finds his teammates and can put points on the board, too.

As a sophomore at Kansas State, the 5'11" floor general averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists per game. He posted a 107.4 offensive rating, and his 37.3 percent assist rate ranked 24th in the nation.

McClellan, meanwhile, saw his efficiency dip as a sophomore at Texas—his 116.5 ORtg in 2011-12 fell to 104.1 in 2012-13. But, as Jeff Eisenberg noted, he has shown flashes of the elite scoring ability that made him a heralded recruit out of high school.

Also from Eisenberg, "Pair McClellan and Rodriguez in the backcourt for the 2014-15 season, and Miami would have one of the more potent guard duos in the nation."

The potential is there, as we have already seen Rodriguez team up with Rodney McGruder to form an explosive backcourt.

The ACC is absolutely loaded this year, so Rodriguez and McClellan won't carry Miami to a conference title. But don't be surprised if the duo lead Miami to a few upsets in league play.

Why to watch Erik Swoope at training camp

I Sports Web
Ryan Dunne
July 15, 2014

The Indianapolis Colts have a 90-man roster heading into training camp and have to find a way to cut that down to 53 players before the start of the regular season.

Now while there aren't many coaches to watch every single player, rookie tight end Erik Swoope is a must watch in this year's camp.

Now let's take a look at Swoope's history playing football: there is none.

That was quick.

But don't let that take away from his chances of not only making the team, but making an impact on this upcoming season.

A few guys you may have heard of would be tight ends like Jimmy Graham, Antonio Gates, and Tony Gonzalez. Those names sound familiar? Not surprised. Players like them are some of the best tight ends in the NFL today and have all made transitions from playing basketball to playing football.

When you look at the size and speed of Swoope, it is a framework that can easily translate to having success in the NFL.

Swoope is 6-foot-5 and weighs in at 246 pounds, a prototypical size for an NFL tight end. Analyzing a player such as Swoope this early is a challenge for anyone, but like I've said before, this wouldn't be the first time a basketball player has made a transition to the NFL. What can help the transition from basketball to football is boxing out. Obviously, when a player misses a shot in basketball you have to be able to box out and get the rebound.

Now in the NFL, there are situations when the quarterback throws a fade route to the end zone and as a receiver catching the pass it is your job to set yourself up in position where you can jump up and make the catch.

Head coach Chuck Pagano has been impressed with Swoope so far stating how he has "exceeded our expectations way beyond anything that you'd ever imagine for a guy that never played."

Swoope is currently in a position where he could compete for a lot of playing time with the Colts.

Tight end Coby Fleener is currently the starter for the Colts with tight end Dwayne Allen currently his backup. Allen is coming off a season-ending hip injury he suffered in the first week of the season against the Oakland Raiders. While Allen did have a productive rookie season the year before leading all rookie tight ends in receptions in 2012, the Colts may try to play it safe with Allen and not give him a heavy workload his first season back from injury. This move could lead to the opportunity for Swoope to see a lot of playing time and impress the Colts coaching staff even more.

Even though Swoope will have a lot to learn in the NFL, there is no doubt he is a player that can be a stud tight end in the game today.

Breaking Down the Hierarchy of the New ACC

Bleacher Report

C.J. Moore

July 6, 2014

With Louisville officially joining the ACC last Tuesday, the league took over the title of best basketball conference in America—maybe ever.

How stacked is the new ACC?

Out of the 15 teams, all but two (Clemson and Virginia Tech) have been to a Sweet 16 since 2003, and all 15 have made the NCAA tournament in that time span.

Five of the last 12 national championships have been won by schools now in the ACC. The ACC has four teams in the top 10 of our most recent preseason rankings for the 2014-15 season.

The competition during the conference season will be highly entertaining, but until it begins, the bragging rights game for ACC fanbases could be just as competitive. You have four schools that have been historically dominant along with several others with storied histories.

So in the interest of taking a forward-looking approach, I decided to rank the schools based on how they're set up over the next four or five years, using how current rosters are built for now and in the future along with possible coaching changes as guidelines for the voting.

Here's how they rank over the next handful of seasons. (In parentheses is this coming season's predicted finish.)

8. Miami (6): Jim Larrañaga may never have a team as good as the one he had two years ago led by Shane Larkin. Larrañaga is trying to build back up with transfers. Sheldon McClellan (Texas transfer) and Angel Rodriguez (K-State transfer) will be go-to guys on this year's team.

But it's hard to consistently have NCAA-caliber rosters at a school without much tradition like Miami. Larrañaga proved he could put together a great team once; it'll be interesting to see if he can put together another ACC title contender over the next four years.

Lecomte Excited to Represent Belgium at Euros

HurricaneSports.com
David Villavicencio
July 4, 2014

The Fourth of July is the most patriotic day of the year in the United States.

While Americans will be celebrating their country at cookouts and with fireworks today, Miami guard Manu Lecomte's patriotism will have him on a flight home to Belgium to play in the FIBA U20 European Championships.

"It is an honor," Lecomte said of playing for Belgium. "It is special when you represent your country. It is different than your team or club."

The U20 European Championships for Division B is a 14-team tournament that will be held in Sarajevo, Bosnia from July 10-20. Lecomte will captain a Belgian squad that is hungry to move into the top division in Europe. Belgium is one of seven teams in Group A, joined by Luxembourg, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Poland and Estonia.

"We are in Division B and now we are trying to move into Division A," Lecomte said. "If you make the finals, you move to the next division. But we want to become champions in order to move into the A division."

Lecomte has been part of Belgium's national team program for most of the past decade. He was a member of the U16 team for two years, the U18 team for two years and is headed into his second year with the U20 squad. His extensive experience playing internationally for his country has pitted Lecomte against some of the best competition in the world.

"It helped me because it is good competition," Lecomte said. "It has good players that only play pro and it has big teams like Spain, Italy and Greece. It's also a good competition because there are also a lot of NCAA and [European] college players."

International tournaments like the FIBA

U20 European Championships can be a challenge for a team because they rarely get to spend much time preparing together before the competition begins.

"It's hard because every year it's a new team," Lecomte said. "We don't have a lot of time to practice together, but I am playing with some guys who have been with me since U16, so that helps."

After a few days of training, Lecomte and his Belgian teammates will begin their quest for a championship on July 10 against Bosnia.

"We have Bosnia for the first game," Lecomte said. "And it is going to be great because the whole country is going to be there to push their team. The first game will be a tough one, but I know it will be very exciting."

As a freshman, Lecomte was an exciting player for the Hurricanes. He was third on the team with 7.7 ppg and ranked second in assists (77) and third in steals (21), while playing in all 32 games and making 16 starts. While he impressed Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga, he also caught the attention of his Belgian coaches.

"The coaches talked to me and said I improved a lot," Lecomte said. "I am expecting to help make it a great championship for us. If I do the best I can, I know I can be real good for my team."

Lecomte credits his vast improvement to spending the past year learning under Larrañaga and his staff and practicing every day against talented players like Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan.

"Those two guys that transferred are very good players," Lecomte said. "I was able to compete everyday against them and I am trying to get better. I like to compete and my goal is to get better each day. When I first got here they were much better than me and now I can compete with them. That's how I know that I have improved a lot."

Lecomte has spent the offseason working in the weight room to add

strength. He also has been polishing his game and working on his shot. Heading into his second collegiate season, Lecomte feels much more comfortable and plans to play more aggressively than he did a year ago.

But before he returns to Coral Gables to don Miami's orange and green, he has a big goal that he hopes to accomplish over the next few weeks.

"We have always finished fourth or third, but we have never won," Lecomte said. "This is the year and I am very excited about it"

Jay Larrañaga enjoys summer role

ESPN

Chris Forsberg

July 2, 2014

Boston Celtics assistant coach Jay Larrañaga, tasked with overseeing the team's summer league squad, had humorously dodged a series of questions about Avery Bradley's re-signing while citing the league's moratorium period when the conversation swung to whether rookie James Young had participated in Wednesday's workout.

"Twister, what's a good answer for that one?" Larrañaga said with a smile as he looked again to the team's media relations czar Jeff Twiss before playfully exclaiming, "Jiminy Christmas!"

Twiss relayed the necessary information and Larrañaga offered it back: "James observed practice. He did the stationary bike a little bit, just watched, and participated from the sidelines."

Young, the 17th overall pick in the 2014 draft, is battling some lingering neck issues after being involved in a minor car accident that forced him to cancel some pre-draft workouts. The team is uncertain if he'll be able to participate in Boston's five-game slate that starts Saturday at the Orlando Summer League.

Larrañaga, entering his third year with Boston, will coach the summer squad for a second straight summer and said his goal is to install the system and culture that head coach Brad Stevens is trying to create in Boston.

"Brad is great, because he really looks to empower all of his assistants during the season and in summer league. That's why he's so great to work for," said Larrañaga, who previously coached the Erie BayHawks of the NBA Development League. "I kinda

look at my job like I looked at my D-League job, you're like a [junior varsity] coach. You run what the head coach wants, you're trying to establish, in a very short amount of time, the culture and the habits that Brad wants during the season. That's kinda how I'm approaching it."

Larrañaga was asked if he tries to think like Stevens might in the regular season.

"I wish I could think like Brad thinks," he said with a laugh. "Every person is different. I'm always trying to learn from him. I think he's a great coach, so I'm trying to steal as much as I can from him. I am my own person as well."

Larrañaga is expected to shuffle into the role of lead assistant with the recent departure of Ron Adams. That could put him in line to coach the team in the event that Stevens gets ejected from a game.

"It was actually pretty funny, because I was talking to Brad a couple days ago about -- he said, 'If I were to get ejected ...' and I said, 'It's not a hypothetical, you got ejected this year,'" said Larrañaga, referencing how Stevens got tossed during a loss in Sacramento in February. "He was like, 'Yeah, yeah, OK.' It was a little bit of a scramble, but there was only a few seconds left, so it wasn't a big deal."

Larrañaga is eager for what lies ahead, both in Orlando and the 2014-15 season.

"I'm excited to coach in Orlando. It's fun to be a little bit more active in practices and in the games," he said. "You learn a lot working from coach Stevens during the year and now it's an opportunity to kinda try to emulate a lot of the things that he does that make him so successful. I don't foresee my role, during the season, changing very much. I've really enjoyed every year I've been with the Celtics and

trying to contribute the best I can. I'll continue to do that."

The Celtics interviewed Larrañaga about the team's vacancy before Stevens was hired and he drew additional interest from Philadelphia. The son of University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga, Jay seems destined to be a head coach in the NBA down the road. For now, the 39-year-old is enjoying his time watching and learning from 37-year-old Stevens.

"I think all of us learned so much from coach Stevens [last year]," said Larrañaga. "He has an incredible will to prepare to win. People talk about that a lot -- his is unbelievable. I felt like we were so prepared going into each game, and he was so prepared, which then allowed him to be incredibly composed in pressure situations and I think that feeds to your players. When he's so prepared and so comfortable in stressful situations -- now, the Miami game was the best example of that. He's just drawing up plays and [saying], 'We got this.' That was really enjoyable for me to watch and try to learn from."

As for his own development, Larrañaga added: "I feel like I try to improve on a daily basis as a coach. I think I'm a better coach today than I was yesterday, and this summer as opposed to the summer before. Just keep trying to improve and hopefully that bears out."

OSU's Kamari Murphy transfers to UM

Miami Herald
Walter Villa
June 20, 2014

The Miami Hurricanes' men's basketball team will now have three former Big 12 players on its roster.

Point guard Angel Rodriguez, formerly of Kansas State, and shooting guard Sheldon McClellan (Texas) have been on Miami's campus for the past year and will be eligible to play this season.

Kamari Murphy, a 6-9, 220-pound forward from Oklahoma State, signed with Miami last week and will be eligible to play in the 2015-16 season. He has two years of eligibility remaining.

A three-star recruit out of New York City, Murphy started 15 games as an OSU freshman, averaging 3.8 points and 3.9 rebounds.

As a sophomore, Murphy started 21 games, averaging 6.1 points and 6.3 rebounds.

Predicting Coach of the Year in Each Conference

Bleacher Report

Scott Henry

June 18, 2014

ACC: Jim Larrañaga, Miami (Fla.)

Miami basketball bore a flash-in-the-pan look after struggling through the encore to 2012-13's ACC championship season. With their top six scorers gone, the Hurricanes had to rebuild around championship reserves like Rion Brown and injury returnees like Garrius Adams.

This year's UM squad is rebuilding again, with five of last season's top seven scorers gone. Coach Jim Larrañaga, however, is bringing some quality materials to assemble another winner in Coral Gables.

Part-time starters Manu Lecomte, Davon Reed and Tonye Jekiri are the only returning lettermen, and all three are better suited for supporting roles. The star quality will have to come from new faces, but Larrañaga may have some strong candidates.

Point guard Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and wing Sheldon McClellan (Texas) were both wildly inconsistent scorers at their previous schools, but both have proved they can produce against major-conference opposition. Rodriguez ranked third in the Big 12 in assists, fourth in steals and fifth in assist-to-turnover ratio during his sophomore season in 2012-13.

Aside from Lecomte, Reed and the transfers, Larrañaga also has a solid group of freshmen joining this season's backcourt. DeAndre Burnett, a 4-star combo guard from the 2013 class, was forced to redshirt with a wrist injury. He'll be joined by top-40 Rivals recruit JaQuan Newton and top-100 Washington D.C. product James Palmer.

The frontcourt depth could be an Achilles' heel, but juco recruit Ivan Uceda could summon Kenny Kadji flashbacks with his blend of inside grit and outside shooting. Freshman Omar Sherman is a 250-pound bruiser who could clean up on the offensive glass if his teammates are misfiring.

Larrañaga still has to integrate all these new pieces, but if his new bigs are immediately productive, there's enough talent here to push for a top-five ACC finish. That would be more than enough to cement an NCAA tournament return.

Erik Swoope: Miami hoops player to Colts tight end

NFL.com

Judy Battista

June 10, 2014

INDIANAPOLIS -- The making from scratch of an NFL player begins at about 5:30 each morning at Erik Swoope's home near the Indianapolis Colts' training center. He prepares his own breakfast and then cues up his first tape session of the day -- usually not of himself and only occasionally of the Colts. Swoope is instead immersed in the work of tight ends around the league, paying special attention to the ones who played basketball. He watches Jimmy Graham and Antonio Gates and Julius Thomas for the little moves they make to get open that hark back to their crossovers, or for footwork that is in various stages of evolution from the improvisational nature of the hardwood to the more structured steps on the gridiron.

Swoope recognizes the basketball in those players, even as it is slowly being coached out of them -- the way it is just beginning to be coached out of him, too.

Hanging in Swoope's locker -- he is in a pod of the extra lockers set in the middle of the Colts' locker room, with the other undrafted rookies -- is a University of Miami backpack, a relic from a different time and a different sport. Swoope was a four-year basketball player at Miami, a 6-foot-5 power forward known for his athleticism and for having the intelligence to understand every position on the floor. He was 6-2 by the time he was in sixth grade and already jumping above the rim. The AAU teams began to circle, and then, a few years later, the talk about college scholarships began. The risk that injury would derail those possibilities was too great for him to seriously entertain the playful chatter he and his friends engaged in about playing football.

And so he never did -- not when he was already too big for Pop Warner, not when he was taking the court for Harvard-Westlake High School in Los Angeles, the elite hoops program that produced Jason and Jarron Collins, and not at Miami, where Swoope earned a degree in economics while laying the groundwork for a playing career.

Just not the one he has now.

Swoope went to coach Jim Larrañaga's office on March 14, the day after the Hurricanes' season ended with a loss to North Carolina State in the ACC Tournament, expecting to discuss his hopes of playing basketball overseas. It was to be a routine end-of-season meeting. Instead, Larrañaga surprised him with some news: The coach had received a call from the Denver Broncos, whose area scout, Nick Schiralli, had heard from his college connections about Swoope's athletic gifts.

"I was completely shocked," Swoope said of his conversation with Larrañaga. "When my coach presented the opportunity, I was almost in disbelief. They told me they were looking for guys 6-4, 6-5 who could catch the ball and run fast. It was almost a spit-balling idea."

Perhaps. But it is grounded in precedent. After the success of players like Gates with the San Diego Chargers and Thomas with the Broncos -- and of course, most famously, Tony Gonzalez with the Kansas City Chiefs and Atlanta Falcons -- teams are on the lookout for basketball players of similar height, weight and speed, believing they have at least as much potential as some prospects who have played football all their lives.

Colts general manager Ryan Grigson said that when there is a basketball player who has the physical attributes that could enable a transfer to tight end and who "can walk and chew gum at the same time," he wants to at least ask if that person is interested in football.

Swoope was, but he did not accept the invitation to work out with Denver immediately. First, he sought the counsel of, among others, Graham, the former Hurricanes basketball and football player whom Swoope had met as a freshman, when Graham was just joining the New Orleans Saints. Miami's trainer had always compared the two of them, and had told Swoope that he thought his

nature -- his speed and strength and quickness, his ability to play every position, from shooting guard to center, while still knowing what the point guard did -- would make the transition smoother, as it had for Graham.

"The main thing Jimmy did was ask me character questions -- What motivates you?" Swoope said. "He said, 'If you're going to make this change, don't let it just be on a whim. If it motivates you, strive for it.' We didn't talk about X's and O's, just about character."

There is, of course, one critical difference between Swoope and Graham, Gates and Thomas. Like Graham, Thomas, a Portland State product, had played some college football. Gates was a top tight end at the high school level before opting for basketball at Kent State. Swoope had none of that background -- he had never played organized football of any kind, had never put on shoulder pads -- and he had just seven days to get ready for the workout with the Broncos. He worked mostly on catching drills, getting some pointers from his brother, Devin, who had played basketball before switching to football, eventually landing at Northwood, a Division II program. Devin, in fact, made the even more unfathomable transition from nose tackle (at 315 pounds) to receiver, which necessitated a 100-pound weight loss.

Swoope watched NFL Network. He found clips of the NFL Scouting Combine on YouTube, so he would know what drills to expect in his workout. He even studied the Madden video game, to gain some rudimentary knowledge of routes.

The audition with the Broncos did not net Swoope a spot with the team, but others were curious about his potential. The Colts had heard through the scouting grapevine that Swoope was interested in playing football, so director of college scouting T.J. McCreight approached Grigson about his interest level. Indianapolis has taken on a number of projects over the years -- including Daniel Adongo, a Kenyan-born rugby player now entering his second season in the NFL. But Grigson had to be sold on the idea of Swoope.

Then the GM began to think the stars might align. On the Colts' staff are coaches Rob Chudzinski and Alfredo Roberts, both former Miami tight ends. The national scout who worked Swoope out, Matt Terpening, played college basketball, too. And then there's the fact that former Colts tight end Marcus Pollard spent 10 seasons with the team despite having played only basketball in college.

"Then I Googled (Swoope) and saw a dunk against Virginia Tech," Grigson said, of a rim-rattling one-handed slam delivered during the ACC Tournament. "A lot of guys would be envious of how he throws it down; he was aggressive to the hole. The way he got here -- is it crazy? At first, it can seem that way. But when you look at who the best tight ends have been -- Tony Gonzalez, Antonio Gates, Jimmy Graham -- it makes sense."

In the less than three months that he has been playing football, plenty has not made sense to Swoope. Like when he first got the Colts' playbook after signing as an undrafted free agent.

"He was already a pro and he never played. He's wise beyond his years." -- Ryan Grigson, Colts GM, on how Erik Swoope has impressed him.

"I looked at it, and it was, 'This is Chinese. I have no idea what I'm looking at.'" Swoope said.

Since then, he has become so immersed in football that he has not even spoken to his family about basketball. Swoope's weight training program from Miami has transitioned well to the NFL, as he already has put on about 20 pounds from his senior-year playing weight -- he is at 246 pounds now -- and likely has another 10 to go. Football's necessary emphasis on developing size and strength is a departure from the emphasis on joints demanded by spending so much time in the air during basketball games.

"Basically, everything has to get bigger," he said.

The greatest adjustment, though, has been mental, as he moves from the more improvisational style of basketball to the more rigorously structured execution of football. Thomas, who says he still feels like he is early in his own adjustment to football, declared that one of the

things that surprised him about football was the length of the day and the level of detail covered at meetings.

"In basketball, you practice and go home. I couldn't imagine if a basketball coach went through and said, 'Look how high your step was,'" Thomas said. "In football, it is so strict on what you're doing and how you're doing it."

And so Swoope is learning nuances that many of his teammates might have first encountered as early as childhood -- not just the play and the formation and the reads, but knowing what everybody else on the field is doing and how his tempo will affect others. It is the difference between knowing that in basketball everyone can get open and recognizing that in football he might be running his route to allow others to work free. Veterans have given him tips on everything from how to block for a run to keeping his eyes on specific defenders.

Working against defenders in OTAs has helped Swoope understand the value of foot fakes and hand positioning, and what a difference doing it correctly makes. And when he watches the film of the former basketball players, he notices how much more structured their physical positioning -- where their feet and hands are -- gets as they spend more time in the NFL.

"I've been surprised at how specific it is, and then when you do it, I'm surprised at the difference it makes," Swoope said. "In basketball, everybody has a different shot form, or a different way they lay it in. In football, there has been, through history, proven ways that work. You emulate those very specifically."

With Dwayne Allen and Coby Fleener, two promising youngsters selected in the 2012 NFL Draft, the Colts are loaded at tight end. So Swoope is a likely candidate for the practice squad or to make the active roster as a special teamer, a job that would probably suit him because of his basketball-bred ability to play in traffic.

Grigson admits that when Swoope arrived with the other rookies after just a few weeks of running routes, he expected coach Chuck Pagano to give him an eye roll when he first saw the new project. Instead, both men were encouraged when they noticed that Swoope already knows how to get out of breaks.

"We didn't know if he would look like a fish out of water," Grigson said. "But his burst, his body control, the way he caught the football were all really, really good signs. You saw raw athletic ability. He's very mature, very businesslike. He was already a pro and he never played. He's wise beyond his years."

Grigson went on to praise Swoope's fortitude, recalling a minor injury that the prospect brushed aside earlier in offseason workouts: "Here's a basketball guy, but he's got a little hamstring and he doesn't want an MRI. He wants to get out there. There's something there."

Whatever it might turn out to be, Swoope is still spectacularly raw less than three months into his immersion program, learning a game -- as Thomas explained it -- at a level that equates to learning addition and subtraction while everyone else on the field is doing calculus. Swoope is still, Grigson said, a very rare case, because he has to learn everything for the first time.

Thomas' coach, who also worked with Gates in San Diego, offers a dose of reality.

"It's much more difficult than it looks," Broncos tight ends coach Clancy Barone said. "For every one player that was a college basketball player that does make it, there are another 25 who don't. Mentally, they can't figure it out, or physically, the demands are too much."

Those are the odds that Swoope is confronting now, and they're certainly much longer than his odds of playing basketball in Europe would have been. The start of his first football season is still more than a month away, but in Indiana, where basketball dominated for generations until Peyton Manning moved to town, it has been hard for Swoope to escape the end of the season for the sport -- with its comfortable familiarity and dreams -- he has left behind.

"In my head, this is where I want to be," he said. "We've been talking about the playoffs a lot. But I wanted to make this sacrifice, and I'm not second-guessing myself."

Top 50 College Hoops Coaches: No. 28

ESPN.com
July 3, 2014

Which coaches are doing the best job right now?

We've been thinking about that question this offseason, looking for the best way to quantify the answer. Luckily, we've got ESPN Forecast. Last week, we asked a panel of nearly 100 ESPN writers, editors, broadcasters and researchers to rate college basketball coaches on all aspects of running a program, on a scale of 1-10. (The crucial distinction here is that the prompt was not career-oriented. This isn't about legacy. It's all about the present.) We compiled their scores and ranked the names, and now comes the fun part: The big reveal.

The list has plenty of obvious selections, but the panel also contains more than a few surprises -- and a few snubs. For the next five weeks, we'll count down the top 25. But today, we kick things off with Nos. 50-25. What wisdom does the crowd have to offer? Let's find out:

**No. 28: Jim Larrañaga, Miami
Miami**

Your humble author believes Larrañaga deserves a spot in the top 25, if not for his brilliant 2012-13 season at Miami then at least for the gif that immortalized it. The Hurricanes lost almost everyone from that watershed campaign last spring, and it showed in 2013-14. Expect a big leap forward this fall.

Newton Ends One Chapter With MVP Performance

City of Love Basketball

Josh Verlin

June 2, 2014

If Ja'Quan Newton's third PIAA state title was the final act of his stellar high school career, then his performance at the Mary Kline Classic could have been considered the encore.

Though Newton wasn't able to get his Team Perseverance to come out victorious in the Seniors game against the Seton Hall-powered Team Courage, the Neumann-Goretti senior did win team MVP honors with a 21-point performance.

The 6-foot-3 point guard did what he does best even playing against some of the other top guards in the country—getting into the lane, hanging in the air just long enough to draw contact before somehow getting the ball through the hoop.

"This is probably my last game [before Miami], so I just wanted to come out here and put on a show for the fans," he said, "and that's what I did."

Newton departs for Coral Gables on June 28, joining a Hurricanes squad coming off a 17-16 season in Jim Larrañaga's third since coming over from George Mason. They're graduating five seniors, including their two leading scorers in Rion Brown (15.5 ppg, 5.8 rpg) and Garrius Adams (10.2 ppg, 4.8 rpg); all in all they'll lose half their scoring from the team.

And while Newton's best asset is indeed his ability to get the ball through the bucket—the's the all-time leading scorer in Catholic League history, with 1,972 points—it's his play on the other end of the court the Miami coaches are looking forward to.

"I talk to them almost every day, just getting ready to go down there. [Larrañaga] talks about what the schedule's going to be like when I get down there, my dates, everything like that," Newton said. "He likes my defensive abilities, so he was on me about that, how good I play defense and [how] that really can help."

Down in Miami, Newton will reunite with Davon Reed, a Princeton Day (N.J.) and Team Final AAU alum. Though Reed, a rising sophomore, is a year older than Newton, they're plenty familiar with each other due to Newton's playing up with the older kids during the 2012 summer season.

"We were close from Team Final, because we both played AAU together and I played up some tournaments so I was with him half the time, him and [Arizona sophomore] Rondae [Hollis-Jefferson]," Newton said. "So we've got a good relationship."

Reed, a 6-6 guard, had a successful freshman season, averaging 6.6 points and 1.7 rebounds in just over 20 minutes per game, though his overall shooting (34.3 percent) certainly needs to improve.

Team Final's director, Rob Brown, thinks Newton's arrival will benefit Reed's game, as well.

"Him and Davon together in Miami will be very good because it gets Davon off the ball, he played on the ball a lot this year," Brown said. "It's better for [Reed] to be off the ball and scoring the ball and Ja'Quan will be able to find him. It's a good tandem, definitely a good tandem in the ACC."

Newton's departure leaves a massive hole in Neumann-Goretti's lineup as the Saints come off their sixth consecutive Catholic League title, but Carl Arrigale has replaced plenty of Division I players in his time there.

The next group of scholarship-bound guards seems to be in place. Senior point guard Lamarr Kimble already has approaching a dozen offers from schools like Massachusetts, Saint Joseph's, Drexel and more. It'll be the impact that juniors Zane Martin and Vaughn Covington as well as sophomore Quade Green—all three of whom are on Division I radars—have that will determine if Arrigale's team is capable of pulling off the seventh in a row.

Their departing leader has talked to those who will follow him about the mindset they need to continue the program's success.

"Just work hard, and anything is possible, you never know what can happen," he said. "Coming in as a freshman, I never knew I was going to achieve all the things I did, so you've got to just keep working and keep putting in the work and keep working hard."

Newton, a South Philly native, won't have to go his whole freshman year without playing in his hometown. Miami has a road game scheduled against La Salle—at the Palestra, where Newton led the Saints to four consecutive Catholic League championships, of all places.

And as he walked out of the Mary Kline Classic, getting ready to begin the next chapter of his basketball story, Newton already was excited about playing back in his hometown, in his favorite gym.

"That's my building."

How Is Swoope's Work Against a Veteran NFL Defense?

Colts.com
Craig Kelley
May 28, 2014

Erik Swoope went against his first veteran defense on Tuesday in the Colts' opening OTA practice. Swoope continued today as he tries to convert from college basketball to the NFL. He finds the speed quicker and the concepts becoming clearer.

Any rookie going through his first OTA practice with veterans (no pads or live contact) is going to go through an adjustment phase.

Erik Swoope, the club's free agent tight end who is trying to convert from college basketball to the NFL, is no different.

"My first technical practice would have been in rookie camp, but this is much faster with the veterans," said Swoope. "I'm really trying to think on the fly.

"I've been studying hard. That's just the beginning. I have to study much harder to make sure I can get out there and compete with those guys."

Swoope's story is not uncommon in the NFL, and his preparation to this point is anything but short-sighted.

Swoope's athleticism at power forward drew notice at the University of Miami from at least one NFL team. His school trainer thought his play resembled that of Jimmy Graham, who left the Hurricanes and has forged a solid career with New Orleans.

Swoope sought Graham's counsel, along with that of former Hurricane linebacker Jonathan Vilma. He thought both could convey what he would encounter in the NFL.

"I had met him (Graham) before (during) my freshman year and had an acquaintance-type relationship," said Swoope. "Getting a chance to speak with him and talk about what his passion is now was a new learning experience.

"Getting a chance to work out with

them and just listen to different things about how they carry themselves was a blessing."

Swoope signed with the Colts one day after the draft concluded, and he observed the culture for a few days before the five-practice rookie camp started two weeks ago.

With Indianapolis being among 25 teams starting OTAs Tuesday, Swoope put theory into practice on a full scale.

"It was faster and more aggressive. We're trying to protect one another, but understanding that we're out there competing and working hard," said Graham. "Getting used to the speed, it makes you want to push yourself. Some of the reads are much easier when everyone's going full-go like (in OTAs)."

Every rookie should have more study work than actual practice time. Swoope has not let his studies suffer.

"Pretty much just about any and every moment I'm awake," said Swoope of how much he is in his playbook. "If I'm not doing rehab, I may take an hour's rest. Aside from that, it's study, study, study and watch film, just anything to try to help me catch up with the rest of the guys.

"When I first got here, I didn't know anything. I had only gotten in a three-and-two-point stance maybe a couple of times. All the things from the basics, just putting on a helmet, I felt I've made some solid progress. I understand this is just a starting point. I think I'm on the right track. I just have to continue to push myself to learn."

Swoope says he is past the butterfly stage, even now when the full units are working against each other for the first sessions. Swoope feels things becoming second nature.

"Slowly, slowly. It's getting there," said Swoope. "With the reads with the guys going full speed, you see what you were supposed to be doing against air. Now it makes more sense, 'Okay, this is why this

works. This is why you're supposed to have an outside release.'

"I'm trying to be relaxed, trying to be comfortable and trust the gifts God gave me, but understanding it is a big learning process."

To a large degree, Swoope is encountering the same development Trent Richardson did last year with the Colts.

Though Richardson played football since his formative years, he was learning an Indianapolis offense on the fly in week three after a trade.

Richardson is finding his first Colts off-season a time for conceptual growth. Swoope is doing that while orienting himself with the specifics of football.

"I think it's a little bit of both," said Swoope. "Seeing the concepts, seeing the vets run the concepts, getting a chance to ask questions, talk to my coaches, that's been helping. The rookies getting a chance to get out there and doing extra work as well – getting used to blocking, stances and starts – it's the right kind of progress going into my first real experience of being a football player.

"So far, I'm still just trying to get the swing of the offense. I've had a little interaction with a variety of defensive guys, but no one really in particular. I'm still trying to get what the swings of my reads are on offense before I learn the defense."

12 Teams on the Rise for 2014-15

Athlon Sports

David Fox

May 27, 2014

Miami

The Hurricanes lost nearly every key player from the team that won the 2012 ACC title. Help was on the way, even if it was delayed a year. Transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClendon (Texas) will be eligible. Don't count out coach Jim Larrañaga, who coaxed an 8-12 ACC season out of last season's short-handed team. -

Swoope exceeds Indianapolis Colts' expectations

NFL.com
Chris Wesseling
May 25, 2014

When the Indianapolis Colts signed undrafted tight end Erik Swoope earlier this month, the former hoopster seemed to be nothing more than a freakishly athletic novelty act.

Unlike fellow former University of Miami forward Jimmy Graham, Swoope had never played a down of organized football in his life.

After Swoope's performance in last week's rookie minicamp, though, coach Chuck Pagano believes the Colts have unearthed a gem.

"To be able to just break a huddle, get in a stance, run the routes that he ran, catch the balls that he caught, I mean, off the charts, exceeded our expectations way beyond anything that you'd ever imagine for a guy that never played," Pagano said, via the team's official website. "If he continues to work -- he's a bright guy, he's smart, he picks things up, he looks like he's got great passion for this -- who knows?"

Swoope has routinely run the 40-yard dash in the low 4.6s. His 35-inch vertical leap would have placed second among tight ends at the 2014 Scouting Combine. He has bench-pressed more weight than Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga has seen out of any basketball player in 43 years of coaching.

Physical ability won't be a problem. The question is whether Swoope can put on 20 pounds and pick up the intricacies of the NFL game after such a late start.

"Every time I walk by the tight-end meeting room, he's in there watching tape, he's with (tight ends coach) Alfredo Roberts

studying and learning," Pagano added. "He's doing a great job to this point."

The Colts are stacked at the position with Dwayne Allen and Coby Fleener topping the tight-end depth chart. If Swoope impresses enough to earn a roster spot this summer, he will start his career as a special teams member.

It's the role Larrañaga believes is best-suited for a basketball player who got by on physicality.

"In Erik's case, he's best when there's contact," Larrañaga told Yahoo! Sports in April. "I don't think that's going to discourage him at all. I even told my coaches, I could see him being on special teams tracking guys down and throwing people away to get to the ball carrier."

Touting Swoope as a "natural," Pagano referenced athletes such as Antonio Gates and former Colts tight end Marcus Pollard who have successfully converted to football.

"We've got some evidence out there of guys that have done the same thing, made the same transition, and ended up being pretty good football players," Pagano said, "so we're excited to see where he's going. He's got a high ceiling."

Colts' Erik Swoope exceeding expectations

SI.com Fansided

Mike Dyce

May 25, 2014

The Indianapolis Colts brought in Miami Hurricanes basketball player Erik Swoope as an undrafted free agent. The hope is that the Colts can use his speed and athleticism, which includes a 35-inch vertical leap, on the football field like other tight ends who also played college basketball.

So far Swoope is impressing his coaches.

"To be able to just break a huddle, get in a stance, run the routes that he ran, catch the balls that he caught, I mean, off the charts, exceeded our expectations way beyond anything that you'd ever imagine for a guy that never played," head coach Chuck Pagano said, via the team's official website. "If he continues to work — he's a bright guy, he's smart, he picks things up, he looks like he's got great passion for this — who knows?"

"Every time I walk by the tight-end meeting room, he's in there watching tape, he's with (tight ends coach) Alfredo Roberts studying and learning," Pagano added. "He's doing a great job to this point."

Some notable tight ends like Antonio Gates, Martellus Bennett and Jimmy Graham were also basketball players in college, though not as raw and inexperienced on the football field as Swoope. Don't expect Pagano to trot Swoope out right away though, the Colts are already pretty covered at the position with Dwayne Allen and Coby Fleener on the roster.

For now it looks like Swoope is being penciled in as a special teamer to give him time to develop.

"In Erik's case, he's best when there's contact," Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga

told Yahoo Sports in April. "I don't think that's going to discourage him at all. I even told my coaches, I could see him being on special teams tracking guys down and throwing people away to get to the ball carrier."

Ranking Top Transfers Eligible to Play in 2014-15

Bleacher Report
Kerry Miller
May 22, 2014

No. 11

The Miami Hurricanes are effectively turning over a new leaf this summer. Of their seven leading scorers from the 2013-14 season, four are graduating, one is transferring and the other two (Manu Lecomte and Davon Reed) were freshman.

Were it not for Angel Rodriguez joining the team after sitting out last season, Miami wouldn't have anything resembling veteran leadership.

The 'Canes are also adding junior guard Sheldon McClellan from Texas, but let's go ahead and assume the point guard who averaged 5.2 assists per game for a 27-8 team is a more suitable leader than the guard who shot 38.2 percent from the field for a team that finished 16-18.

Should Rodriguez carry that success with him to Miami, he'll be the first Hurricane player to average better than 4.6 assists per game since John Salmons averaged 6.1 assists during the 2001-02 season.

Reed Enjoyed Solid Debut Campaign for Miami

Princeton Town Topics

Bill Alden

May 22, 2014

At times, Davon Reed seemed to be a man among boys during his stellar career with the Princeton Day School boys' basketball team.

Starring from day one as a freshman in 2009, Reed led the team in scoring every year and totaled a program-record 2,102 points in leading the Panthers to three state Prep B title games.

Heading south to the University of Miami this winter to continue his basketball career Reed has been forced to man up in order to keep pace in the high-powered ACC.

"I have always played hard but here you have to play that much harder," said Reed. "The players are more athletic and physical and they are much tougher."

While going through the bumps in the road that inevitably come with a freshman season, Reed proved tough enough to thrive at the D-I level, starting 10 games for the Hurricanes and averaging 6.5 points and 1.7 rebounds a game.

For Reed, getting on the floor in the opener against St. Francis Brooklyn on November 8 was a special moment.

"It was exciting to play my first college game even though we didn't get a win and I didn't have the best game," said Reed, who scored 3 points in 18 minutes of action as the Hurricanes fell 66-62. "It was something I was very grateful about."

A week later, Reed had a breakthrough moment, scoring 11 points in an 84-69 win over Texas Southern.

"That was one of my first games with a higher scoring day," said Reed, who shot 4-of-8 from the floor in the game. "As the season went on, I got more confidence even with the ups and downs."

Playing at point guard rather than his natural shooting guard position ended up being a confidence builder for Reed.

"I just wanted to do what I could to get on the floor," said Reed, who ended up with 37 assists on the season. "I am not a natural No. 1 but I have handled the ball my whole career. I enjoyed it and it really helped my ball-handling improve."

Reed acknowledges that he hit a down stretch when Miami got into conference action.

"When ACC play started, I kind of struggled a little bit," said Reed. "I wouldn't say it was the intensity level. It was just a new set of teams and bigger games. Once I started playing freely, I had some good games."

In reflecting on his debut campaign, Reed is proud to have produced some highlight games.

"I remember big scoring nights like against Arizona State (19 points) and Syracuse (16 points)," said Reed.

"I would like to say that one of my special ones was the Florida State game when I came in late and changed the way the game was going for us. That was a big win."

While Miami didn't get as many wins as it would have hoped, posting an overall record of 17-15, Reed is optimistic about the program's future prospects.

"This year was definitely a rebuilding year," said Reed. "Even though the W-L record didn't show it, there were a lot of games that could have we could have won but we didn't get the bounces. We still made a lot of progress."

Over the course of the winter, Reed made plenty of progress individually. "I think as the season went on I continually became more confident," said Reed.

"Even if there were some things I couldn't do, I can work on those in the offseason. Some of my decision-making got better and the 3-ball was good for me."

Reed is looking forward to putting his nose to the grindstone in the offseason.

"I want to get bigger, stronger, faster and handle the physical aspect," said the 6'6, 208-pound Reed, who raised his bench press to 250 pounds from 175.

"I want to be more consistent with my jump shot and be a better ball-handler. Defense was one of my strong points and I want to continue that."

Reed's experience at PDS gave him a strong foundation for excelling off the court.

"I had a pretty good first semester and I am doing better this semester," said Reed.

"I have had a good year academically, there has been lots of balancing between the basketball and the books. Going to a school like PDS has helped me with time management."

All in all, Reed had the time of his life this winter as he achieved his goal playing big-time college basketball.

"I didn't know what school I was going to go to but I wanted to play in the ACC where you go out every game and compete against the best of the best," said Reed. "I thank God that I have the chance to play the game that I love at this level."

Will a loaded league live up to powerhouse reputation?

NBC Sports
Rob Dauster
May 13, 2014

The ACC's 2013-2014 season did not quite go as expected.

In a year where the league was bringing in the likes of Syracuse, Notre Dame and Pitt in order to help bolster their basketball product, the conference as a whole was as down as it has been in quite some time. The Orange won a lot of close games to start the season but in the final month lost the ability to score. Duke had as much talent as anyone in the country, but their lack of a big man and inability to defend resulted in getting picked off by Mercer in the opening round of the tournament.

North Carolina was an interesting story. They beat the preseason's top four teams during the year, but they also lost to the likes of Belmont and UAB before finally getting themselves to play with the kind of consistency they needed to. And Virginia, who won a dual-ACC title, did so while playing a very weak ACC schedule and bowing out in the Sweet 16.

For all the discussion about the new ACC, the 'Hoos ended up being the only team from the league to make it out of the first weekend.

Next season, however, should be better as there are four ACC teams that have the pieces to be considered a favorite to put together a run to the Final Four.

THREE UP

North Carolina: The Tar Heels bounced back from a couple of rocky winter months to put together an impressive finish to the season and make it to within one DeAndre Kane basket of the Sweet 16. And they should be better next season. Marcus Paige will have a chance to be an all-american, UNC's youthful front court should be one offseason's of work better and freshman Justin Jackson should provide the kind of scoring pop from the wing that the Heels were without this past season.

Virginia: It feels weird saying this given the fact that the 'Hoos won the ACC regular season and tournament titles last season and that they won't enter next season as the favorite. That said, my point is that last year was not a fluke. Tony Bennett will once again field a top 10 team in 2014-2015, headlined by the ever-underrated Malcolm Brogdon, London Perrantes and Anthony Gill, who should be in line for a breakout season.

Terry Rozier: There's a lot to like about this Louisville team heading into next season, but their x-factor may end up being the sophomore Rozier. Rozier was a bit limited in his minutes and shot

attempts playing behind Russ Smith and Chris Jones a season ago, but people around the program believe — and believed last season — that Rozier might actually be the best NBA prospect on the roster. With Smith gone, expect Rozier to have a big year.

THREE DOWN

Syracuse: The Orange had a disappointing end to the 2013-2014 season, as they bowed out of the NCAA tournament in the first weekend after sliding to a No. 3 seed despite being one of the last team's in the country to remain undefeated. Next year will be tough as well. The Orange lose Tyler Ennis, C.J. Fair and Jerami Grant and will once again be forced to head into the season relying on one point guard, with freshman Kaleb Joseph running the show this year.

Pittsburgh, N.C. State and Clemson: Departures hurt these three teams badly. The Panthers stumbled once they hit ACC play and they couldn't hide behind a week non-conference schedule anymore. Next season, they'll be playing without Lamar Patterson and Talib Zanna, who both graduated. There is some decent young talent on the roster, but the Panthers will have a lot of production to make up in a conference that could have four top 15 teams.

T.J. Warren was named ACC Player of the Year last season, largely because he routinely put on scoring displays that left everyone watching in awe. After coming within a couple of free throws of the Sweet 16, Warren then entered the NBA Draft, as he's likely going to be a first round pick. The Wolfpack are going to have their work cut out for them to try and get into the tournament next season.

Clemson didn't make the NCAA tournament, but they still lost K.J. McDaniels, their best player by far, to the NBA Draft.

Quinn Cook: Cook is going to find himself in a difficult situation next season. He's been a good, productive point guard in his tie with the Blue Devils, but with Tyus Jones entering the program next season, he may find himself in a situation where the freshman is better — or, at the least, most consistent — than the veteran. Duke had this same conundrum a few years ago when Nolan Smith overtook Greg Paulus in the starting lineup midseason.

NEW FACES

Louisville: The final change in the ACC's membership stemming from the most recent round of conference will happen next season, as Louisville will replace ACC stalwart Maryland, who is headed to Big Ten country. The Cardinals were one of the big winners during the NBA Draft early entry process as Montrezl Harrell decided that he would be returning to school for his junior year. If

Chris Jones, Terry Rozier and Wayne Blackshear have the kind of season we expect them to have, Louisville will be an ACC title contender.

Jahlil Okafor and Tyus Jones: Duke is always bringing in loaded recruiting classes. It's what Duke does. But this group is as good as any that Coach K has landed. Okafor is the best player in the class, a throwback, low-post presence that will be one of the best true centers in the country next season. Jones may not have the NBA upside of some of the other point guards around the country, but he's a full-blooded leader and a true point guard that will excel in the pick-and-roll. Oh, and two other Duke recruits, Justise Winslow and Grayson Allen, are also McDonald's all-Americans.

Buzz Williams: The most shocking move of college basketball's coaching carousel was the decision of Buzz Williams to uproot himself from Marquette and make the move to Blacksburg, Va., where he will be coaching Virginia Tech next season. It is going to be rough sledding for Buzz early on, but he already has landed a number of talented players, including Maryland's second-leading scorer last season, Seth Allen.

Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan: Given that the Hurricanes lost six of their top seven from the team that made the 2013 Sweet 16, Jim Larrañaga actually did a pretty impressive job with Miami last season. This year, he'll add Kansas State transfer Angel Rodriguez and Texas transfer Sheldon McClellan, both of whom are all-league caliber players, in addition to redshirt freshman Deandre Burnett. Miami is a sleeper tournament team with those three in the fold.

Danny Manning: After a tumultuous tenure in Winston-Salem, Wake Forest finally made the decision to move on from head coach Jeff Bzdelik. In his stead, they hired Danny Manning from Tulsa.

POWER RANKINGS

1. Duke
2. Virginia
3. North Carolina
4. Louisville
5. Syracuse
6. Florida State
7. Notre Dame
8. Miami
9. N.C. State
10. Pitt
11. Wake Forest
12. Clemson
13. Georgia Tech
14. Virginia Tech
15. Boston College

An early power ranking for 2014-15 ACC hoops

Roanoke Times
Doug Doughy
April 18, 2014

Not having attended ACC Operation Basketball for several years prior to last year's session, I found myself scrambling upon receipt of the ballot for preseason order of finish and preseason player-of-the-year and all-conference selections.

Maybe if I started looking at the ACC rosters with men's basketball still on my mind, that might help.

Here's the first thing that jumps out: Of the top 20 scorers in the ACC this season, 15 have either used up their eligibility, have made themselves available for the NBA draft or are transferring.

Clemson junior K.J. McDaniels, were he to decide before the April 27 deadline, would make 16. Notre Dame junior Pat Connaughton, not an NBA prospect at this time, is a possibility for the major-league baseball draft.

Top scorers among the returnees are Boston College guard Olivier Hanlan, third in the ACC in scoring at 18.5 points per game; No. 4 scorer Marcus Paige from North Carolina and No. 11 scorer Aaron Thomas from Florida State.

(If you'd asked me the top three returning scorers in the ACC, I could have gone all day and not named Aaron Thomas. I'd sooner have named Wake Forest's Devin Thomas, the top returning rebounder).

Paige is the only returning player off the media's All-ACC first team and is likely to be named preseason ACC player of the year. Chances are he will be joined by UVa rising junior Malcolm Brogdon, named first-team by the coaches and second-team by the media.

McDaniels would be on there if he returns, but a jump to the NBA seems likely. Hanlan said this week that he will be returning for his sophomore year at BC, but nobody else is obvious. Dez Wells from Maryland would be in the conversation but the Terps are leaving for the Big Ten.

So I've got Paige, Brogdon, McDaniels if he stays and Hanlan. Duke's Jabari Parker made first-team All-ACC this year as a rookie and 2014 Blue Devils recruit Jahlil Okafor is rated No. 1 in his class.

McDaniels, described as a "sleeper" first-round NBA, is headed home for the weekend to discuss his future with his parents. If McDaniels does not return, here's my All-ACC

first team: Paige, Brogdon, Hanlan, Okafor and Louisville's Montrezl Harrell, who announced that he is coming back for his junior year.

Yes, Louisville will be in the league next year, and the Cardinals have to be considered a contender for the conference crown. I'm not sure that I'd say the same thing about Syracuse, which has lost underclassmen Tyler Ennis and Jerami Grant to the draft.

Here's an early attempt to rank the teams:

1. North Carolina (24-10, 13-5 ACC) – In addition to Paige, the Tar Heels currently are holding onto 6-9 rising junior Brice Johnson, who played fewer than 20 minutes per game but averaged 10.3 points and 6.1 rebounds. Another semi-regular, Kennedy Meeks (6-9, 290) averaged 7.6 points and 6.1 rebounds. Tar Heels' recruiting class has been ranked No. 4 in the country by ESPN.

2. Duke (26-9, 13-5) – Point guard Quinn Cook is the Blue Devils' only returning double-figure scorer (11.6) and also had a team-high 153 assists. Rasheed Sulaimon (9.9 ppg) is seen as a possible jumper to the NBA. Blue Devils' recruiting class has been ranked No. 1 in the country.

3. Virginia (30-7, 16-2) – won the ACC regular-season and tournament championships, and tied a school record for wins. The Cavs lose Joe Harris and Akil Mitchell but increased minutes should lead to increased production for Anthony Gill and Justin Anderson.

4. Louisville (31-6, 16-2 AAC) – Harrell averaged 14.0 points and 8.4 rebounds and the Cardinals' ACC debut would have suffered had he not returned for his senior year. Returnees Chris Jones, Wayne Blackshear and Terry Rozier had a combined 124 3-point field goals last year. Cardinals' recruiting class has been ranked No. 4 in the country.

5. Pittsburgh (26-10, 11-7) – The Panthers will miss unheralded Lamar Patterson (17.1 ppg) and leading rebounder Talib Zanna. Cameron Wright, who will be a senior, is the only returning double-figure scorer. Durand Johnson, averaging 8.8 ppg before missing the last 20 games, should help. Shelton Jeter, who began his career at Vanderbilt, is an X-factor.

6. Syracuse (28-6, 14-4) – Leading returning scorer is Trevor Cooney, a 3-point specialist (90-of-240) who averaged 12.4 points. Rakeem Christmas (5.8 ppg, 5.1 rpg) is the next-most noteworthy returnee. Orange's recruiting class has been ranked No. 20 in the country.

7. Clemson (23-13, 10-8) – McDaniels was

the leading scorer on the team at 17.1 and nobody else had more than 9.7 (Rod Hall) but Tigers won 23 games without a senior.

8. Florida State (22-14, 9-9) – Thomas (see above) had to be the ACC's most unheralded 14.5 point-per-game scorer. Seven-foot Kiel Turpin comes off a redshirt year to join 7-3 Boris Bojanovsky and 7-1, 290-pound Michael Ojo.

9. Miami (17-16, 7-11) – Miami's leading returning scorer is point guard Manu Lecomte (7.7) and the top returning rebounder is Tonye Jekiri (5.3), and the Hurricanes await the eligibility of transfers Sheldon McLellan and Angel Rodriguez, double-figure scorers two years ago at Texas and Kansas State respectively.

10. N.C. State (22-14, 9-9) – Ralston Turner, entering his second year at State after transferring from LSU, is the Wolfpack's only returning double-figure scorer. Guards Anthony Barber and Desmond Lee both scored more than eight points per game. The Wolfpack's recruiting class has been ranked No. 17 in the country.

11. Wake Forest (17-16, 6-12) – Point guard and leading scorer Codi Miller McIntyre returns for his senior year, as does leading rebounder Devin Thomas, a good place to start for new coach Danny Manning.

12. Notre Dame (16-17, 6-12) – Connaughton was the best Irish player this year and his current baseball stats (28 hits and 19 walks allowed in 24.2 innings) would suggest he might be back for his senior year. Suspended Jelani Grant, averaging a team-high 14.4 points when he was sidelined, hopes to return next season.

13. Georgia Tech (16-17, 6-12) – Marcus Georges-Hunt and 6-8, 247-pound Robert Carter will be back as seniors but the Yellow Jackets lack an established floor leader.

14. Virginia Tech (9-22, 2-16) – Coach Buzz Williams will welcome national Top 100 recruit Justin Hibbs to a trio of perimeter players – Adam Smith, Ben Emelogu and Devin Wilson – who all averaged double figures in ACC games or overall. Continued progress from big man Joey Zegezen would be a plus.

15. Boston College (8-24, 4-14) – Other than Hanlan, Anderson was the Eagles' only double-figure scorer, as well as the Eagles' leading rebounder.

Five impact transfers for the 2014-15 season

CBS Sports

Jon Rothstein

April 10, 2014

Trevor Lacey, NC State: A big-time offensive talent, Lacey will help replace some of the scoring the Wolfpack lost with T.J. Warren's exit to the NBA. Big, strong and confident, the 6-foot-3 shooting guard averaged 11.3 points and made 62 three-point shots two years ago at Alabama. Lacey's arrival should give Mark Gottfried a sneaky good perimeter next season along with Cat Barber and Ralston Turner.

Chane Behanan, Colorado State: Bruising big man will be a menace in the Mountain West, and his presence should push Larry Eustachy's crew back into the NCAA discussion. The Rams return three double-figure scorers in J.J. Avila, Daniel Bejarano and Jon Octeus and the addition of Behanan should give Colorado State enough firepower to compete at the top of the league standings alongside UNLV and San Diego State. The 6-6 Behanan averaged 9.8 points and 6.5 rebounds two years ago at Louisville and had 15 points and 12 rebounds in the national title game vs. Michigan.

Rodney Purvis, UConn: The Huskies will need to find another perimeter scorer after Shabazz Napier's departure and Purvis should be more than up to the challenge. The 6-4 pit bull averaged 8.3 points two years ago at NC State and should immediately start in the Huskies' back court next to Ryan Boatright. Former UConn coach Jim Calhoun said several times this year that Purvis regularly dominated some of the Huskies' practices and he'll need to display that type of form if Kevin Ollie is going to continue to have this program deep in the NCAA Tournament.

Kyle Wiltjer, Gonzaga: Redshirt seasons have done wonders in the past for some

of Mark Few's big men (see Kelly Olynyk) and Wiltjer has all the requisites to hit the ground running in Spokane. With Sam Dower's graduation, Wiltjer slides in perfectly at power forward for the Zags, who will again be the favorite in the WCC. Last season at Kentucky, Wiltjer averaged 10.2 points and 4.2 rebounds while shooting an impressive 36.7 percent from three-point range. His presence should open up the floor for teammate Przemek Karnowski, who will benefit from better spacing thanks to now playing with a true stretch four-man.

Angel Rodriguez/Sheldon McClellan, Miami: These two players are on the list together because they're going to be linked at the hip for the rest of their careers. Both Rodriguez and McClellan were productive Big 12 players at Kansas State and Texas, respectively, and they're the primary reason why Jim Larrañaga will have a chance to return to the NCAA Tournament in 2015. The crafty Rodriguez averaged 5.2 assists two years ago with the Wildcats while McClellan was second on the Longhorns in scoring in 2012-13 at 13.5 points. Expect this combo to be a real difference maker for Miami next season.

Five teams -- Miami -- will rise next season

CBSsports.com

Jon Rothstein

April 8, 2014

With UConn crowned as the new national champion, every Division I team in America will be gunning for the Huskies. Which teams will take a step forward next season? Here are five to watch.

SMU: If you thought the buzz was big this season in Dallas surrounding the Mustangs, it will reach an entirely new level next season. Larry Brown will welcome in arguably the nation's best freshman in 6-foot-5 point guard Emmanuel Mudiay, who will join a strong core of returners. Nic Moore and Markus Kennedy will be among the better players in the American next season and Sterling Brown, Ryan Manuel, Cannen Cunningham, Crandall Head, Keith Frazier, and Yanick Moreira will be back. The wild card could be versatile sophomore forward Ben Moore, who could have a breakout year if he becomes SMU's starting power forward. Texas Tech transfer Jordan Tolbert is another candidate to start at the four if he receives a waiver from the NCAA to play immediately. The Mustangs are the clear favorite in the American. And it's not even close.

Maryland: The Terps should return to the NCAA Tournament. Maryland brings back everyone of significance and adds three high-level freshman: Romelo Trimble, Dion Wiley and Jared Nickens. The Terps should be strong in their first Big Ten season, considering their depth, talent and experience. Mark Turgeon returns a strong, seasoned backcourt in Seth Allen and Dez Wells -- along with a veteran frontcourt of Jake Layman, Evan Smotrycz and Charles Mitchell.

Miami (Fla.): Jim Larrañaga should have the pieces to compete for a second NCAA

bid in three seasons. The Hurricanes bring in two potential backcourt starters in transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas), as well as a Top 50 recruit in freshman point guard Ja'Quan Newton. Miami also returns Manu Lecomte and Davon Reed, who had solid freshman seasons, along with capable front court pieces in James Kelly and 7-footer Tonye Jekiri. The wild card may be redshirt freshman Deandre Burnett. The coaches love his scoring ability and he could be a valuable perimeter reserve. 6-4 freshman James Palmer is another potential candidate for playing time.

Utah: The Utes won 21 games and reached the NIT this season and things will go a step further in 2015. Larry Krystkowiak will return two of the best players in the Pac-12 in versatile guard Delon Wright (15.5 points, 6.8 rebounds, 5.3 assists per game) and skilled forward Jordan Loveridge (14.7 points, 7.0 rebounds per game), along with sharpshooter Brandon Taylor (64 made three-point shots). Utah also returns two solid post players in Dallin Bachysnki and Jeremy Olsen along with a quality wing reserve in Dakarai Tucker. Two talented freshman -- Brekkott Chapman and Kyle Kuzma -- figure to help. The 6-8 Kuzma is an intriguing prospect because of his versatility. Expect this team to be in the top half of the Pac-12.

Texas A&M: The Aggies were a point guard and big man away from being an NCAA Tournament team this season and will have both next season. Lightning quick freshman Alex Robinson has been the point guard Billy Kennedy has salivated for since he arrived in College Station and Tony Trocha is a legit 6-10 center who will have an immediate impact defensively. Another potential difference maker is SMU transfer Jalen Jones, who led the Mustangs in scoring and rebounding two seasons ago.

Leading scorer Jamal Jones is back as a senior, along with several role players Kourtney Roberson, Devante Fitzgerald, Alex Caruso, Jordan Green, and Antwan Space. The Aggies should challenge for a berth in the field of 68 next season.

Larrañaga Recruiting Proven Winners

HurricaneSports.com

Hurricanes head coach Jim Larrañaga is signing proven winners to the University of Miami men's basketball program. This winter, UM's most recent signees - Ja'Quan Newton, Ivan Cruz Uceda, James Palmer and Omar Sherman - have accumulated postseason hardware at their high school and junior college basketball championships.

Ja'Quan Newton

Ranked No. 58 in ESPN's Top 100, Philadelphia Ja'Quan Newton of Neumann-Goretti High, is the premier player in Pennsylvania. He is ranked No. 1 in the state and is the 12th-best PG in the country, says ESPN.

After leading his team with an average of 21.7 points per game and to a 22-4 record, Newton was crowned the Catholic League MVP and to the All-Catholic First Team. Newton guided the Saints to a sixth-straight Catholic League Championship, defeating Roman Catholic 53-48. He scored 15 of his 23 points in second half to seal the victory—it was Newton's fourth consecutive start in the Catholic League Championship game.

Newton's perimeter scoring capability is an aspect of game Larrañaga hopes can replace the productivity of graduating seniors Rion Brown and Garrius Adams.

"He has become the leading scorer in his school's history, and he is close to breaking the record to become the leading scorer in the history of the Catholic School League in Philadelphia," Larrañaga said. "He's competed against high-level competition and is a proven scorer."

Newton and Neumann-Goretti begin play in the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association playoffs this weekend with hopes of securing a state title.

Ivan Cruz Uceda

Ivan Cruz Uceda was born in Madrid, Spain, and has played the last two seasons

at Harcum College, a junior college in Philadelphia. Harcum was ranked as high as No. 4 in the NJCAA rankings, finishing the season with an overall 29-3 record. Uceda, a 6-foot-10 center, averaged a double-double scoring 14.7 points per game and snatching 10.2 rebounds per game—both are team highs. He was efficient as well this season, converting over 62 percent of his field goal attempts.

"Ivan is a guy who can hit a spot-up three and he's got very good hands around the basket," Larrañaga said, describing Uceda's versatility. "The thing I was most impressed about him is that he's an excellent passer. I would consider him a smart player."

Uceda's experience at the JUCO level enticed the Hurricanes staff to offer him a scholarship. There will only be one senior on the roster next season and Uceda provides more veteran, upperclassman-type leadership.

"Ivan is a junior college player and we felt like we needed a couple more upperclassmen," Larrañaga said. "I did not want to bring in six freshmen, it would just make us too young."

The Spaniard started in all 32 games this season, including Harcum's 77-73 loss to Westchester Community College in the NJCAA Region XV Championship. Uceda's versatility was on full display in the championship—15 of his team-best 21 points came from behind the three-point line making five of his 10 tries. The center was just as effective in the paint, securing 12 rebounds, which were also a team high.

James Palmer

The Canes were able to secure Washington, D.C., guard James Palmer of St. John's College High. ESPN ranked Palmer as the No. 1 player in the D.C. region.

"James Palmer is someone who plays in what I think is the best high school basketball league in the country," described Larrañaga. "At 6-feet-5-inches he's a very

good shooter—like a Rion Brown—but, he also is an outstanding passer."

Palmer is listed as a shooting guard with impressive size, averaging a team-high 15.7 points per game. St. John's fell a game short of the D.C. State Athletic Association final, falling 84-77 to Theodore Roosevelt High in the semifinal. Palmer, still not even 18 years of age, led the Cadets to a successful regular season finishing at 27-4.

"He [Palmer] is young, he's only just turned 17," Larrañaga said. "When he comes in he'll look like Manu Lecomte—baby-faced and doesn't shave yet. He looks like he should be going into his junior year of high school rather than freshman year of college."

Omar Sherman

There is a second center joining Larrañaga's 2014 recruiting class, a three-star Texan named Omar Sherman from Duncanville High School, outside of Dallas. At 6-foot-9-inches, Sherman is the No. 10 recruit in Texas and No. 19 center in the country, as ranked by ESPN. After signing with Miami in September, Sherman paced Duncanville to a 20-12 season, leading the team with 17.1 points per game and 8.4 rebounds per game.

"Sherman has a beautiful, soft, left-handed shooting touch from three-point range, kind of like a Kenny Kadji," Larrañaga said. "He also has a nice low-post, left-handed jump hook game. And we felt as he got bigger and stronger, he could be a force offensively, but also a very good and serviceable rebounder."

The Hurricanes are expected to lose six players to graduation after this season, including leading scorer Rion Brown. But, Larrañaga and his staff have four incoming players that will be capable of filling that offensive void, as well as redshirts Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez and Deandre Burnett.

Larrañaga rebuilding roster with talented newcomers

Miami Herald
David Furones
March 25, 2014

The season wrap-up news conference for UM men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga came much sooner than it did the previous season.

At this time last year, Larrañaga was leading his troops to a Sweet 16 matchup with Marquette in the NCAA Tournament. This season, the Hurricanes, who finished 17-16 and 7-11 in the Atlantic Coast Conference, are not participating in a postseason tournament.

Although Larrañaga might not like to use the term, it was a rebuilding year for Miami, which lost its top six scorers from the 2013 squad that swept the ACC regular-season and tournament titles.

The young, inexperienced team developed throughout the season, one which began with a home loss to St. Francis-Brooklyn but ultimately pulled out seven ACC wins in arguably the most difficult conference in the college game.

"I would say we improved," said Larrañaga, who wrapped up his third season as coach of the Canes. "If you ask me after we lost to St. Francis-Brooklyn, I thought we might not win a game. And then we beat N.C. State at N.C. State, I thought, 'You know, we could win the ACC Tournament.' "

Now Larrañaga looks at next season and knows he will have a full complement of his own players he brought in and not the leftovers from the Frank Haith era.

His focus heading into the offseason is on recruiting and scheduling his nonconference schedule.

"We need our nonconference schedule to be strong enough that when the [NCAA] Selection Committee looks at our body of work, they feel like we challenged ourselves in the nonconference," Larrañaga said. "They know we already have a great league, and it's only going to get better with Louisville. But they want to know what we did in the nonconference."

Larrañaga said he has one available scholarship remaining. He would like to see if he could use it on an experienced transfer, preferably a big man who can score in the post.

With how skilled the backcourt is projected to be, a post presence would really complete next season's team.

The Canes have seven guards who could prove serviceable next season. Point guard Manu Lecomte (7.7 points per game) is the top returning scorer while 6-6 wing Davon Reed (6.5 ppg) would be second. They then add to the rotation three players that redshirted last season and two freshmen.

The redshirts who will finally get to contribute: Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State transfer), Sheldon McClellan (Texas transfer) and Deandre Burnett (freshman from Carol City High whose season ended after a wrist injury sustained in an exhibition game before the regular season began).

"There's basketball terminology to describe [Burnett] to a tee — two words: Bucket getter," Larrañaga says. "He gets buckets. He just knows how to score."

Rodriguez has conference championship experience, having played in the Big 12 championship game in 2013 — a loss to Kansas when he was with Kansas State.

"His leadership is going to be very important to us because we have a lot of guys who are hungry, but we need a leader," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga also is reeling in Ja'Quan Newton, a talented 6-3 point guard from Philadelphia who is rated four stars by Rivals, and 6-3 shooting guard James Palmer, a three-star recruit.

In the frontcourt, he only returns center Tonye Jekiri and forward James Kelly, neither of whom are prominent scorers. Larrañaga hopes the 7-foot Jekiri can develop his offensive game in the post.

Incoming freshmen up front include Ivan Cruz Uceda, a 6-9 power forward from Bryn Mawr, Pa., and Omar Sherman from Duncanville, Texas.

Newton, the day after his mother dies from cancer

The Patriot News

Geoff Morrow

March 22, 2014

Life's passions, accumulated in Lisa Brown's all-too-brief 38 years, clearly passed from mother to son.

- * the knowledge that hard work and dedication to your craft can help you achieve the loftiest of goals;

- * the satisfaction you feel from accepting friends and family into your heart and sharing the journey with loved ones;

- * and the strength to handle life's most heartbreaking lessons with a healthy dose of maturity and sophistication.

Ja'Quan Newton represented all of it Friday night at Hershey's Giant Center.

One day after his mother, the 38-year-old Lisa Brown, died following a three-year battle with breast cancer, Newton defied logical explanation, stepped onto the hardwood and lifted his Neumann-Goretti boys' basketball team to a Pennsylvania state championship.

Not only did he take the court with such a heavy heart, Newton thrived on it, scoring a game-high 33 points as his top-ranked Saints from Philadelphia edged gutsy Susquehanna Twp. 64-57 in overtime in the PIAA Class AAA title game.

"I played tonight just for my mom," Newton said while hugging the 2014 championship trophy. "She would have wanted me to play this game. If I didn't, I knew she would be mad at me, up there fussing at me."

Brown, whom Newton and his teammates described as a "team mom" for the Saints, was diagnosed with the disease during her son's sophomore year at Neumann-Goretti.

That didn't slow her from intense fandom. Nor did it stop her from relishing in her son's tremendous accomplishments, such as earning a full ride to continue his basketball career at the University of Miami or becoming the Philadelphia Catholic League's all-time leading scorer.

The latter was only achieved Tuesday night in a PIAA semifinal victory over Philadelphia Electrical, and with Friday's 33 points, Newton, a 6-1 guard, finishes his high school career with 1,972 points.

"She was a big fan of all of us," said Newton's classmate and close friend Jamal Custis, a 6-5 forward who added four points, four rebounds and two blocks.

"She came to all of the games and supported us, so when we heard the news [Thursday

morning] it was very sad. Coming into this game, we knew we had to do it for her and for him. He's such a strong kid. We didn't expect him to come [to practice Thursday], and we didn't even think he was gonna play today. He's a strong kid, so he played today, and we knew we had to do it for her and him."

Indeed, Newton did practice Thursday evening just hours after his mom passed.

If that sounds impossible, well, let the young man explain his reasons.

FAMILY OF SAINTS

Brown died around 9 a.m. Thursday with Newton at home and his teammates in school.

Word spread, and by the end of the afternoon, those teammates were pouring into Newton's southwest Philly home he shared with his mom.

"The morning was very difficult for me, but as time went on, my teammates came by the house," Newton said. "They made me feel so wonderful and not FORGET about the situation, but [still] forget about the situation. If I wanted to take my mind off it, I had to go to practice with my brothers, my family."

So the Saints practiced, sharing laughs and the usual chit-chat while learning the game plan of head coach Carl Arrigale, whose own mother died from cancer when he was in his 20s.

"He handled it so much better than myself," said Arrigale, who's now directed the Saints to state championships in four of the last five years. "I was hurting real bad for him the last two days, and I just couldn't imagine what was going through his head.

"I told the coaches and I told the kids I wasn't going to holler at him tonight. I wasn't going to do anything. It was just gonna be his night to do whatever he saw fit out there. And I guess he wanted to make sure we won a state championship."

But that wasn't without a yeoman's effort from Susquehanna Twp., which battled the No. 1-ranked Saints tooth and nail from opening tip until the final horn in overtime.

In fact, the Indians went ahead 53-52 on Quintin Ward's three-point play with 1:35 left in regulation, but Newton sank one of two free throws 16 seconds later to tie it.

That freebie ultimately forced overtime after both sides missed contested shots late in regulation.

THE EXTRA SESSION

"We went to overtime, and I knew I had to do it," said Newton, who missed the final shot in regulation. "There's no way I could lose."

The gifted guard scored the extra session's only field goal to give Neumann-Goretti a lead it would keep, and he added four free throws -- N-G sank nine of 10 in the extra frame -- as the Saints gradually pulled away.

When it was over, Newton not only had his 33 points (11-for-19 shooting) but also eight rebounds, two assists, two steals and a block. And a brand new gold medal to honor his mother.

"He's such a leader," Custis said. "We're used to it. When things get tough for us, we kind of lean on him to pull it through. And his performance tonight showed that he's probably the best player to ever play for us."

Added junior guard Lamarr "Fresh" Kimble, who contributed 10 points and two assists: "He always has that fire, that type of intensity. With her passing away, that kind of brought us all up to his intensity. We really wanted to get this one knowing that yesterday his mom passed away."

Vince Rogers, Susquehanna Twp.'s head coach, recognized the efforts of Newton.

"Big-time ballplayers are gonna step up and make plays, and he came out in the second half and demanded the basketball," Rogers said. "He hit some tough shots, man. You gotta give that kid a lot of credit."

As dignified as you'll witness from a high school senior, Newton then stood with the media -- several of whom were unfamiliar to him -- and shared his feelings from this unimaginable emotional roller coaster.

"I didn't feel it until probably about [20] seconds left," he said. "When [teammate] Troy Harper was at the foul line, I started tearing [up] a little bit. Then when I came out of the game, it really hit me."

"Some teams say 'family' in the huddle and that they're brothers, but they don't play like it out on the floor. That's one thing we have in common. That's why we win so much, won the Catholic League, the city championship. Because we're brothers.

"We're family on and off the floor."

Returners, transfers set team for big improvement

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
March 15, 2014

Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga extracted a lot from a group that finished 17-16 (7-11 in the ACC) and bowed out in the second round of the ACC Tournament. Given the lack of available offensive talent and game experience, the coach was not dissatisfied with that result.

Next season, the expectations — and the excitement — will be heightened.

That's why Saturday, a day after returning from Greensboro, N.C., Larrañaga was glad to look ahead.

"I think our fans, if they've enjoyed watching these last two years, I think they'll absolutely love next year's team," he said.

In addition to returning point guard Manu Lecomte, guard Davon Reed, center Tonye Jekiri and forward James Kelly, the Hurricanes will bring in a quality recruiting class, unleash two former Big 12 standouts and see what a healthy, talented young scorer can do.

Miami loses five scholarship players — guards Rion Brown and Garrius Adams and forwards Donnavan Kirk, Erik Swoope and Raphael Akpejiori — but next year's lineup will not be green.

Point guard Angel Rodriguez, a former All-Big 12 player at Kansas State, will be eligible after sitting out this season due to NCAA transfer rules. Same goes for 6-5 guard Sheldon McClellan, who averaged 12.4 points in his first two seasons at Texas. Both players will have two years of eligibility and should contribute immediately.

Larrañaga described Rodriguez as a vocal floor general, "very good at directing and getting other guys involved." He led Kansas State to a share of the Big 12 title in 2012-13, when he averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists per game. He was also a Big 12 All-Defensive Team selection.

McClellan, former a top-50 recruit out of Houston, was described by Larrañaga as a "more athletic (former Cane) Durand Scott." One of the most enticing additions could be Deandre Burnett, a 6-2 guard who can score in a variety of ways.

"Two words: bucket-getter," Larrañaga said, when asked to describe the former Miami-Carol City star, who sat out this season with a wrist injury. He noted, however, that Burnett's defense needs "a lot of work."

Those three, along with Lecomte, who improved steadily after arriving from Belgium, and versatile Davon Reed (6.5 points in 20.7 minutes as a freshman) will be relied on in an up-tempo, guard-heavy rotation. Larrañaga said any three of those five could play at once.

Seeing offensive improvement from Jekiri, an athletic 7-footer who made strides defensively, will be of vital importance. This season was a learning year for Kelly, a physical force (6-7, 250) who struggled to solve ACC defenses after transferring from junior college.

UM's incoming freshmen are Philadelphia point guard JaQuan Newton, a top-60 player nationally; 6-5 shooting guard James Palmer, rated by ESPN as the No. 1 player in Washington; 6-10 forward Ivan Cruz Uceda, a junior college transfer from Spain; and 6-9 forward Omar Sherman, a three-star player from Texas.

"We'll have seven veteran players," Larrañaga said. "Four newcomers will be inexperienced, but they are all good and they could all be impact players. We just don't know which ones (will be)."

Larrañaga, who resumes recruiting Tuesday, says he'll use his one remaining scholarship on a big man, preferably in the mold of former Cane Julian Gamble (6-10, 250 with a strong inside game at both ends).

A lot of the rotation will be figured out in August, when the team embarks on a four-game, 10-day trip to Spain. Larrañaga

can't wait to watch it fall into place.

"It will be a little more exciting offensively, or capable of doing more things offensively," he said. "If we can learn to defend, it'll be a really fun team to watch."

Zone defense is all the rage in college basketball

Chicago Tribune
Chris Hine
March 14, 2014

GREENSBORO, N.C. — By Jim Larrañaga's rough calculations, last season opponents played a grand total of 10 minutes of zone defense against his Miami team.

But this season, the Hurricanes coach — sounding like a ranting Larry David from "Curb Your Enthusiasm" — said he has noticed a sea change across the ACC and the rest of the country: Almost everybody is incorporating zone into their game plans, including Larrañaga.

According to Pittsburgh coach Jamie Dixon, Larrañaga is one to talk.

"He's the guy that's doing that!" Dixon said. "He should look at himself. He's playing zone, and I always thought he was a man-to-man guy."

Larrañaga isn't alone in noticing it or changing his style. Several coaches at this week's ACC tournament said they have seen the shift.

"We've probably played against man-to-man less than half the time, which is an incredible transition," Larrañaga said.

Why is this happening? Two reasons, according to the coaches. One is the NCAA's new hand-checking rules.

The other is that playing zone — like a resurrected fashion trend — is a fad again in college basketball, especially after the success of Louisville, which used full-court zone pressure to help win the national title last season, and Syracuse, which continues to set the standard for zone defense under coach Jim Boeheim.

"Teams that win, people tend to imitate," Larrañaga said. "They start realizing like we did. As soon as our season ended last year, I told our coaches to start researching zone defense."

The new rules have accelerated the transformation. Coaches say it's harder to guard driving players one-on-one without fouling, necessitating more frequent switches to zone to limit foul trouble.

"We ran into it a couple games with foul trouble and fouls that weren't fouls in the past," Dixon said. "That's the biggest challenge. I said this was going to happen each time they made a rule change — longer 3-pointers, calling the game closer on the perimeter. Teams are going to be using zone more because of that."

One motivation behind the new rules was to jump-start scoring, but zone defenses can cause games to slow down, negating the effect. According to NCAA data compiled by Kevin Pauga, Michigan State's director of basketball operations who runs the blog KPI Competition Analytics, teams were averaging 70.8 points through March 9, up from 67.5 a season ago.

"It's probably a bigger trend than the rule, and the rule has waned a little bit here in the last month as a point of emphasis," Notre Dame coach Mike Brey said. "The other thing is you want to see if people can consistently make shots over you. You get to that at some point in the season."

One coach offering a dissenting perspective was Florida State's Leonard Hamilton, who said he noticed a slight uptick early in the season in opponents playing zone but did not notice as much during the conference season.

"Most coaches stay with what they're most comfortable with," said Hamilton, who is loath to play zone. "Sometimes you get into a groove in zone; if it works for you, you use it. It just doesn't work for us. I would love to, but every time I go to a zone, everybody starts raining 3s from the parking lot."

The NCAA wants more eyeballs affixed to games on TV, and the hand-checking rules were implemented with that in mind. So is more zone defense good for the game?

"All in all it's probably what people don't want to watch, but I don't know if that determines what's good for a game," Dixon said. "It's still going to keep the game slower."

Even if the game is speeding up to get in the zone.

Lecomte Improving all Facets of His Game

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
March 10, 2014

From the very first time he stepped on the floor for the Miami Hurricanes, freshman PG Manu Lecomte has shown the ability to run a team.

Blessed with tight handles, lightning quick speed, and a smooth reliable jumper, his offensive game was never in question.

After all he had no trouble creating shots for himself or his teammates in the European Under-20 (Division B) championships this summer, earning a spot on the All Tournament team.

But in the highly competitive basketball world that is the Atlantic Coast Conference, it takes more than offensive skill to excel. You need to play both ends of the floor.

In fact, despite Manu's comfort level with the ball, a big part of the reason for Miami's well documented switch from man to zone this year, was due to Lecomte's struggles on D.

Midway through the season he even lost some of his aggression on offense.

To his credit he adjusted.

"I think he has just become more accustomed to what is expected of him," coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He's a very conservative young man, and he would probably prefer to just be distributing the ball to other really good scorers."

On the season he has very respectable numbers of 7.9 ppg, 2.2 rpg, 2.4 apg and 43% from the floor as well as a very solid 41% from deep.

This past weekend he had a very efficient 9 point, 5 rebound, and 6 assist performance Vs Wake Forest.

2 games back he sliced and diced NC State to the tune of 15 points and 3 assists.

But numbers only tell half the story.

More than at any other point in the season he is playing fast and looks comfortable on both ends of the floor.

"At the beginning of the year he was playing European defense," added Coach L. "Basically just playing safe. As the season progressed and we started playing zone, it was almost to accommodate him. But as then we even went to a box and one and had him be a chaser, and he was fantastic doing that. He really used his quickness to apply pressure. And we encouraged him to to that when he's guarding the ball as well. He's learned, and he's really improved his defense. He's a far better player on both ends of the court then he was in November and December. I expect him to have a very good ACC Tournament."

Additionally he's starting to make plays that are on bordering on spectacular at times (see highlights below).

If Lecomte can keep up his improvement it will play huge dividends in the ACC Tournament, and future seasons to come.

Hurricanes Newcomers could Spark a Big Run in 2014-15

State of the U

Jerry Steinberg

March 5, 2014

This season has been an up and down year for the Miami Hurricanes basketball squad.

Players like seniors Rion Brown and Erik Swoope have played their hearts out and helped UM overachieve. They will be sorely missed.

Freshmen Manu Lecomte and Davon Reed have shown great potential and promise to grow into even better players next season with a year of experience.

But which new faces will shape the team in 2014-15?

There is no shortage of incoming talent, and today we break it all down.

For the interest of this article we will use 4 Categories to break down next season's newcomers:

Top Shelf, Will Contribute, Developmental, & Wildcard

Top Shelf:

PG Angel Rodriguez - (transfer K State Jr.)

The Numbers - Was a 4 star prospect coming out of Dr. Michael Krop High School in Miami, Fla. His two years with the Wildcats did nothing to diminish his reputation. As a sophomore averaged 11.4 points on 36.1 percent shooting, including 34.4 percent from 3-point range, to go with 5.2 assists, 2.1 rebounds and 1.5 steals. Also had a spectacular 2.2 to 1 assist to turnover ratio and was an All Big 12 second team selection as well as All Big 12 defensive player. Listed at 5-11 180.

The Skinny - Just an outstanding all-around player. Shooting will improve after sitting out 2013-14. He can create his own shot when needed, but always looks to keep his teammates involved. Very strong with the basketball and rarely makes unforced errors. Stronger than he looks and moves his feet well on defense. Not the shooter or athlete that Shane Larkin was, but pretty close in overall skills. My only concern is if he can stay healthy. Decided to skip waiver application for this year in part due to tendonitis in his knee. As good as Manu Lecomte has been as a freshman, should upgrade the PG position on both ends of the floor. Though Coach L has hinted you could see them on the floor together some next year. Certainly they will push each other in practice and the point guard position will be a major strength for the 'Canes next year.

SG/SF Sheldon McClellan - (transfer Texas Jr.)

The Numbers - #47 ranked prospect overall by ESPN coming out of Bellaire H.S. in Texas. As a sophomore averaged 13.5 points, 3.9 rebounds, 0.9 assists, 0.8 steals, shooting 38.2 percent from the field, 27.3 percent from three and 83.3 percent at the line. Listed at 6'5 210.

The Skinny - His talent is off the charts. Yet he earned a spot in Rick Barnes doghouse in 2012-13 because of poor shot selection and defensive

effort. Exceptional ability to take the ball to the basket and finishes strong inside. Great handle as well. Streak shooter from the outside. Not a polished passer by any means. With Coach L and staff working with him should improve dramatically as a defender. Bottom line, he is too good not to work with and should see significant minutes immediately. However there is plenty of room for improvement as an overall player.

PG/SG Deandre Burnett - (RS Freshman)

The Numbers: As a senior at Carol City H.S. FI averaged 37 ppg, 5 apg, and 6 rpg. Yes those numbers are real! 4 star recruit and 2012 Parade All-American who spent a season at Prep School as well, so will actually be 20 years old for his RS Fr. campaign. Listed at 6'2 191.

The Skinny: Born to score. Can take the ball to the basket and finish, pull up for medium J's, and has unlimited range from distance. Floaters, slashes, shots off the dribble, catch and shoot are all part of his repertoire. Was expected to lead this year's team in scoring before breaking his wrist just before UM's opener. Had 16 points in 22 minutes in UM's exhibition Vs Florida Tech 10/30/13. All-around game remains a question, but he can definitely fill it up.

Will Contribute:

PF/C Ivan Cruz Uceda -(JUCO transfer Jr.)

The Numbers: Averaging 14.2 ppg on 63.7 percent shooting from the field, 45.8 percent from three (27-59), and 74.4 percent from the line (58-78), 9.8 rebounds, 2.0 assists, 1.3 blocks, and 1.3 steals per game (updated 2/23/14) at Harcum J.C. Listed at 6'10 240.

The Skinny: Charlie Strauser and Josh Frank collaborated to give this very detailed scouting report. In a nutshell he is an experienced, developed player who can score inside and out. He is also an effective rebounder, and an excellent passer. Has very good feel for the game. Not a big time athlete by any means, but could be the sleeper of this group as he is highly skilled. Could end up being "top shelf" because of Miami's need for interior players next season.

PG/SG JaQuan Newton -(Fr.)

The Numbers: Consensus Top 60 player, rated as a 4 star prospect and the No. 55 player in ESPN's Top 100 list at Neumann-Goretti High in Philadelphia. Unofficially averaging 21.3 ppg and 4 apg as a H.S. senior. Listed at 6'2 180.

The Skinny: Has been compared to Durand Scott because he is best taking the ball to the basket, and has a streaky jumper. Tough as nails competitor who should improve the more time he is on campus. Good passer, and can play both guard positions. Creates his own shot with ease. After watching some film on him as a junior, recently saw senior highlights and his athleticism and explosiveness seem to have improved. Probably won't start right away but because he can defend and is versatile, should be part of the rotation from the get go.

PF Omar Sherman - (Fr.)

The Numbers: Rated as a 4 star prospect, according to ESPN and Scout.com, and the # 20 power forward in the country, as well as the No.

94 player overall by Scout. Could not find current stats on Sherman but averaged 12 ppg and 8.3 rpg as a H.S. junior at Duncanville H.S. in TX. Listed at 6'8 250.

The Skinny: Big, strong player who has a soft touch and can play with his back to the basket. Also has good range on his jumper and can even knock down an occasional three. Adds depth to a position of need, and could see early minutes as a result. Might need a year to learn the speed of the game, particularly in the ACC, before becoming optimally effective.

Developmental:

SG James Palmer - (Fr.)

The Numbers: Rated as a 3 star prospect and 25th best shooting guard in the country by ESPN. No current stats available but averaged 12 ppg 5 rpg and 2 apg as a junior at St. John's College High School in Washington D.C. (one of the better programs in the country). Listed at 6'4 180.

The Skinny: Pure shooter who loves to spot up and get shots in transition. Smooth handle as well, and shows the ability to play both guard spots. Don't let the stats fool you, he is the best player on a very good team. Good size as well. Could end up being a very good player down the line, but might find himself redshirting next season with the amount of depth Miami will have in the backcourt.

Wildcards:

PG Corn Elder (RS Fr.)

The Numbers: Top 100 H.S. PG according to ESPN. Led Ensworth H.S. TN to 2 straight state championships and was named state tournament's most valuable player. Averaged 20.2 ppg and 4.7 apg a game as a senior, not to mention 4 steals a game. 7 tackles and 144 return yards as a freshman on the gridiron for Al Golden. Listed at 5-10 170. Legit 4.4 speed.

The Skinny: Was expected to contribute to this year's squad before suffering a torn meniscus during football season. Would not be available until January as he is on scholarship for football, so would have a hard time getting many minutes. But could be a defensive menace and a spark plug in certain situations. Elder is a tough kid, and has Shane Larkin like athletic abilities. Long term he could be a factor, especially when his football eligibility is exhausted.

PF/C Unknown (Graduate transfer??)

The Numbers: When all of the graduates move on and the newcomers arrive, Miami will still have one scholarship available (see chart below).

The Skinny: In a perfect world, Coach L and staff find another Donnavan Kirk. A graduate transfer who is BIG, experienced, and eligible ASAP, could be the final piece that completes a very talented roster.

McClellan Anxious to Play For Miami

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Feb. 19, 2014

Sheldon McClellan catches the ball on the wing and hears a message he's heard before.

"Catch and shoot! Be ready. Feet ready, shot ready," yells assistant coach Chris Caputo.

It's a message to help McClellan, a natural slasher, to shoot more from the perimeter.

McClellan's confidence with his outside shot has been shaken in his first two years at Texas where he shot 29 percent from behind the 3-point line. But a transfer to Miami and a new approach along with reminders from the coaching staff has helped him improve this year while sitting out due to NCAA transfer rules.

"For me it's just about confidence and I think I lost that at Texas," McClellan said. "When I see shots not falling, I'd get down on myself and stop playing defense. It affects my game all-around so I just have to keep my confidence up and I've been working on that. I've been confident in taking more shots no matter where it is."

McClellan, a 6-foot-5 wing, averaged 12.4 points in 68 games at Texas and is expected to Miami's top scorer next season.

"I've been amped up since the first game that when we lost against St. Francis," McClellan said. "I was just so mad. I'm ready to play. I'm sick of sitting out really to tell you the truth, but it's just a process I have to go through and it just makes me hungrier in my workouts and I just go even harder."

McClellan doesn't like shooting jumpers. He'd rather get to the basket and get fouled, but knows adding a reliable perimeter shot to his game will be a positive.

"If I'm able to do both, that makes me more dangerous," he said.

Shooting drills just as the OKC drill in which players are expected to make 10 shots from each of the five primary 3-point locations on the court in an allotted amount of time is something that has helped McClellan. Knocking down perimeter shots hasn't always been an issue with his game.

"It's been my game to get up and down the floor, cutting, slashing, and fast breaks, but in high school I could shoot and my confidence was very high," McClellan said. "I don't know what happened when I got to college, but I'm starting to get my confidence back."

Another area of his game he is working to improve on is his defense.

"Our real focus is help Sheldon become a better defender," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He's a very, very talented offensive player. He's kind of a combination of Durand Scott, Rion Brown, and Trey McKinney-Jones. He has size, length, jumping ability, shooting ability, driving ability, can make free throws—he's really good. He hasn't become the defender that he should be. He should be a weapon defensively, that's how much talent he has at the end of the floor, but most really good offensive players rest on defense and we can't afford that. We need him to become a great defender."

McClellan believes he has made strides on defense.

"I'm improving on my defense," he said. "That was a problem for me at Texas and I am getting better at that too."

McClellan will have two years of eligibility remaining at Miami along with fellow Big 12 transfer Angel Rodriguez via Kansas State. The two former foes have developed a strong bond this year, which includes late nights at the gym.

On game nights, home or away, the two will head to the gym after the game for a workout after watching the game.

"We're not just sitting back and relaxing," McClellan said. "We're in the gym. We just love basketball. We just want to help these guys this year and definitely be ready for next year."

Rodriguez, a second-time all-Big 12 selection last year, is expected to take over as the starting point guard next season.

"His awareness on defense, his instincts, his IQ, and he's just a good leader and a good player," McClellan said. "He's got an offensive and defensive game. Every time I work out with him I learn something new. He's helping me and I'm helping him."

Although the two would rather be playing, it's been a positive year for both.

"It's been great," McClellan said. "Me and Angel have been working hard and looking forward to next year, but right now we're just helping these guys in practice on scout team to get everybody better for this year and next year."

Larrañaga Remembers Connecting To Sons Through Basketball

Yahoo! Sports

Jon Finkel

Feb. 17, 2014

Imagine that it's 1981. You're a young father with a 5-year-old son and you're an assistant basketball coach in the storied Atlantic Coast Conference. Now imagine that your son's a ball boy for your team, the University of Virginia, which is ranked No. 1 in the country and features the best player in college, 7-foot-4 Ralph Sampson. To your boy, the players are giants and every home game is a party with thousands of people cheering for your squad. If you wanted your son to get bitten by the basketball bug, there are few better scenarios to conjure up.

For Jim Larrañaga, the current head basketball coach at University of Miami, the above hypothetical was his son Jay's reality several decades ago.

"Jay's first introduction to the players on our team was when we were at Virginia," Jim Larrañaga says. "He was a ball boy and when we'd have players over the house for dinner and he'd interact with them, they'd tell him stories about their childhood and how they played basketball. Then Jay would be at the gym every chance he got. There was so much excitement surrounding that team he wanted to be around it."

Virginia was one of the earlier stops on Larrañaga's basketball career, which began with his days as a star player at Providence. After Providence, he took a coaching job at Davidson, then a coaching job in Belgium, then Virginia. After seven successful years at UVA, he took his first prominent head coaching position at Bowling Green State.

"Jay was in sixth grade," Larrañaga says. "We lived in a small town and he often rode his bike to school, but after school was over he'd come directly to the gym and he'd play during practices on a side basket with one of my managers. After practice I'd have a chance to work with him and teach him the game of basketball."

When the family moved to Bowling Green, Larrañaga was surprised to learn that the university had yet to establish a youth basketball program. They did, however, have an excellent hockey program, so Jay's younger brother, Jon, joined the hockey team.

"Jon would go to the ice arena around 5 a.m.," Larrañaga says. "My wife would drive him. The first five years in Bowling Green he played more hockey than

basketball."

Then Larrañaga decided to capitalize on one of the perks of being a head coach and decided to start his own youth program, called the Junior Falcons. This enabled his son and other kids interested in basketball to play. After all, what better way to share your love of basketball with your offspring than to create a youth hoops program that he could play in?

"We ran it on the weekends and my players coached the young kids in town," Larrañaga says.

By this time, Jay had fully fallen in love with the sport and was ready for his high school team.

"Jay's high school had no fall or spring programs, so my wife and I would take turns driving him up to Toledo so he could play in their open gyms," Larrañaga says. "He liked it so much that he decided to go to school in Toledo, which had one of the best high school programs in the state of Ohio. Jay led them to a state championship game and had a tremendous career."

In addition to a love of the game, Coach Larrañaga passed along a gym rat work ethic that only a coach could truly appreciate.

"I remember one day Jay's high school coach came into my office and said that Jay is really effective in and around the basket and that they need him to play inside, like a post player," Larrañaga says. "Jay was a great perimeter shooter, but I knew that he'd do whatever he needed to do for the team to win. I started working with him on his post game right way, but he never stopped working on his perimeter shot as well."

When asked if his son's desire to improve and the determination to continue to work on all facets of the game came directly from being the son of a coach, Larrañaga says that is part of it, but also a sort of sports osmosis takes place.

"Whenever you're around basketball a lot, you learn mentally and you apply it physically," he says. "You see a kid make a move and then you go to your own driveway and start working on it. In our driveway we put up two baskets. One was on the side of the garage and the other was at the end of the driveway. The boys would shoot on one basket and then drive and score on the next one."

The driveway work and the time in the gym would eventually lead both sons to an opportunity to play for their father, Jay at Bowling Green and Jon at George Mason. Where this might be a problem for some parents and coaches, Coach Larrañaga

made one thing clear from the start.

"I explained to both Jay and Jon when they played with me that my responsibility to the team is to help us win," Larrañaga says. "All the decisions I make will be about what's best for the team, not what's best for my son. It's very, very hard to be objective, but you have to be."

Speaking to that point, Larrañaga recalls Jay's freshman year when he was telling his son how thrilled he was with his performance in practice, so Jay asked why he wasn't starting. Coach Larrañaga explained to him that the guy ahead of him was a junior and was playing just as hard and just as well and he deserved the spot.

Later in that season, against Michigan State, Larrañaga put his son in when the team needed some help defensively and he outworked the starter who was ahead of him on the depth chart against the same opposing player. The rest of the team saw the same thing and Jay earned his way into the starting line-up. No special favors were given.

The flip side to this is the pressure that a son feels when playing for his father. In a 2008 interview with the Toledo Blade, Jay said the following about playing with his dad:

"There always was pressure to play well, because if we lost people would say I played badly and my dad was a terrible coach. But I have so many great memories of my time playing for my dad, spending time with him on road trips and practice and such. But the positive times are accentuated when you share them with the people who mean the most to you in your life."

Jon and Jay, who is now an assistant coach with the Boston Celtics, both left college with enough talent to play professional ball in Europe, which is a testament to their father's coaching.

"Actually, playing for my dad did help me prepare for the pressure of playing in Europe," Jay told the Blade. "That was the greatest pressure I ever felt in my life."

Regardless of the pressure, his love for the game stayed strong and Jay has followed in his dad's coaching footsteps -- just the way you'd have imagined it would turn out if your son was that 5-year-old ball boy for Virginia.

Burnett Staying Positive While Out

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Dec. 23, 2013

Burnett broke his left wrist in practice after the exhibition game in November, which required surgery ending his season.

"I was devastated obviously," Burnett said. "But the team needs positive energy so I just can't be down because I'm hurt, I have to stay positive and bring energy to the team."

Teammates Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, who are also sitting out this year due to NCAA transfer rules, have helped Burnett with the process.

"They just tell me to stay positive and that we're going to come back strong and even better when we get back," Burnett said.

Burnett committed to Miami in March 2012 during his senior year at Carol City, but spent a year at Massanutten (Va.) Military Academy before enrolling at UM. He was expected to be one of Miami's top scorers this season and had a strong showing in the exhibition game scoring 16 points in 22 minutes.

"It's something that you can really build on," Burnett said. "I know how it feels under the lights when it's time to play. I got that out of the way, that feeling, so it won't be anything new for me next year."

Burnett had surgery last month and still has a cast on and is unsure when he will get it off. The next stage will be to strengthen the wrist before resuming basketball activities.

"When I come back I'm going to be in tip-top shape and it'll just be the basketball part that I'll have to get back," Burnett said.

He injured his wrist during practice when driving to the basket. There was a collision at the rim and Burnett fell on his wrist. When he comes back, he believes he's going to change his game a bit.

"At every level you've got to adjust so I feel I'll have to adjust my game to the college game and start shooting more pull-ups and stuff like that instead of going all the way to the basket and knowing when to go all of the way to the basket," he said. "I feel like I will have to adjust to I want fall as much. But it's basketball, you're going to fall."

Burnett has been traveling with the team, which has been beneficial to him as well as the team.

"He's doing great as a sideline reporter," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He sits there on the side, is very into it, and is trying to figure things out."

Seeing the environments on the road has also been helpful.

"I think it's really good for me because I get to see how the arenas are going to be, the environment, how refs officiate games on the road, and you can't let the crowd affect you," Burnett said. "You have to mentally focus when you're on the road."

The Hurricanes are 7-5 after their win over La Salle on Sunday with three of their losses by five points or less.

"No matter what, win or lose, the team stays positive," Burnett said. "Everybody has the right mindset to get better each day. We know we're building, we're a new team and I think they'll get back on track."

With the additions of Burnett, Rodriguez, and McClellan for next year's team, there is a sense of excitement around the program.

"It's going to be a great season," Burnett said. "I think they're going to finish strong this year, I still have faith that Coach L is going to get them on track—but I think next year we'll have the right chemistry, the pieces will be together and the sky is the limit."

Nigerian Soccer Lover Becomes Canes Basketball Star

CBS Miami
Summer Knowles
Nov. 1, 2013

Tonye Jekiri stands just under 7-feet tall, and is a true sophomore on the University of Miami's basketball team. Jekiri, who was born and raised in Nigeria, only became interested in the sport after a renown basketball coach in Nigeria spotted him.

Jekiri's first love was always soccer, "All I ever dreamed about was playing professional soccer in Europe."

But after learning how to dribble some, he attended a basketball camp, where his raw ability to run, block shots and grab rebounds got him noticed and ultimately earned him a scholarship to Champagnat Catholic High in Hialeah.

From there it was on to the University of Miami, where although Coach Jim Larrañaga said Jekiri is still playing catch up to a degree, he believes Jekiri's potential is promising.

"His ceiling is very high he hasn't come close to scratching the surface of that ceiling so we expect him to just get better and better," Larrañaga said.

Jekiri said being where he is now doing what is doing is miraculous.

"It's a miracle because my mom had been praying for me that one day I would change," said after explaining how he'd often get spankings as a child for skipping class to play soccer.

Despite being relatively new to the sport, Jekiri now dreams of one day playing in the NBA and being able to give back to kids in his hometown in Nigeria.

"If you could just teach them how to dribble the ball because running is not something you are going to teach the people back home because they already know how to do that," Jekiri said with a smile.

Jekiri, who is one of five siblings, said he is very happy and thankful for the opportunity to prove himself as a ball player and a good son.

"I feel like I'm the one they love most now," he said while laughing.

Fantasy Camps Provide Millionaires Opportunities

Forbes

Alicia Jessop

Oct. 30, 2013

On a sunny autumn day, the University of Miami Field House was buzzing with the sounds of basketballs dribbling and whistles blowing. Inside, players ran the length of the court, as their coaches paced alongside it chiding them to compete harder. Training tables ran the length of the room, ready to assist players should they tweak something while playing. On this sunny autumn day, it wasn't the 2013 ACC Men's Basketball Champions, University of Miami, pacing the court under the guidance of head coach Jim Larrañaga. Rather, it was a group of 35-year-old to 70-year-old men with net worths over \$1 million seeking to live out the fantasy of being a college basketball player.

Founded in 1998 to provide summer sports camps for children and assist professional athletes in hosting camps, in 2012 Pro Camps entered the fantasy camp market. Fantasy camp attendees are told they can "live their ultimate fantasy" at the five fantasy camps Pro Camps hosts: the Bill Self Basketball Fantasy Experience at the University of Kansas, the John Calipari Fantasy Experience at the University of Kentucky, the Tom Crean Fantasy Basketball Experience at the Indiana University, the Jim Larrañaga Fantasy Basketball Experience at the University of Miami and the USA Basketball Fantasy Basketball Experience in Las Vegas.

At each experience, the camp's adult participants are treated to a fantasy version of what being a student-athlete is like. For starters, there aren't any classroom activities. Rather, there are hotel stays at places like the Ritz Carlton and dinners at steakhouses like Ruth's Chris. There are swag bags filled with items including t-shirts to jerseys from basketball's biggest merchandisers. There are team meetings, film review sessions and personal coaching opportunities by each school's head coach and his staff. No fantasy camp would be complete

without behind-the-scenes access to each team's locker rooms, training facilities and offices, with the ability to compete in the arena that each team calls home.

What the promotional material for each fantasy camp fails to advertise, though, is what each camper is the most willing to spend big dollars on to receive: high-level basketball competition and camaraderie. For these men who work high-stress jobs, those two factors justify the \$2,995-to-\$10,995 price tag Pro Camps charges for its fantasy basketball camps. "Participants of our fantasy camps will tell you that the best thing about them are the friendships and relationships they build. It's not about the gear. It's not about the good food, hotels and events we provide them. It's about the relationships they build. When they first started going, guys didn't know each other and now they're building relationships with them. Guys are recruiting other guys to go to different camps with them," Pro Camps' chief operation officer, Andy Danner said.

The enjoyment the camp's participants receive from participating in the camps has led to the creation of a businessman basketball counterculture of sorts. Fantasy camp participants traverse the country throughout the year participating in Pro Camps' fantasy camps and other fantasy camps organized by individual coaches or other entities, like Jim Boeheim's at Syracuse or Mike Krzyzewski's at Duke. Many of the men have built basketball training facilities into their homes, with some adding facilities to their offices. Most have personal trainers and some have shooting coaches.

Even after the camp ends, the fantasy lives on. Throughout the fantasy camp "off-season," they email each other talking smack and scouting to see who has improved the most away from camp. One camper at the recent Jim Larrañaga Fantasy Basketball Experience who wished to remain anonymous for fear over how investors in his business may react to what he called his "\$100,000-per-

year basketball habit" noted, "There's a bunch of type-A personalities who are unbelievably successful here. There are 50 millionaires, multimillionaires and more, who are competing at the highest level and they share a passion for basketball. It's an amazing experience to suspend reality and come into an environment, have coaches come and work with us, and come together with a common goal in this very temporary bubble of fantasy. You can't get this in other facets of life."

Pro Camps notes that the market for fantasy basketball camps is niche and as such, growth must be slow, steady and intentional. The number of men with net worths over \$1 million limits the pool of participants from the outset. Add to that the fact that not every man with that net worth wants to spend his money traveling to play basketball. On top of that, realize that there are only a handful of coaches in America who could draw a large enough crowd committed to paying thousands-of-dollars to learn under them. Quickly, one realizes the market for fantasy basketball camps is small. "What's unique about fantasy basketball camps, is we feel there's only a certain number of camps we can do. The camps have to be tied to very elite programs—the Camelots of college basketball," Danner explained.

That fact hasn't dissuaded Pro Camps, however, from entering the market. In fact, the company is looking for ways to expand its fantasy camp experience, through the addition of other sports that may be more attractive to a wider audience, like golf and tennis. If its fantasy basketball camps are any indicator, it's likely that if Pro Camps makes the move, it'll have golf courses and tennis courts filled with millionaire businessmen eager to live the life of their favorite golf and tennis stars.

'It's gotta be the shoes?'

NBC Sports College Basketball Talk
Raphielle Johnson
Oct. 3, 2013

"If you look good, you feel good. If you feel good, you play good. If you play good, they pay good."

Those are the famous words of Deion Sanders, and while college basketball players certainly can't be "paid" the words can be applied to the college game. Why? Shoes, that's why. While signature shoes saw their start in the 1980s it took some time for college players to add their own personal style, with many of the nation's top programs going with a more uniform look when it comes to footwear.

In recent years some programs have given their players more freedom to express themselves in this regard, and the results have grabbed the attention of many. One program that's stood out in this regard is Miami, whose school colors (orange and green) tend to lend itself to more self-expression when it comes to footwear. Last year's ACC champions displayed a wide variety of looks, catching the attention of both college basketball fans and diehard "sneakerheads."

With the freedom to add their own personal flair, what shoes a player wears on the floor can become competitive but in a good way. Teammates can turn this into a good-natured competition of sorts, with the goal being to make sure no one's shoe looks better than theirs.

"Definitely, especially between Shane [Larkin] and Durand [Scott]," Miami senior guard Rion Brown told NBCSports.com in a phone interview. "Of course guys like myself, Kenny [Kadji] and Erik Swoope jumped in. Every time a new shoe came out we wanted to get it before someone else got it, and we tried not to tell anybody [else] what shoe we had until the game started."

The Hurricanes displayed some interesting footwear, and as Brown noted in the

phone interview their colors (orange and green) worked well with some of the new shoes the program's official supplier (Nike) released. Big man Julian Gamble wore the SoleFly x Jordan Spiz'ike shoe during the NCAA tournament last season, with the shoe being designed to commemorate SoleFly's (a Miami-based sneaker boutique) two-year anniversary. As for the aforementioned Larkin, he wore volt colorways of both the LeBron X and the Spiz'ike (the special Black History Month release) during the ACC and NCAA tournaments. And among the sneakers worn by Scott last season were the Black History Month version of the Kobe 8 and the Zoom Huarache 2K4 Volt.

In regards to which players were the most creative last season, that was a tie according to Brown.

"I would probably say that was between Kenny and Shane," said Brown. "Shane always had the most "up to date" shoes, and Kenny always picked the weirdest ones."

Miami isn't the only school with players who like to stand out via their footwear, and the companies have aided in this process. Players at Arizona, San Diego State, UNLV and many other programs have caught the attention of sneaker collectors in recent years thanks to some of their footwear choices. North Carolina even has a team-specific version of the Jordan XX8 that they'll wear this upcoming season.

Gone are the days of the old-fashioned Chuck Taylor shoe being worn on the court, much to the chagrin of some traditionalists from a style standpoint, with technology improving as well as consumers being able to practically design their own shoe (for a higher cost, of course).

That can go a variety of ways, from players creating their own designs to manufacturers designing special shoes for the programs they sponsor. One example of this would be Maryland, which is sponsored by Under Armour (founded by

Maryland alumnus Kevin Plank). For their game against N.C. State in January the Terrapins wore a full "Maryland Pride" ensemble, complete with a pair of sneakers that featured different patterns in order to replicate the look of the Maryland state flag.

Another program that's been one of the more creative in college basketball is Baylor, who wore those unforgettable "electricity" uniforms during their run to the Elite Eight in 2012. During the Big 12 tournament the Bears, who won the Postseason NIT, wore uniforms designed by adidas that had sleeves and their colors also led to some eye-catching footwear choices.

Is a player's shoe choice the difference between winning and losing? Unless the player's out on the floor playing in an uncomfortable shoe with its best feature being multiple holes in the sole the answer is obviously no. But while sneakers are clearly a billboard for the manufacturer, they also give the players an opportunity to show off some of their personality.

Some will go with the standard team issue sneakers, either because it isn't that big of a deal to them or they play for a school that prefers that they go with a more conservative approach. And on the other end of the spectrum are the players who want to make a statement in two regards: with their play, and with their fashion sense.

As for Miami, Brown and his teammates will look to continue to wear distinct shoes despite the majority of last season's squad moving on to the professional ranks.

"Me and Erik will definitely look to step our game up and keep it going," said Brown, who noted that the Hurricanes' newcomers are catching on when it comes to the footwear. "Even our three walk-ons, Justin Heller, Mike Fernandez and Steve Sorenson, have already started getting their shoes ready."

Canes will not seek waiver for transfer Rodriguez

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Sept. 28, 2013

It remains to be seen who will replace Shane Larkin as starting point guard for the University of Miami men's basketball team this season, but one player who won't be running the floor — at least not until next season — is Angel Rodriguez, a Kansas State transfer who played at Miami Krop High.

Coach Jim Larrañaga said Friday before the Hurricanes' first official practice that the school will not appeal to the NCAA for a waiver to expedite Rodriguez's eligibility because Rodriguez is recovering from tendinitis in his knees, and the player said he would rather sit out this season, learn the new system and come back 100 percent for his final two years of eligibility.

Larrañaga said that UM team doctors examined Rodriguez upon his arrival and "shut him down the entire summer" because the tendinitis was that severe.

"When we talked to Angel about this coming year, we told him there was no sense in even applying for the waiver if you're not physically fit enough," the coach said. "We were waiting to decide to see how he feels, spoke to him the other day and both agreed we're not even going to apply."

The point guard duties will likely be shared by Belgian freshman Manu Lecomte, graduate student Garrius Adams (back from a medical redshirt season) and freshman DeAndre Burnett of Carol City High, who is more of a scorer but can also play the point.

Lecomte has competed for the Belgian Under-16, U-18 and U-20 national teams. He is small — 5-9, 159 pounds — but has

impressed his coaches.

"Manu is adorable and will have to be aware of all the girls who are going to be interested in him," Larrañaga said. "He is a very good-looking young man, smart and has a very mature way of approaching his schoolwork and basketball. I am very, very impressed with him as a person, and the players are impressed with him as a player. You'll see a lot of him, as a starter or a sub."

The Hurricanes are coming off an Atlantic Coast Conference championship season and a thrilling Sweet 16 run. They lost the top six scorers from that team, including Larkin, Kenny Kadji, Durand Scott, Julian Gamble and Reggie Johnson. The only player returning who was in the starting rotation is senior forward Rion Brown, who has taken on more of a leadership role.

This season's team has nine new faces, including five true freshmen.

"They are learning a whole new way of looking at the game of basketball," Larrañaga said. "Everybody comes from a different background, learned the game from their high school or AAU coach. It's going to take them some time. We have to be very, very patient with them."

One player who could make a big difference — literally — is sophomore center Tonye Jekiri. He bulked up from 215 to 240 pounds over the summer and has been working on his shooting so much that he developed tendinitis in his shoulder.

"Tonye looks like a totally different person," Brown said. "You won't even recognize him."

Senior forward Erik Swoope agreed.

"Tonye has so much more confidence this

year," Swoope said. "Last year, he had a lot of respect for the older guys. This year, he's saying, 'I am the big man, and for us to be successful I have to be a threat.'"

Added Larrañaga: "When Tonye was a freshman, the first thing you noticed is he's got size and speed, but he didn't have the bulk or strength to battle against the bigger, stronger guys on our team. So when he was going up against Reggie, Kenny and Julian and Rafael [Akpejiore], they pushed him around a lot. He has worked very hard at gaining strength and weight. He gained valuable experience as a freshman in practice against the veterans and in games against all the best teams in the country. He's going to take a major step forward this season but still is not going to be the kind of player he's going to become until his junior year."

The Canes will play an exhibition game Oct. 30 against Florida Tech and open the season Nov. 8 at home against St. Francis.

A Conversation with New PG, Manu Lecomte

State of the U
Charlie Strauser
August 1, 2013

The commitment of incoming freshman Belgian point guard Emmanuel ("Manu") Lecomte, which we broke here on SOTU, came as surprise to @CanesHoops fans who are used to looking at major recruiting rankings to gauge the school's success on the trail. But it looks like assistant coach Michael Huger, a former MVP in Belgian's professional league, signed a player who might be a revelation - not only to Canes fans, but to the staff itself. Just 17, Lecomte took the time to answer some questions for us fresh off of an all-tournament performance at the European Under-20 (Division B) championships. The budding international star speaks three languages, and we appreciate him not forcing us to learn Flemish or French before the interview!

Q: Manu, first of all, thanks for taking time to talk to us here at State of The U and congratulations on your all-tournament performance at the U20s! What could you tell us about your experience?

A: It was a great experience playing against guys who were older than me and who are already playing at a top level in Europe. It's always pride for me to play for my country.

Q: Why do you think that you played so well and had such exceptional statistics, compared to some previous successful European appearances?

A: I think I just put the work in, and then the results speak [for] themselves, I've worked really hard the whole year and in the preparation for that championship. My coach was also a big part of that, he put me in the best positions to make a great championship, he knows me very well and knows how I'm playing my best.

Q: What were your final average stats from the U20s (points, assists, steals & rebounds)?

A: My final average stats were: 21.6 points, 6.6 assists, 1.9 steals and 4.1 rebounds. (Editor's note: Lecomte led the tournament in assists and was second in scoring.)

Q: Were there any issues with you as the team leader at just age 17, when you were playing at the 20-year old level? Did your results speak for themselves, or was there anything in your leadership style that made the team more comfortable?

A: Although I was the youngest player in the team, I was captain of the team. I always try to play and to act like a guy who's 20 so at that moment people don't consider you as the youngest guy, so it was not a problem at all. I

wasn't only a leader on the floor but also off the floor that's what my coach expected from me. He wanted me to be an example for the team and I think I did a good job, it was also very important to me.

Q: How disappointing was it not to get promoted to Division A by just one point?

A: It was really disappointing for us but, you know, many good players had [planned] to come but they couldn't because they were injured so a lot of people were thinking before the championship that [Belgium] "ain't gonna win one game." And then we got that 4th place so I told my guys that we could be very proud of what we did.

Q: What was the Miami coaching staff's reaction to the success you had?

They said I [did] a great job but we didn't have the opportunity to talk about that yet.

Q: Could you tell us about your experience with the senior team (Belgian Lions)? Did you just practice with them, or did you see any minutes during a preseason friendly?

A: After the championship, the coach of the senior team told me that I was selected in the team. I've made one week of practices and then he told me that he doesn't want me to get hurt before I leave for Miami, so I didn't make any games and he gave me some rest till I leave for Miami.

Q: Do you expect that next summer, you will focus again with the U20 roster, or will the Lions be who you'd expect to spend much of your time with?

A: Well, after what the coach of the senior team told me, I will be selected again with the Lions but it also depends if I put the work in at Miami. But the coach is really positive about that, and I can't wait to be a part of the Lions.

Q: After you were released, what is your plan for the rest of August? When do you start practicing with the team?

A: I'm gonna start again the workouts next week till I leave for Miami. That means probably the 18th or the 19th.

Q: Have Miami's coaches given you things to work on before you arrive, or do they simply want you to rest after playing such heavy minutes?

A: They want me to rest a little bit but they haven't given me any particular things to work on.

Q: Have they told you how they plan to use you? It's unknown whether experienced Angel Rodriguez would be eligible to play this season, leading potentially to many available minutes.

Are you ready for that responsibility? You are both smaller point guards, would you be able to play together if needed?

A: Coach told me to be ready to play because of Angel's eligibility and I told him that I will be ready. To be honest, I've never seen Angel playing but I heard about him and I think we will be able to play together if needed. I don't see any problem.

Q: What do you think you need to work on, coming off of this summer's experience?

A: I will probably have to add some weight because the game is a bit different than in Europe. But I'm used to work on every parts of my game.

Q: There has been some inconsistency in your measurements, which combined with your age, has made some Miami fans apprehensive that you're undersized, even with some impressive looking photographs from the tournament. What do you currently stand (with or without shoes, please let us know)?

A: I am going to turn 18 the 16th of August, so I'm still 17 years. I'm between 5'10 and 5'11 without shoes.

Q: We've been told that you're considered a top 25 prospect in your class in Europe (Eurohopes.com has hinted that Manu will move the 15 to 25 range for the 1995 year when they update their rankings next month)? What made you want to play college basketball, and specifically, why did you then choose Miami? Has your relationship moved beyond initial contact with Coach Huger?

A: Yes, top 25. Well, I wanted to play in college because I think it's the best thing for me to improve my game and to reach another level. Other colleges wanted to offer me but I picked Miami because first, I think they have a very good coaching staff and second, because they play in best conference of the country.

Q: What will you miss most about home and what are you looking forward to most about Miami and living in the U.S.? Have you traveled to the States before? What are some of your favorite things - foods, shows, and so on - that you might miss or import over to the States?

A: I will miss my family the most and then my friends, but I'm looking forward to start a new life in the U.S. I'm really excited about that, moreover I've never been to the States! I'm not very difficult with the food so it won't be a problem about that.

Q: Thanks again for your time. Is there anything else you want to tell Canes fans?

A: Just wanna tell the Canes fans that they won't be disappointed to see me playing for the U!

SG McClellan a Natural Scorer

Inside The U
Chris Stock
July 28, 2013

Sheldon McClellan heard from a number of schools after he announced that he would be leaving Texas.

McClellan, a 6-foot-4 shooting guard who averaged 13.2 points as a sophomore last season for the Longhorns, took visits to Miami, LSU, and Oregon before picking the Hurricanes.

"Mainly (because of) Coach L (Jim Larrañaga)," McClellan said. "I liked the type of person he was, how he coached his players, and the players loved his enthusiasm. I wanted to play for somebody like that, someone who would encourage me."

Georgetown and Florida Gulf Coast were also among the suitors.

"It was very hard, but I had a long talk with my mom and God," McClellan said. "It was very hard, but I felt I made the right decision. It's going to make me better."

McClellan was still in Austin when Miami played their first two games of the NCAA Tournament, but could not attend the games due to NCAA rules. Still, he watched the games and liked what he saw.

"I liked their style of play and how everybody plays," he said. "I just like Coach L mainly. He's a motivating guy that's going to make me work hard."

Deciding to transfer wasn't easy especially knowing that he'd have to sit out a year. But now he's looking forward to using the time to improve his game.

"At first it was tough," he said. "I didn't really transfer because I didn't really want

to sit out a year, but I think it's going to benefit me in the end because it's going to make me work hard. I'm not going to just sit around and wait for next year. This offseason is going to make me better for next year and it starts right now."

McClellan was a double-digit scorer in each of his first two seasons in Texas averaging 13.5 points as a sophomore to go with 3.9 rebounds during a disappointing 16-18 season.

Although he has moved on, the Houston native enjoyed his time at UT.

"It was a fun program," he said. "Texas is a good school. The players were good and I respect everyone that was there. I just felt like I had to make a decision for me and my family. It's nothing against them, I love them guys and they're always in my corner."

McClellan showed he was a capable scorer eclipsing the 20-point mark eight times including a career-high 27 against Texas Tech on March 9. He scored in double figures in each of his first 14 games this past season averaging 15.6 before being taken out of the starting lineup.

He credits former NBA player John Lucas for his development over the years.

"He's been helping me and that's where I've gotten all of my skills from," McClellan said. "My dad wasn't really around so I was always playing by myself. Then I got with John Lucas and he brought me up."

Fellow Miami transfer Angel Rodriguez played against McClellan five times while with Big 12 conference foe Kansas State.

"He can shoot it, he can drive to the basket, he can pretty much do it all," Rodriguez said. "He's got good size and from what

I've seen when he was at Texas, he's good at coming off down screens and stuff like that. I'm sure Coach L and the coaching staff will have a good system in place for him."

Although he's scored in bunches, he hasn't always been effective shooting 41.5 percent from the floor and 29.2 percent from the 3-point line in his career. He shot just 38.2 percent as a sophomore, but will be using this year to improve his perimeter shooting.

"They've been helping me a lot with that," McClellan said. "I work on it every day for five minutes to see how many 3s I can make with my footwork and elevation. I'm seeing improvements."

The team has been practicing throughout the summer and McClellan likes what he sees.

"It's been great," he said. "They've been treating me like family ever since I came in. I feel comfortable already. We are already bonding on and off the court so everything is great right now."

PG Rodriguez Feels at Home at Miami

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 16, 2013

Not many people knew, but Angel Rodriguez played the final three months with a torn tendon in his left wrist.

Rodriguez had surgery immediately after his season with Kansas State came to an end in the first round of the NCAA Tournament in March.

"It affected me, I could barely practice because I couldn't dribble with that hand at all," Rodriguez said. "It definitely impacted my game in a negative way, but everybody gets hurt at some point. You just have to get through it especially late in the season you have to play, you can't let your team down."

It's been nearly three months since the surgery and Rodriguez remains limited during off-season workouts after transferring to Miami in May, but is pleased with the progress.

"It feels great honestly," he said. "We're still trying to strengthen it, but it feels great."

Rodriguez isn't able to participate in contact drills with the team, but is able to handle the ball while wearing a small brace.

"Now I'm doing more," he said. "They cleared me not too long ago to dribble and do all types of stuff. They are still being careful with contact and things like that. There's only two weeks lefts then we have a break to go home so there's no need to rush it. Everything has been going great, all of the rehab."

Rodriguez averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists as a sophomore earning second-team All-Big 12 honors before transferring to Miami, where the point guard originally from Puerto Rico played high school ball.

He's made a seamlessly smooth transition.

"I love it, I love it," Rodriguez said. "The coaching staff and players have made me feel like I've been here forever. They all have personalities, which makes it easier. I just love everything about here. I'm home."

One of the reasons Rodriguez chose to transfer to UM was to be closer to friends and family.

"It feels great seeing all of your friends supporting you," he said. "Every weekend they come see me or I see them. My mom already came to visit and when the second summer session finishes I'm going to go to Puerto Rico, then she's going to come again. It's been great seeing my people in such a small amount of time."

Rodriguez was expected to file a waiver with the NCAA to allow him to play this year, but he has not turned in the paperwork. He expects to do so "soon."

"We haven't even really applied yet for it," Rodriguez said. "But that's not something in our hands. We're going to leave it up to the NCAA and we'll see about that."

If Rodriguez does have to sit out, he plans to take the year off in stride.

"I'm not even stressing out honestly. When things are not in my hands I can't stress especially if it's not going to hurt me sitting out a year. I'm just trying to get used to this, get comfortable with the team, and we'll let the NCAA take care of the rest."

Another transfer, Texas guard Sheldon McClellan, will have to sit out this year and also has two years of eligibility remaining. Rodriguez played against McClellan five times as Big 12 conference foes with Rodriguez and the Wildcats winning four.

The two didn't know each other before, but have been getting to know each other since they've become teammates in South Florida.

"I never really talked to him when I was playing against him, but as soon as I knew he was coming here we've had a good relationship," Rodriguez said. "The first day we talked, we said, 'Who knew, what a small world,' but it's cool now."

Tonye Jekiri at home on basketball court

CaneSport.com
Staff
Oct. 24, 2012

The culture shock for Hurricane center Tonye Jekiri when he arrived in Miami from Nigeria three years ago?

All it took was the twist of a shower handle.

"I remember I took a shower, was wondering where the water was coming from," the freshman Jekiri said. "In Africa you go fetch it with a bucket, or you see a tank that stores the water at the back of the house. Over here I was asking where the water was coming from. I kept looking because I'd been in the shower for so long and the water just kept coming out, didn't run out. That was one thing I was shocked about it."

Another shock (literally): Nonstop electricity.

"I kept waiting for it to be turned off at some point," Jekiri said. "Certain hours of the day it would come on back home."

Other adjustments: Air conditioning and supermarkets with fresh produce. Jekiri was used to roadside markets and people running up to the family car hawking fruit and vegetables.

"The supermarkets there sell things like cologne, no food," he said, adding that "It was a change in food here. My native food I would normally eat soup ... and the way the rice was made with spices was way different - it was a change. It was difficult for me those first months. I had to adapt to everything.

"Even the roads - in Africa they have potholes, and you only have one major road that will take you to your office and

everything is on it; you're stuck in traffic for an hour or two."

Jekiri's road to Miami began at age 16 when one of his soccer coaches said based on his size he could be a basketball player in the States. Arrangements were made for him to be evaluated at an American camp.

"It was because of my height," Jekiri said. "One of my soccer coaches started working with me on fundamental things like catching the ball, dribbling."

Soon after Jekiri packed his 6-foot-11 frame into a coach seat for the 19-hour flight in hopes a high school coach would take a chance on him. On day 1 of the camp he got his first five-on-five real game experience.

"I was just running the floor and getting rebounds, that was it," Jekiri said. "Coaches liked me because of my energy. They said I ran nonstop."

A coach at Hialeah (FL) Champagnat Catholic asked him to attend the school, and Jekiri and his mother agreed.

"It was a small private school, and we liked that," Jekiri said. "The coach was there watching me, said he'd love me to come to their school. When I went back home my mom decided that would be good for me."

When Jekiri moved to Miami for good, he faced a big academic challenge.

"It was difficult - the first months I was struggling with the educational system," Jekiri said. "So many classes I hadn't taken in my country I had to take like history, and I didn't know much about the United States. And I had to take Spanish."

The transition on the basketball court wasn't much easier. Starting out as a junior he struggled.

"I couldn't even make a layup then," he said. "On game time I had butterflies bad, struggled for seven to eight games. After that I had a good season just running the floor and getting rebounds. I had little schools looking at me then, like FIU."

As a senior he made big strides, opening eyes by averaging 20 points, 12 rebounds and five blocked shots. It all started clicking for him, and he wound up rated the nation's No. 17 center prospect by ESPN.

"Miami, they came by during my senior season, watched me play and offered me a scholarship during the season," Jekiri said.

He wound up with 17 scholarship offers and took visits to George Mason, Clemson and Miami before settling on the Canes.

He says he chose UM because "The weather is the same as in Africa, warm. I've never experienced coldness, how that would affect my breathing. That was one reason I love Miami and decided to stay. Miami was my third visit, was the place I wanted to be and play ball."

Now Jekiri is focused on making a sizable impact when he's in games.

"I'll come off the bench, will help the team - I know I'm going to have a big role to play," Jekiri said. "I'll be getting rebounds, blocked shots."

He adds "I'm really happy to be a Hurricane. Putting on the jersey with my name on it, I was really happy. I just thank God for everything."

Jekiri Looking to Fill Role

InsideTheU
Chris Stock
Oct. 12, 2012

Tonye Jekiri is Miami's lone true freshman and is looking to be a key role player this season.

Jekiri is a 7-foot, 227-pound shot-blocking center and solid rebounder originally from Nigeria before he moved to Miami and played two seasons at Champagnat Catholic.

As a senior, he averaged 20 points, 12 rebounds, and five blocks per game leading his team to a Class 2A state final.

"The biggest adjustment (from high school to college) was going from weightlifting to practice, it's not the same in high school," Jekiri said. "In high school I never lifted weights and went to practice. From weightlifting to practice to class to study hall, it was really tough for me. But I've kind of gotten used to it."

Head coach Jim Larrañaga has been impressed with Jekiri's progress since he arrived in the summer.

"I like the progress Tonye Jekiri is making," Larrañaga said. "We have worked exclusively on him developing a great jump hook because I think that will be his greatest weapon throughout his college career. He's got a nice jump shot, but a guy with his size and versatility in and around the basket, to be able to just jump hook over people would be very, very effective and he's working very hard to develop that shot as his bread and butter move."

Since arriving at UM, Jekiri has been praised Larrañaga and the players for listening to instructions without any questions.

"With me playing basketball I'm still trying to learn because it is my third year playing basketball," Jekiri said. "I'm trying to learn rather than talking. I really believe you learn more when you listen instead of talking more. There's not too much I can say because they have been in the game more."

Jekiri is one of five post players on the team with three—Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadi, and Julian Gamble—leading the way as seniors.

"They really have showed me what it really takes to be a Hurricane player and how hard it is going to be for me even when I go ahead with more expectations when they leave, the coaches will be looking for me to step up and take that role," Jekiri said. "They have been really pushing me when it comes to practice and weightlifting. They have also told me about their past experiences and how they fought through all of the things, they have been a big help for me."

Jekiri is making sure he's improving daily not just for a role this season, but in the future when he'll have a larger role after the seniors depart.

"I really do think about that right now," he said. "Even when I come off the bench, it's still a big role for me. I always think about when I come into the game and how I'll have to step up. I always think about that and the future too when I'll have a bigger role."

To help Jekiri learn the game more, he spends time watching NBA and college games. In particular, he likes watching Kevin Garnett and Dwight Howard play.

"I like how they play, how they are leaders on their team and have really learned from them," said Jekiri, who also liked watching

Thomas Robinson and Jared Sullinger in college.

Miami hosts St. Leo on Nov. 2 at 7 p.m. in their lone exhibition game. Regular season action begins Nov. 9 as the Hurricanes look to make a run towards an NCAA tournament appearance.

"As a team my expectations is for us to get to the NCAA tournament and the Sweet 16, 8, or 4 and I think we have weapons to get there, we just have to put ourselves together," Jekiri said. "Mostly we want to win back our fans because we need our fans to support us in every game. As a player my expectation is stepping up in every game, filling the roles, and being aggressive in every game."



TM

University of Miami
Men's Basketball Clips

Program Highlights

Larrañaga: Old-school coach with new-world approach

CBS Sports.com
Gary Parrish
Feb. 13, 2013

Less than 24 hours after five players combined to make 15 3-pointers in a blow-out win over North Carolina that kept Miami perfect in the ACC, Jim Larrañaga was sitting on the patio of an Italian restaurant called Villagio, enjoying the weather, ordering salmon, discussing where his Hurricanes might land in the Associated Press Poll that would be released the next day.

I told him the top five seemed likely.

"Really?" he said.

At which point, I asked what he thought.

"Honestly, I never think about it," Larrañaga answered. "The only rankings that are important to me are the rankings of the KenPom.com stats in all of the categories that determine success or failure."

This struck me as interesting because, just a day earlier, I'd sat with two dozen other reporters and listened to Larrañaga detail his affection for advanced statistics. Now this 63-year-old supposed old-school coach was doing it again, in a different setting, while his wife, Liz, picked at a bowl of lentil soup. He was bucking stereotypes.

"I value those statistics," Larrañaga said. "I value them for motivation."

Jim Larrañaga has 20 winning seasons as a Division I head coach, a trip to the 2006 Final Four on his resume and the reputation of a highly-skilled tactician. His credibility has long been established. But when he arrived at Miami in April 2011 after 14 seasons at George Mason, this son of a Floridian and grandson of a Cuban immigrant didn't rely on past achievements to grab the attention of his new players. Instead, Larrañaga asked them questions about them, confident the answers would probably come as a surprise.

"When I took the job at Miami, I met with the team and the very first thing I asked is, 'How good do you guys want to be?'" Larrañaga said. "They were like, 'We

want to get to the Final Four! We want to win a national championship!' I said, 'OK. Well, here are some categories that are important.'"

Larrañaga mentioned defensive 3-point field goal percentage.

He asked his players where they thought they ranked.

"They said, 'Oh, we're pretty good,'" Larrañaga said. "So I asked, 'What is pretty good? There are 345 Division I teams. One is the best. The worst is 345. Where do you rank?'"

They told him they were in the top 100.

Larrañaga told them they were actually 224th.

"Then I told them, 'OK, turnovers are important,'" Larrañaga said. "'One is the best. The worst is 345. Where do you rank?'"

They told him around 100.

He told them they were actually 218th.

"The first thing I needed them to know is where they needed to improve, and those numbers showed them because they are totally objective numbers," Larrañaga said. "You can't argue with them. They show you what you need to work on. And, as a coach, if you don't know what you need to work on, then you're just practicing ... stuff. Yes, I want to practice what we're good at. But what I really want to practice is what we have to improve on to be really good, and I want my players to understand why we're doing it."

Those numbers forced Larrañaga's players to understand.

So they got to work immediately.

Now the Hurricanes are 37th nationally in defensive 3-point field-goal percentage, 17th nationally in offensive turnover percentage, and those are just two of the reasons why they're 19-3 overall and 10-0 in the ACC heading into Wednesday night's game at Florida State. Larrañaga and his staff took over, used advanced statistics to identify problems and then worked meticulously and relentlessly at solving those problems. That approach, combined with

an experienced and talented roster, helped create one of college basketball's best stories and reinforce one of Larrañaga's favorite expressions.

Think like a gardener; work like a carpenter.

"What does a gardener do?" Larrañaga asked. "He plants seeds. And then he nurtures those seeds, but it takes a while. And a carpenter? He's very precise. If he makes a chair, one leg can't be longer than the other three. He has to be precise. So when we're working with our players, we're constantly planting seeds but each day working on things that are very, very specific. Those things might not come to fruition in a week or a month. It might take years. But when we planted those seeds like gardeners, we knew that, if we worked like carpenters, we could get here."

Here is on top of the ACC at a school that had never been ranked higher than eighth before this week and has advanced in the NCAA tournament just once since the 2001-02 season. Miami has long been considered such a tough job that Missouri hardly cared that Frank Haith never finished better than tied for fifth in seven years in the ACC. Missouri hired Haith anyway because, the administrators figured, who could do better than fifth in the ACC at Miami?

Answer: Jim Larrañaga.

He took Haith's players, added point guard Shane Larkin, planted a bunch of seeds and started working like a carpenter -- on everything, but especially hard on the things that these same players struggled with before his arrival. Now Larrañaga has a team that's pretty good at guarding beyond the arc, really good at taking care of the ball and two games ahead of everybody else in a league typically dominated by a Duke program that the Hurricanes beat by 27 and a North Carolina program that they beat by 26.

Déjà U

Sports Illustrated

Luke Winn

March 10, 2013

I want you to do something. Before you put your head to the pillow tonight, I want you to sit on your bed, close your eyes and visualize yourself in tomorrow's game. Visualize it deeply and specifically, so you can feel yourself there. You're running through the plays in the scouting report. You're guarding the man you're going to guard. You're getting back and getting stops.

At Miami, there is practice and then there is mental practice. There is a coach and a stathead and a psychologist, and they are all the same person: 63-year-old Jim Larrañaga, the former orchestrator of mid-major magic at George Mason, gone south for a last hurrah in ACC basketball's tropical outpost. The psychologist in him believes that this is an essential part of preparation. In your mind you are making big plays.

Kenny Kadji, a 6'11" fifth-year senior who is the Hurricanes' starting power forward, is a believer. He has closed his eyes and won the jump ball, run pick-and-pop sets and knocked down threes. Sophomore point guard Shane Larkin uses it too. The 5'11" son of Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin has made big steals and reacted to defensive schemes for stopping him off ball screens. From a hotel bed in Raleigh in early February, he hit a game-winning shot at N.C. State. In real life he missed the last-second jumper and center Reggie Johnson tipped it in before the buzzer, but the scenario was eerily close to coming true. Durand Scott, the 6'5" senior combo guard who is the team's heart and soul, is not too cool for this practice, either. He has visualized the experience of winning, of students' storming the court at BankUnited Center and his surfing atop the crowd.

You could say that Miami has not been here before, and that would be true. The Hurricanes are in the running for a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament, yet no one on their grizzled roster—the average age of their top six rotation players is 22.5—has ever appeared in the Big Dance. They are 14-2 in the ACC and have clinched a share of the school's first-ever ACC title. They routed No. 1 Duke by 27 points in Coral Gables on Jan. 23, after which their students stormed the floor, and they were one shot shy of taking the Blue Devils to overtime last Saturday at Cameron Indoor Stadium in a 79-76 loss. Larrañaga had never beaten a No. 1, or coached a team ranked this high (No. 6 after the loss at Duke), or presided over regular-season games with this much national attention.

But he has been making use of a concept a good friend wrote about in a 1996 book called *Golf Is Not a Game of Perfect*:

A golfer can mentally simulate the experience of reaching his goal.... If he does it vividly enough, he can in effect fool the mind and body into thinking that the experience actually happened. Later, when he actually comes close to that goal on the golf course, he will not experience discomfort or disorientation, he will instead have a sense of déjà vu, a comforting and calming feeling that he has been in this situation before and handled it successfully.

The Hurricanes have not been here before, but they're playing as if they have. You could say that they've fooled themselves into becoming college basketball's most surprising team.

Larrañaga's belief in visualization dates back 23 years to a tennis court at Boar's Head Resort Sports Club in Charlottesville, Va. Then an assistant under Terry Holland at Virginia, Larrañaga was distracted from his match because of what he heard from a kids' lesson on an adjacent court. That coach was telling his charges to picture their strokes—to see their racket in slow motion, catching and throwing a topspin forehand back over the net—and Larrañaga was so fascinated that he walked over and introduced himself.

The coach was Bob Rotella, then an assistant professor of psychology at Virginia. He would soon start helping the Cavaliers' basketball team at Larrañaga's behest, and later gain fame as the author of best-selling golf books and as an adviser to some of the biggest names on the PGA Tour, from Tom Kite to Davis Love III to Rory McIlroy. Rotella is a believer in having goals, which to him are synonymous with dreams. Without dreams, he has written, athletes lack the emotional fuel to thrive.

Rotella witnessed the genesis of George Mason's dream: On Oct. 30, 2005, he stood before the Patriots and told them to close their eyes, bow their heads and imagine what they wanted to happen that season. Senior guard Lamar Butler was encouraged to share his thoughts with the room. "I dreamt that we went to the Final Four," he said. Rotella asked the rest of the players if they could get on board. The answer was affirmative. He then told them that instead of watching powerhouses—the Dukes and Carolinas and UConn—on TV from a fan's perspec-

tive, they needed to start sizing them up as future opponents. Five months later, as a No. 11 seed in the NCAA tournament, the Pats reached the season's final weekend in one of the most inspiring performances in tournament history.

But only an infinitesimal share of sports dreams get George Masoned. The rest go unrealized or are deferred for so long that they risk abandonment. Which is what happened to this one: In the spring of 1986, just after Larrañaga left Virginia to take his first head-coaching job, at Bowling Green, he took out the small leather-bound notebook he always kept in his back pocket, for recording everything from recruiting details to favorite quotes, and wrote: One day, I want to be an ACC coach.

It was a reasonable goal for a charismatic, well-respected former assistant on two ACC Final Four teams. But 11 seasons went by at Bowling Green, then 14 more at George Mason. Had Larrañaga been 46 when he took the Patriots on their dream run, doors would have opened—"Any job he wanted," longtime assistant Chris Caputo figures. But Larrañaga was 56, and after passing on an offer from Providence, his alma mater, in 2008, it looked as if he might remain in Fairfax, Va., until he retired and they put his name on the court. The offer from Miami, which came as a surprise after Frank Haith left for Missouri in April 2011, was likely to be Larrañaga's last chance.

When you realize a dream you need a new one. Or many new ones. Each off-season, Larrañaga makes a long list of goals in neat cursive. He did 20 for 2012-13, and on a late February afternoon in his office, he revisited them with a reporter:

1. Have a great recruiting class.
2. Win the ACC regular season.
3. Win the ACC tournament.
4. Win the NCAA tournament.
5. Develop a stronger defensive team....

Had Larrañaga gone public with those goals last November, he might have elicited eye rolls. His first Miami team, in 2011-12, went to the NIT after coping with injuries, suspensions and the specter of the NCAA's investigation into booster Nevin Shapiro, in which Haith was implicated. Many felt the Canes were a sleeper in '12-13, until they lost a home exhibition to Division II Saint Leo and their second real game to Florida Gulf Coast. But Larrañaga chooses not to reflect on those moments. Recently he called Johnson in for a meeting, the chief purpose of which was to remind him how special it was that he had two game-winners this season (against N.C. State and Virginia). "If I talk about it, he dwells on it, and he starts thinking good thoughts," Larrañaga explains. "That's how you get a guy's mind right."

Before this story goes completely mental, know that the Larrañaga Method is binary. To focus only on his positive psychology would be to ignore his equally important obsession with analytics. "Some people stay in one realm," says longtime assistant Eric Konkol, "but the fascinating thing about Coach is that he uses both the right brain and the left."

Larrañaga was an economics major at Providence, and began the practice of hand-charting points per possession in the 1970s. He cares more about kenpom.com efficiency rankings than poll rankings. Caputo, whom he entrusts with opposition scouting, relies heavily on advanced stats from kenpom and Synergy Sports Technology. "Coach, and all of us, believe that numbers tell a story," Caputo says. "They don't lie."

Larrañaga can tell his own story through numbers. Five was what mattered when he was at Archbishop Molloy High in Queens: He needed to make the starting five to get recruited because he couldn't afford college without a scholarship. Fifty cents is what he had for lunch, and he bought the same thing every day: 10 Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, which somehow helped him grow into a 6'4½" forward. Two is the division that Bob Cousy, the coach of Larrañaga's dream school, Boston College, had suggested he play in after coming to scout him at Molloy as a senior. Thirty-nine and 28 are what he scored for Providence as a freshman and sophomore, respectively, in his first two wins over B.C., prompting Cousy to admit he'd made a mistake. Numbers, Larrañaga says, "were how I evaluated and judged myself."

When he convened what he called a "board meeting" with his players last April in Miami's conference room, he wrote in a column on a whiteboard: 9, 4, 2, 1. They were the adjusted defensive efficiency rankings, respectively, of Kentucky, Kansas, Ohio State and Louisville, the teams that made it to the Final Four. Miami had been 73rd. The message was clear: "You need to be in the top 10 to have a shot at a national championship next year."

Tenth was the Hurricanes' rank at week's end. They have locked down the interior, led by 6'10" sixth-year senior Julian Gamble, who was No. 1 in the ACC in block percentage at 10.0. Larkin, meanwhile, is their master of anticipation on the perimeter, ranking fourth in the conference in steal percentage (3.42). For all this talk of visualization, the one thing even Larkin could not see coming was a reunion with Larrañaga, who had recruited him at George Mason before Larkin signed with DePaul. But

Larkin chose to leave Chicago before his freshman year started, citing a family medical issue. He did a last-minute search for a school closer to his Orlando home. He called up Larrañaga a few days before classes began at Miami in August 2011 and asked two things: "Do you have a scholarship available, and do you need a point guard?" The coach said yes to both. That was how he landed the three-star recruit who through Sunday was averaging 13.8 points and 4.3 assists and will likely be the ACC Player of the Year.

Larrañaga is playing tennis again. Dual hip-replacement surgeries allowed him to pick the game back up after a 10-year hiatus, and he gets in a quick match at Riviera Country Club before meeting his wife, Liz, for a dinner date in the clubhouse. "How'd it go?" Liz says. Jim shrugs. He is not offering up numbers. "I broke a good sweat."

Their route to a table is accompanied by smatterings of applause from club members. The Riviera is a two-minute drive from the Hurricanes' campus, and alumni appreciate that basketball is thriving at the U during a dark time for football. The Canes had beaten Virginia 54-50 in a thriller the previous night, and the NCAA's notice of allegations in the Shapiro scandal dropped this morning. A Miami alum older than Larrañaga compliments the coach for handing out doughnuts to students waiting in line for tickets. When Larrañaga asks how the man is, he replies, "Well, we're both here, and that's the most important thing, right?"

The dinner conversation centers on how, exactly, Larrañaga got here. The Michael Jordan fantasy camps he worked in Las Vegas following Mason's Final Four run created connections. In Vegas his Cuban ancestry had helped him strike up a friendship with Jose and Jorge Mas, two Cuban-American millionaires from Miami who participated in the camp. Jose would later put in pro-Larrañaga calls to members of Miami's board. And at the camp he co-coached a team with Doc Rivers, who vouched for him during the hiring process.

Larrañaga also explains what loosened his ties to George Mason. In March 2011, his friend Alan Merten, the school's long-time president, announced plans to retire, and Larrañaga told his wife that it "might be a sign that we should look around too." He had been petitioning athletic director Tom O'Connor for a better deal—Larrañaga believed his assistants were "grossly underpaid," and Shaka Smart's new, \$1.2 million-per-year deal at league-rival VCU dwarfed Larrañaga's \$525,000 base salary. The Hurricanes interviewed Larrañaga on April 11 and made their offer 10 days later: a contract reported to be worth \$1.3 million per year for five years. Mason didn't formally counter until Larrañaga was in the airport that night, ready to board his flight to Miami. By then, his mind was made up.

I ask what would have happened had Mason offered a better deal, more quickly. He ponders the question and says, "It would have been like, Do I want to stay [at George Mason] with a great contract ... or hope that I might get an offer in a week from Miami? I'm a pretty conservative guy, so...."

Liz stops him there. "That's too hypothetical," she says. "Anyway, it worked out for the best."

This is true. The assistants got paid. Miami is having a dream season. Liz played golf today, and she finally got Jim to Florida. They owned a vacation house in Sarasota, which she loved to use while he was at Mason, but ... "I could never get him down there. He never had the time."

As a kid in the '50s, he had the time. The annual Larrañaga family vacation, as he tells it, was a long-haul drive from the Bronx. They would stop in Kissimmee to visit his mother's sister, then continue on to Key West, where his father, the son of a Cuban immigrant, had been born and raised. They would take the old Route 1 through Miami, and one time, about 18 miles south of the university's campus, they stopped at a strange attraction called the Coral Castle. The legend was that a 5-foot Latvian immigrant, defying laws of physics, had sculpted the structure out of blocks of limestone, many weighing several tons, as a tribute to an unrequited love. He put a hand-carved sign outside that read, YOU WILL BE SEEING UNUSUAL ACCOMPLISHMENT.

This is Jim Larrañaga's return trip. After dinner he and Liz walk out into the twilight, on a path alongside the golf course. Small children are rolling down an embankment near the putting green, letting out small whoops of joy. Near the driving range, grade schoolers play pickup soccer, darting around divots and through pools of lamplight. "Could you imagine," Liz asks, "having this as a kid?" The setting is an idyll, like something they closed their eyes, visualized and tricked themselves into believing was real.

Obsession with stats drives Miami's Larrañaga

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 11, 2013

Jim Larrañaga is a self-described numbers nerd. Always has been. He loved arithmetic in grade school and majored in math and economics at Providence College, where he was the basketball team's leading scorer his sophomore and junior years.

If there was a stat or shooting percentage to be calculated, he was all over it. When he and his wife, Liz, go out to dinner with other couples, he figures out the tip.

It's no wonder, then, that the University of Miami men's basketball coach is obsessed with kenpom.com, a college basketball statistics website run by Ken Pomoroy, a Salt Lake City meteorologist who compiles a statistical archive that analyzes all 345 Division I teams on a possession-by-possession basis. There isn't a news conference that goes by in which Larrañaga doesn't refer to kenpom.com. He even has the site's mobile app on his iPhone for whenever he gets the urge to check his favorite stat: points per possession.

Larrañaga, 63, also was one of the first college coaches to use Synergy Sports, an Internet-based video-scouting index that logs every possession of every game, allowing coaches to zero in on team and player tendencies. You want to compare a player's spot-up shooting percentage with a dribble and without a dribble? No problem. Percentages going left? Going right? It's all there.

The coach leaves nothing to chance. He writes everything down. His entire life over the past 20 years - every appointment, practice, personal goal - is chronicled in his Franklin-Covey daily planners. His bible is Stephen R. Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Larrañaga's organizational skills, which he also requires from his staff, helped the Hurricanes (24-6, 15-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) go from afterthought to major player this season.

They were No. 2 in The Associated Press poll, the highest ranking in school history. They knocked off then-No. 1 Duke by 27 points, the first time a UM team had beaten a No. 1. They became the first team since the ACC's inception in 1953 to beat Duke and North Carolina by 25 points in the same season. They drew a record five sellout home crowds. And, they are the No. 1 seed in the ACC tournament after winning the regular-season conference title Saturday with a 62-49 win over Clemson.

Larrañaga's staff is atypical. Most teams have an assistant who coaches guards, an assistant who coaches big men, and they rotate the scouting duties. Larrañaga takes a page from football. Eric Konkol is his offensive coordinator. Michael Huger is the defensive coordinator. Chris Caputo is the master scout, fully responsible for the scouting reports for every game.

The idea, according to all three assistants, is uniformity in terminology and message. They have found that players like routine and familiarity. Rather than have every third scouting report written by a different coach, they are all in Caputo's language.

All three coaches followed Larrañaga to Miami from George Mason. "We moved the store south,"

Konkol said.

The Miami Herald took a peek at how Larrañaga's staff prepares for a game. Answer: Details, details, details.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

It is Tuesday afternoon, March 5, and the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets are coming to town to play the Hurricanes the next day. The team has gathered at BankUnited Center for a 3 p.m. practice.

In case any of the players are wondering, this is "Practice #82." They can find that out on the upper-right corner of their Daily Practice Plan, a typed down-to-the-minute practice schedule listed in Roman numeral format:

I. Meet/Video.

II. Stretch (10).

III. Thought of the Day (2). "Get low. Stay low on defense."

IV. Fundamentals. 1. 2-Line Full Court Passing (2),

2. Celtic drill (2), 3. Rebound-war on the boards (5).

V. Defense. Shell drill. Defend Georgia Tech.

VI. Offense. Fast ball movement. Man movement. Pass to Post.

VII. Scrimmage.

VIII. Shoot 3's (15).

IX. Stretch.

DeQuan Jones, who played for Miami last season and is now with the Orlando Magic, is in town for a game against the Heat. He shows up at Hurricanes practice with Magic teammates Kyle O'Quinn and Mo Harkless. They watch and remark on the intensity and organization of the workout.

"Coach L and his staff are super organized and strategic," Jones said. "Everything is calculated down to a T and broken down. We'd spend a block of time on each fundamental. They'd break down details like, 'This guy shoots from the right 70 percent of the time,' stuff like that. As a player, that paints a picture of what you're guarding, what to expect. Almost to the point you know what the offensive player's going to do before they even do it. It made the games easy. That's one thing I noticed. Practice was always the hardest thing.

"They slowed the game down and broke down the Xs and Os. This coaching staff made me a better player, made me respect the game."

Larrañaga's practices are spirited. Caputo is crouched on the sideline, yelling instructions to the "Green" scout team. Konkol stands at mid-court, coaching the "White" team starters. Huger, 42 but still a lethal scorer, often plays guard with the scout team. He has experience from his days playing under Coach L at Bowling Green. Larrañaga, wearing a heating pad strapped to his back, whistles, claps a lot and encourages his players.

"Trey, I like how you accelerated past that screen!" "Jules, real good!"

When he has to, Larrañaga gets tough. After Kenny Kadji missed a mid range jumper in a scrimmage, Larrañaga yelled: "You take difficult shots and you don't have to. You don't need to dribble. It doesn't prove anything. You missed the shot. Keep it simple!"

The scrimmage goes to five points. On this day, the scout team beats the starters 5-1 - an omen of the 71-69 loss to come the next night.

As the practice is wrapping up, Larrañaga says someone has to hit a half-court shot before they

can leave. The players laugh and begin heaving shots from mid-court. Durand Scott makes it. Practice over.

After practice, the players receive one of Caputo's famously meticulous full-color, 17-page scouting reports. Players are instructed to study the report before they go to sleep that night. The first two pages are personnel reports.

The scouting report on Duke's Ryan Kelly before he lit up Miami for a career-high 36 points read: "We expect him to play and be excited about it. MUST MATCH HIS INTENSITY! Excellent on offensive boards. Make him a dribbler. Prefers left shoulder in paint."

The report on Michigan State's Keith Appling before their game Nov. 28, 2012: "Left to basket, Right for either pull-up or rim. Gambler on D, MUST BE BALL TOUGH. Push in transition. MUST STOP THE BALL NO HEAD OF STEAM!"

The report then includes summaries of the opposing offense and defense.

BREAKING IT ALL DOWN

On the Spartans' defense: "MSU Defense is #8 in the NCAA in Points Per Possession. They are very much a pack defensive team with the exception of Dawson running through passing lanes for dunks. They do a very good job guarding the ball and beating screens. We must be patient and wait for our screens to be set."

Next is a sheet with team stats, best and worst free-throw shooters, best three-point shooters and best offensive rebounders. There is a list of the team's top 15 to 20 offensive plays. Then, 10 pages of those plays diagrammed.

"The players don't have to know all the stats and information, but we do as coaches," said Caputo, who attended Archbishop Molloy High School in New York, the same school as Larrañaga. "My job is to condense it all. I want to give them an edge, a few hints of what to expect."

The game preparation typically takes two days. Caputo spends 12 hours watching tape of the opponent, and then with the help of the staff videographer Jaime Vathieil, puts together a 20-minute "long edit" for Larrañaga and a 12-minute shorter version for the players.

On March 4, the staff met at 9:30 a.m., watched tape and started to strategize. They could tell from the tape that Georgia Tech's freshmen were playing better now than the last time they played. At 3 p.m., the players got a three-minute "Sneak Peek" video of Georgia Tech. "We just want them to see the team's identity. Are they great offensive rebounders? Do they press? Are they a transition team?" Konkol explained.

"The key," Caputo said, "is making the players feel comfortable and confident. We try to keep the same routine for every game. We set up the chairs the same way, do everything at exactly the same time. The calmer we can make them, the better they will perform when the lights come on."

Larrañaga finds he's still fashionable in Miami

Washington Post
Mark Giannotto
Feb. 28, 2013

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Challenging transition

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

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

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

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

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

To manufacture excitement at Miami, where

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

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

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

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

"He can relate to anybody"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parallel successes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larrañaga's use of analytics gives Miami secret weapon

USA TODAY

Nicole Auerbach

March 1, 2013

Jim Larrañaga is a storyteller.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The use of such tools has propelled Miami to unprecedented success in the Atlantic Coast Conference this season. The Hurricanes' 13-0

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This lingo, while new to the Hurricanes, is

far from foreign from those at George Mason, where Larrañaga spent 14 seasons before coming to Miami in April 2011.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Crunch time

ESPN The Magazine

Peter Keating

August 13, 2012

Terms you'll need to know for this story

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY

For a team: Points allowed per 100 possessions. For a player: Points his team allows per 100 possessions while he is on the floor.

EFFECTIVE HEIGHT

The combined height of a team's centers and power forwards. Measured in inches above or below the national average baseline.

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY

For a team: Points scored per 100 possessions. For a player: Points produced per 100 possessions.

PACE

Possessions per 40 minutes. Faster pace means more possessions in a game.

PLUS/MINUS

A team's point differential when a particular player is on the floor.

TEMPO-FREE STATS

Statistics adjusted for possessions to allow for accurate comparisons across teams.

ONCE IN HIS LIFE, in third grade, Jim Larrañaga asked his father for help with his math homework. The elder Larrañaga, a very private man who never talked at home about his work as an insurance adjuster, looked at the assignment and handed it back to the youngster. "You're going to have to learn that on your own," he said. Larrañaga, now 62, has been learning on his own ever since.

You probably know him as the gregarious hoops lifer who shot to national prominence during March Madness in 2006, when his George Mason Patriots made the Final Four as an 11 seed. A Bronx, N.Y., native with a receding hairline, lively eyes and a restless mind, Larrañaga has fully earned the kind of old-school plaudits that come a man's way over 29 years of successful head coaching: motivator, philosopher, occasional cutup. But there's something more to Larrañaga's approach, and it's nearly unique. The timeless lessons of basketball fundamentals aren't enough of a foundation for him; he has always wanted to ground his teachings in empirical data. "The better you can assess a situation and figure out how to improve it, the better you'll be against teams that don't have that ammunition," he says.

So Larrañaga, who majored in economics at Providence College and graduated in '71, started tracking what we would now call advanced metrics 30 years ago. And as new hoops stats have spread around the Internet, he has embraced, absorbed and applied them with the kind of zeal you'd expect from an enthusiast one-third his age. Larrañaga logs on to KenPom.com and RealTimeRPI.com and WarrenNolan.com. His assistants crunch updated numbers in real time during games. He quotes stats he cares about to reporters. He posts them for his players to see and to focus their goals. "What

your mind dwells upon, your body acts upon," he likes to say.

In short, no other college basketball coach uses statistical analysis more thoroughly to connect strategy to tactics. And this season, his first at the University of Miami, he is delivering what may be his greatest performance yet. With players he didn't recruit, facing a schedule he didn't set, Larrañaga has led a team plagued by injuries, scandal and death to a 15-9 record (through Feb. 17). Indeed, with their Feb. 5 win over Duke, the Hurricanes, who haven't been to the Big Dance since 2008, put themselves right on the NCAA bubble. "You can see the team morphing, kind of like watching Optimus Prime change in slow motion from a junky truck into his magnificent robotic form," says Josh Kaufman, a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Miami who co-runs Category 6, a blog covering all things Hurricanes. "And Coach Larrañaga is how this team plays."

IT WASN'T EASY for Larrañaga to leave George Mason, where he amassed 273 wins, three CAA championships and five NCAA tournament berths in his 14 years on the bench. GMU had grown to love him not just as a coach but as the kind of teacher you always remember. He's constantly reading and watching movies, quoting everything from Aristotle to Abraham Lincoln to the movie *Drumline* to Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*. He routinely posts a Thought of the Day for his team; this season's first: "Begin with the end in mind."

In 2008, Larrañaga turned down the chance to coach at Providence, his alma mater. But last year, George Mason president Alan Merten (and Larrañaga's best friend at the university) retired and Miami came at him offering \$1.3 million a year. Larrañaga, who always wanted to coach in the ACC, realized that the Canes had a solid core of talent in a great location with access to huge resources in a conference with just two dominant teams, and that Miami was just waiting to be resuscitated. In a word, the program was undervalued, just as so many of Larrañaga's George Mason recruits had been before they shocked the country with their stunning tournament run.

As soon as Larrañaga arrived at the U, his new team faced a wave of problems. Center Reggie Johnson hurt his knee and missed a month of the season. Big man Julian Gamble tore an ACL -- out for the year. Guard DeQuan Jones got caught up in Miami's booster scandal -- his family was accused of taking \$10,000 to commit to the U in 2008 -- and sat out the first 10 games. And in a different category entirely, guard Malcolm Grant's 36-year-old brother, Yatti, died of a heart attack in December. (Larrañaga missed his first practice in several years to go to the funeral.)

"It's all about the percentages. Ten turnovers in a 50-possession game is just as bad as 20 turnovers in a 100-possession game."

-- Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga

Still, Larrañaga pressed on; he would install his hybrid system -- coaching integrated with metric analysis -- with whoever was able to play. Larrañaga's approach starts with bas-

ketball box scores. Points, rebounds and assists are hoops' version of batting average, home runs and RBI -- numbers that most of us reflexively value because news accounts have tracked them for so long. But simple counting statistics are hugely influenced by the pace at which a game is played, and to truly measure these stats' value at either end of the floor, you need to adjust for possessions. For example, this season, Wisconsin is giving up 50.3 points per game, the fewest of any team in the country. But the Badgers play at a crawl, averaging just 58.6 possessions per game. Ohio State is actually more efficient on defense, surrendering just 81.2 points per 100 possessions, versus 82.2 for Wisconsin. "It's all about the percentages," Larrañaga says. "Ten turnovers in a 50-possession game is just as bad as 20 turnovers in a 100-possession game."

Former UNC coach Dean Smith invented per-possession, or "tempo-free," stats, and stathead Ken Pomeroy popularized them on his website (KenPom.com). Once you learn about adjusting for pace, the concept seems obvious. But most college coaches aren't keeping up. In October, for example, the CAA Hoops blog surveyed conference coaches, who had to compete against Larrañaga for years, and was shocked to find most coaches pay very little attention to tempo-free stats. "I care about rebounds, turnovers, free throw percentage," Drexel's Bruiser Flint said. "All that other stuff is a little too much. My favorite is what a kid does over 40 minutes. Well, he doesn't play 40 minutes for a reason!" Flint's assertion makes as much sense as disliking on-base percentage because a player gets more than one plate appearance a year. But even that sentiment was light-years ahead of Georgia State's Ron Hunter, who said: "I don't look at stats. I don't read newspapers. People keep trying to tell me and I don't want to know." So the stats revolution hasn't quite arrived everywhere just yet.

Larrañaga, of course, applied it immediately to the Hurricanes. While Miami's slow pace last season obscured some of the team's issues, when the new coach looked at pace-adjusted stats, turnovers jumped off the page: Miami gave the ball away on nearly 21 percent of possessions in 2010-11, ranking 218th among 345 D1 teams. Play had gotten so bad that the Canes had to run trick plays to inbound the ball. So at one of his very first practices, Larrañaga put the team through a drill called TOBE: turnover basketball elimination. It starts with Larrañaga putting 12 balls on a rack and letting his players scrimmage. Whenever anyone commits a turnover, he eliminates one ball. After the 12th ball is gone, the players run for the rest of practice, whether for half an hour or two and a half hours.

The Hurricanes started those earliest practices the way they played a year ago: sloppy. But as balls vanished from the rack, play got crisper, and hazardous passes disappeared. As the season neared, the Canes rarely had to run at all. "If you give players a reason, they'll change their own behavior and make better decisions," Larrañaga says. "I call it incentive thinking."

Crunch time (cont.)

Now inbounds passes are accurate, and players have vanquished another Miami bugaboo: dribbling into a corner and hanging around until a double-team converges. This season, Miami has soared to 53rd in pace-adjusted turnover rankings, losing the ball on just 18.4 percent of possessions. Of course, that's good coaching and good execution, both driven by data that interpreted turnovers as a priority. "You start to learn any new language through vocabulary, word by word, and eventually the words flow together," Larrañaga says.

Larrañaga's next change was to go beyond adjusting box score stats to charting what's not in box scores at all. He's been working on this for three decades, since he was an assistant to Terry Holland at Virginia. "We had a guy named Kenton Edelin, who was not a good shooter, who was a terrible free throw shooter, who statistically didn't appear to be very good at all," Larrañaga says. "But when he was in the game, we did better. He was so tenacious defensively, rebounding and shot-blocking, and on offense he never took a shot. So defensively, we were better, and offensively, he was screening to our best shooters and getting them open so they could take the shots."

Eventually, Larrañaga started taking notes on how well his teams did when different players and combinations of players were on the floor. Which is to say, he embraced what statheads now call lineup plus/minus -- a stat that captures the cumulative impact of harassing opponents, inspiring teammates and other seemingly unquantifiable skills to the extent that they actually change the course of a game. It's helped clue Larrañaga in to the contributions of low-scoring but high-intensity defenders like Shane Larkin at Miami and Andre Cornelius at George Mason. "Everybody wants to look at his own stats, but while you were scoring 20, your team might have been outscored," Larrañaga explains. "And when you look at lineups, another player may have scored only four points, but the team was plus-12 when he was in the game."

Coaches use plus/minus and tempo-free stats to tailor their goals to their program. Tom Izzo at Michigan State and Blaine Taylor at Old Dominion believe in maximizing the number of their teams' possessions, and you'll see those schools post huge offensive rebounding percentages season after season. Larrañaga has studied the statistical profiles of teams that make the NCAA tournament and found that their field goal percentage allowed is typically first, second or third in their conference and that they're usually particularly efficient at stopping threes. So everything Larrañaga's players do at both ends of the floor is keyed to holding opponents to under 40 percent shooting and under 30 percent on three-point attempts.

On offense, Larrañaga instructs his players to rotate the ball until they create a high-percentage shot; he'll often say things like, "What good is it if you're open if you miss eight of 10 from that spot?" He wants them to attempt no more than 17 to 18 three-pointers per game, or about one-third of their total shots, in part to limit long rebounds and fast breaks for opponents. And

you won't find the Canes crashing the boards en masse. Larrañaga would rather have them get back after missed shots, again to clamp down on easy breaks for the other side.

Defensively, Larrañaga is known for a disruptive scheme he calls the Scramble -- a man-to-man scheme with trapping options designed to force opponents to consume time and make sub-optimal decisions. If defenders anticipate and rotate well enough, they avoid getting caught in the kind of three-on-four and two-on-three breakaways that commonly puncture higher-risk defenses. And because it slows games down, you don't need great athletes to run it. Instead, it requires players with a keen sense of where the ball is headed.

Larrañaga is just starting to implement it at Miami, but already the scheme is giving the Hurricanes a hustling vibe very different from last year's zone defense. And the team is starting to meet Larrañaga's goal of compelling bad shots without gambling. In five consecutive ACC wins from late January through mid-February, Miami held opponents to just 37.8 percent shooting. Again, that's good coaching in a classical sense and good execution, but all focused on goals set by Larrañaga's statistical research. "Our players know our goals," he says. "If the other team shoots 42 percent, even if we win, we didn't meet our goals."

HE'S NOT DONE innovating. Larrañaga uses Synergy Sports' video-retrieval and indexing software to scan games to find opponents' strengths, weaknesses and tendencies. "[Assistant coach] Chris Caputo gets all the stats, on our opponents and ourselves, to see how we need to match up and at what tempo," Larrañaga says. "For example, a player may be dynamite going to his right, but influence him to go to his left and he might be 20 percent less effective." Another assistant, Michael Huger, fits together the best groups of players to exploit potential matchup advantages and helps monitor efficiency during games. "At halftime, he's able to tell me, 'These five guys were plus-6, and they were the only group that was effective,'?" Larrañaga says. "We then ask whether that was because of their size, or who they were guarding, or how they were beating the other team's zones, or whatever. We try to figure that out and apply it."

Add it all up and you get a team with a distinctive statistical profile that's suddenly become hugely dangerous for this spring. With their trapping defense slowing the pace, the Canes average just 64.6 possessions a game, ranking 261st in the nation. But because the team protects the ball so well and takes good shots, it scores 110 points per 100 possessions, the 45th-highest efficiency in the NCAA. And despite playing makeshift lineups, Miami has improved its three-point defense from 224th in the country last year to 112th while remaining stout inside. Overall, opponents score just 95 points per 100 possessions against the Hurricanes, ranking them 74th in defensive efficiency.

This is a team with numbers reminiscent of Larrañaga's George Mason squads. In fact, take

Larrañaga's last 10 teams and shuffle their stat lines, and you won't be able to pick out which one was put up by this year's Hurricanes. In less than one season, he's imprinted on Miami the statistical templates that made George Mason a winner.

And there's more to come in the off-season. For one thing, Larrañaga has barely begun recruiting athletes to Coral Gables. At George Mason, he found players undervalued by other programs, and year after year, his teams won despite a lack of height. "His recruiting approach was Moneyball,?" says Peter Boettke, a professor of economics and philosophy at George Mason and a former AAU coach. "He got exceptionally talented players who were overlooked not for skill or accomplishment but because they were slightly off the expected body type for major-conference players. And most of them stayed all four years and bought completely into Coach L's system."

In contrast, Larrañaga is stepping into a program that has underachieved in recent years but never lacked for big men. This year, the Canes' effective height is 2.8 inches above average, giving them the 23rd-tallest inside presence in the country. Now he gets to see who else he can bring aboard, and letting Larrañaga pitch Miami is like giving Billy Beane the keys to the Yankees' vault.

Moreover, next season will be the first time Larrañaga helps choose Miami's nonconference opponents. Last May, at the first ACC meetings Larrañaga attended, Virginia Tech coach Seth Greenberg asked him how George Mason, coming out of the CAA, managed to gain so many at-large bids to the NCAA tournament. Larrañaga claims he hadn't planned on saying much, but he launched into an explanation of how he and his staff, led by assistant coach Eric Konkol, had conducted a mathematical study of NCAA invitations and RPI. "We found that bids are determined not just by who you beat but who you schedule," he explained. "As much as possible, we avoided scheduling the teams likely to end up in the lowest category of RPI." Further, he noted, his staff looked to face opponents who had the potential to be surprisingly good: "If we beat them and they ended up in the top 50 in the country, that would be a great win on our resume." So George Mason routinely played opponents from outside power conferences that nonetheless went on to post impressive seasons, like Harvard and Duquesne last year and Dayton and Creighton in 2009-10.

As Larrañaga spoke, his fellow ACC coaches listened intently. Their conference ranked 16th in nonconference strength of schedule in 2010-11 and sent four teams to the NCAA tournament. The Big East, which ranked first, sent 11. Mike Krzyzewski, who happens to be two years older than Larrañaga, said it best: "We need to be listening to the old man."

It's either that or learn it on your own.

The leadership style of Jim Larrañaga

Washington Post
Jena McGregor
March 18, 2013

Selection Sunday is over, and the University of Miami ended the day with a No. 2 seed in the NCAA men's basketball tournament, which ties the record for highest seed in the Miami Hurricane's history. On Sunday, the school — known far more for its football team than its hoops squad — won its very first ACC championship. And as March Madness heats up this week, some bracketologists are betting the Canes could make the Final Four, which would be a first for the team.

What changed? The team has some key players, of course — point guard Shane Larkin being the most critical. But many are looking to the Hurricanes' 63-year-old coach, Jim Larrañaga, as the man behind the team's success. It's just the second season for Larrañaga, who formerly coached at George Mason University, and he inherited a Miami program that had its share of distractions. Yet with a mix of management changes, extreme organizational focus on details, and a belief in coaching the players he has, Larrañaga seems to have turned the team around.

One of the smartest things Larrañaga did when moving from George Mason, where he led the mid-market team to the Final Four in a surprising run, was to take his coaching staff with him. The move itself is not that unconventional, but the roles he gave them are. According to the Miami Herald, Larrañaga sets up his staff differently than other teams, which typically have assistants that each coach different positions and rotate through the scouting responsibilities.

Larrañaga, meanwhile, has an offensive coordinator, a defensive coordinator and a master scout, in order to keep communica-

tion with players and messaging about potential recruits uniform. Such a setup also provides for a highly integrated coaching style that gives the team's leaders a greater view into the skills and weaknesses of more players.

The Bronx, N.Y. native is also a voracious consumer of management books. The New York Times writes he "would seem right at home at a TED conference, exchanging innovative management ideas." His favorite: Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," which he appears to quote from relentlessly. He's a devotee not only of the guru's ideas but of the Franklin-Covey daily planners that bear his name. In his office, Larrañaga keeps two decades' worth of the binders carefully tracking every goal, every practice and every appointment.

That kind of meticulousness carries over into the way he coaches the team, relying heavily on numbers to guide his thinking. He uses stats-driven Internet sites to track each player down to each possession, using that data to help him coach. His defense-driven style instructs his players to limit opponents to 12 points per position. He breaks down practices into minute-by-minute increments that players say are so strategic and organized that they're able to guess what their opponents will do once it's time for the game.

But perhaps the biggest reason for Larrañaga's success is the confidence he has in the players on his team. He borrows the "train it and trust it" philosophy from golf, putting all his focus on practice and then letting his players execute on their own during the game, rather than trying to over-manage from the sidelines. Hit with recruiting challenges following an NCAA ethics investigation into events at Miami that pre-dated his arrival, Larrañaga has chosen not to start over with a new re-

cruiting class. Rather, he's focused on the players he's got, ten of whom are seniors or juniors. As senior Julian Gamble told the Washington Post's Mark Giannotto recently, "He has a lot of confidence in us. Probably more confidence than we have in ourselves sometimes."

Who knows if Miami could win it all — there are plenty of reasons that might not be in the cards this year. The quality of their coach, however, isn't likely to be one of them.

How Miami's Basketball Coach Is Bringing Back The ñ

WLRN.org

Kenny Malone

March 28, 2013

The squiggly line seemed to show up out of nowhere.

It happened at the Greensboro Coliseum on Sunday, March 17th.

Confetti was falling. Hurricanes were celebrating. The University of Miami had made history by winning the first Atlantic Coast Conference tournament in school history. Jeannine Edwards, an ESPN reporter, was standing by with second-year UM coach Jim Larrañaga.

And then, the name graphic.

In what the television world refers to as a "lower third," ESPN had identified Miami's head coach with a baffling cultural flair: a tilde.

"JIM LARRAÑAGA," the ESPN graphic read.

Scott Michaux, a columnist for the Augusta Chronicle took note, tweeting: "Did moving to Miami automatically come with a tilde?"

The short answer: Yes.

The Long Answer

Jim Larrañaga is arguably most famous for ruining the country's collective March Madness bracket in 2006. He coached 11th-seeded George Mason University through upsets of perennial powerhouses like Michigan State, North Carolina and number-one-seeded Connecticut and eventually reached the Final Four before losing to Florida.

"We never used the tilde," George Mason's director of news media for men's basketball, Dan Reisig, wrote in an email. "In fact, no one at George Mason was aware of his Cuban lineage prior to his arrival at Miami."

That's because the lineage has been slowly white-washed, piece-by-piece, over Larrañaga's life.

"Americanized"

Jim Larrañaga is Bronx-born with an accent to prove it. He's 63, Caucasian, and throughout his life, people have assumed his last name was Italian. "Because it ended with a vowel," he laughed.

In reality, the name is Basque by way of Cuba.

According to Larrañaga, his grandfather was born in Cuba and was part of the Por Larrañaga cigar company. (That's pronounced LAW-ruh-NYAW-guh.)

Larrañaga's father wanted his kids to blend in, to be "Americanized." He pronounced his last name with an extra-nasally, American 'a' and left the ñ sound out completely (LAH-ruh-NAY-guh). He refused to let the kids speak Spanish even though Jim's grandmother was fluent.

But Jim Larrañaga liked the way his grandmother said the name, the deep vowels, the ñ. He adopted the Basque pronunciation.

And then he quickly dropped it.

On Larrañaga's first day at a Catholic kindergarten, a nun was going through the class roll. When she called Larrañaga's name, she put her own Americanized spin on it. "I try to correct her," Larrañaga said, "and she wouldn't be corrected... That was it. It stuck."

The Missing Tilde

There's a case to be made that Jim Larrañaga's time at George Mason University was as Americanized a stretch as he'll ever have.

The school -- in Fairfax, Va. -- is 25 miles from Washington D.C. The university's nickname is "The Patriots." And by the time Larrañaga had arrived at GMU his name's spelling was set in stone:

"L-A-R-R-A-N-A-G-A," recalled Bill Rohland, the radio play-by-play announcer for GMU basketball. "Yeah, there was never any accent on any of the letters whatsoever, it was just straight across, that was

it."

One major factor: Jim Larrañaga never fully understood that typing an ñ was even a possibility.

"Okay, hang on," Larrañaga said during a recent phone interview before UM's 2nd and 3rd round NCAA games from Austin, Texas. "I'm in front of my iPad, you're telling me that there's a way to do that?"

"Well, no-I mean yes. But it's a big pain," this reporter explained. "You have to change your keyboard to an international keyboard."

"Oh," Larrañaga replied, "I don't have that ability."

It's a safe bet that the "Larrañaga" spelling never got into any of Jim Larrañaga's resumes, cover letters or applications--including the most recent.

"When I applied for the Miami job, I copied and pasted my Wikipedia bio," said Larrañaga, "So whatever that had [as the spelling], that's the way it went."

Larrañaga added that one reason he never corrected anyone about the missing ñ is that he simply thought it couldn't be done.

The Autograph

In 1972, a 71-pound, four-foot-six, eight-year-old named Bobby Harbers went to basketball camp at Davidson College in North Carolina.

According to a report card that Harbers still has (he's now "Bob" not "Bobby"), the younger version of himself was "EXCELLENT" when it came to passing, free throws and boxing out. His crossover was just "GOOD" and his pivoting had shown "much improvement."

Each category on the Wildcat Camp report card was completed by a different coach. Jim Larrañaga would have been in just his second year as an assistant coach at Davidson, his first coaching job after playing at Providence.

The 24-year-old Larrañaga was responsible for grading Bob Harbers' "INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE" in the dribbling category.

Larrañaga placed a check mark in the "excellent" column and then signed his name. And if you're looking for it, there is unmistakably a line over the 'n.'

There's no reason to think Jim Larrañaga ever stopped signing his name with a tilde (granted the tilde is more line than curve). A number of alleged George Mason-era Larrañaga autographs have made their way through eBay in the last few weeks. All have included the line over the 'n.'

But there is a basic disconnect: How is it that no one seemed to have noticed that line in his signature until now? Or at least didn't notice enough to include in his Wikipedia entry, on his business cards or in media guides.

Larrañaga has a theory: "People didn't recognize [the tilde]."

He points out that signatures are generally hard to read. "So to see a line over the 'n', [people] just thought that was part of the way I signed my name. They didn't know that was actually the correct spelling."

"Mari" or why the tilde matters

Wednesday, January 23rd, 2013. Freshman Mariana Gaviria had been waiting in line outside the Bank United Center for that evening's game against Duke University for about an hour when the commotion started.

The Hurricanes wound up embarrassing the number-one-ranked Blue Devils 90-63. It was the first time in school history that Miami had beaten a top-ranked opponent. The entire sports world was finally forced to take the University of Miami men's basketball team seriously.

But at the moment, tipoff was still about six hours away, and Gaviria, 19, was waiting in line when she heard someone say: "Is that Larrañaga?"

Gaviria saw a group of very tall men piling out of

a parked van - many carrying boxes of Krispy Kreme donuts.

It was a sugary expression of gratitude from Coach Jim Larrañaga and his players.

Larrañaga made a short speech to the students. At a football school, where the basketball team had never reached a national ranking higher than #8 (in 1960), the message was pretty simple: Thank you for waiting in line for a basketball game.

It was the first time Gaviria had seen her school's coach up close and personal. She didn't know about his Cuban grandfather, his Basque name, the tilde in his last name.

Nothing about seeing Larrañaga in person tipped her off.

"He doesn't really look Cuban. It's kind of bad to say," she admitted, "but he doesn't look it."

"He doesn't really look Cuban. It's kind of bad to say," she admitted, "but he doesn't look it."

Gaviria was born in Colombia, where "Mariana" is a fairly common name. Her parents moved to Kendall when she was four years old. Many of her elementary school teachers spoke no Spanish.

In her new home, Gaviria heard all variations of her name. Some people thought it was "Marina" or "Maria." Others would assume the name was actually the American equivalent of her name: "Marianna" (said like Maryann-a as opposed to Mari-AH-nuh).

It felt like a constant reminder that she was different and that Kendall wasn't Colombia.

Gaviria started going by "Mari."

"It upset me as a little kid because it wasn't what normal people would call me in my country," said Gaviria. "I understood why, but as a little kid you want to make it easier on people."

Gaviria, who is majoring in political science and international studies, is now fiercely proud of her Hispanic heritage and her name. When she learned from this reporter about Larrañaga's Cuban background, the nun who couldn't say his name and the tilde in his signature, she was delighted. "Something as small as an 'ñ' can make a big difference," she said.

The squiggly line that Larrañaga is pretty sure people simply didn't notice in his signature means the world to Gaviria.

"Everybody has their own story, especially when you're an immigrant and you go to a different country," said Gaviria. "And when you travel a little north, people have trouble saying the name, they just don't understand--understand the different processes that it takes to make it here. And even just a name can link people that way."

It's All About The ñ

Jim Larrañaga was as shocked as anyone when he got his University of Miami business cards: "Jim Larrañaga."

"I showed my wife. I said, 'hey, look at this. They were able to do it.'"

And then again on ESPN: "That was the first time I'd seen it on TV."

How the tilde showed up again is a bit of a mystery. Larrañaga said he never asked anyone to do it, but he prefers the new, old spelling.

"It's always been there [in the signature]," he said. "That hasn't changed for me since I was a little boy."

And so the variable has been everything around Larrañaga -- a father who Americanized the family, a teacher who mispronounced his name, a part of the country where the line in his signature may have been mistaken for a flourish instead of a sign of Cuban heritage.

Larrañaga's glad to have the tilde back, glad to officially wear his grandfather's heritage on his name. Plus he's hoping it'll clear up one misconception.

"People are not going to say, 'he's Italian.'"

Larrañaga making himself at home in Miami

The Examiner
Kevin Dunleavy
March 9, 2013

As he entered Sports Grill in South Miami with an entourage of assistants, family and friends, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga received a standing ovation. His Hurricanes had just walloped then-No. 1 Duke by 27 points. Like a politician, the 63-year-old coach visited each table, holding court and pressing flesh.

The short trip from BankUnited Center down South Dixie Highway to the popular wings-and-beer joint has become a routine for Larrañaga and his coaches as they make new friends and draw fans to a program that has barely registered in South Florida.

It's the same outreach Larrañaga performed in 14 seasons at George Mason with Brion's Grille as his postgame headquarters. More than any other college program in the Washington area, the Patriots belonged as much to the community as to the school.

Now, 1,050 miles to the south, Larrañaga is lighting up Miami with his optimism, enthusiasm and self-help catechism. On cue, his team has arrived. After never finishing better than fifth in the ACC, Miami (23-6 entering Saturday) is ranked No. 6 and will open the conference tournament as the top seed this week in Greensboro.

"It's been quite a transition," Larrañaga said Friday. "It's 75 today. The sun is shining. It's absolutely beautiful. My wife is going to play golf in an hour and she is loving that."

In a city where the NBA champion Miami Heat overwhelm the sports conversation, the Hurricanes are carving a niche. For the first time ever, Miami sold out consecutive games, and for the first time since joining the ACC in 2004 the Hurricanes will not have the league's lowest attendance.

Students now line up for tickets, camping overnight between palm trees on "Larrañaga's Lawn," some wearing T-shirts

with the coach's face above the slogan "40 Minutes of L." The morning of the Duke game, Larrañaga and wife Liz stopped by Costco, picked 300 Krispy Kreme doughnuts and distributed them to the campers.

"We wanted to create a family atmosphere within the basketball program," Larrañaga said. "We wanted our students to also be part of our family -- to make them feel part of our success."

At Miami, Larrañaga has recreated his success in Fairfax. He's done it in a more competitive basketball conference, in an area less receptive to college basketball and at a school in need of an image makeover. Despite some raised eyebrows when Larrañaga took the job, no one was better suited for it.

"We built a grassroots network of people who support our program," Larrañaga said. "My staff and I have reached out to the local community to try to get young kids to follow our program. We had our first high school basketball game in the BankUnited Center. Those are the kind of people that want to become season ticket holders and fans."

As coach at Bowling Green from 1986 to 1997, Larrañaga saw how families involved in the basketball programs of his two sons were drawn to Falcons games. These days, Larrañaga goes to extremes to ensure his summer basketball camps are attractive to local youths. His players serve as instructors and role models in the summer, then as drawing cards in the winter. After games, children are invited to a designated area of the locker room for posters, photo opportunities and autographs.

To energize students, the Hurricanes conduct "dorm storms," with Larrañaga beckoning students to come outside and accept posters and T-shirts. It's reminiscent of his early days at George Mason when Larrañaga conducted karaoke nights.

The Canes are not only attracting families and students. The glamour set has taken note. Rapper Flo Rida and WWE star The

Big Show have checked into BankUnited. After a Heat game in which All-Star Dwyane Wade threw a pass off the backboard to feed a teammate for a flashy fast-break dunk, he told reporters he was inspired by Hurricanes sophomore Shane Larkin, who did the same at a game Wade and LeBron James had attended.

Many of the school's illustrious football icons are showing up. At the Duke game, NFL Hall of Famer Warren Sapp was seated near the Miami bench and when the rout was assured, he urged Larkin to slap the floor, Duke-style, before a defensive possession. When all five players complied, Sapp and those nearby had a hearty laugh and an amusing snippet with which to remember a transformational night.

Later in the evening, the revelry was transported to Sports Grill where Larrañaga got down to business.

"He's the best at going to every table and saying hello," assistant Eric Konkol said. "Now people count on us being there, talking about the game."

Longwood head coach Mike Gillian, who served under Larrañaga at Bowling Green and George Mason, says his promotional efforts are as detail-oriented as his game plans.

"In college sports, a big portion of what you do is community, fans, media. Jim understands that better than anyone," Gillian said. "Trust me. It's on a list. It's planned out. It's organized."

Given his deep roots in the community, Larrañaga's departure from George Mason was anything but a routine step up the coaching ladder. After leading the Patriots to the Final Four in 2006, he had fended off offers from big-conference schools and appeared settled in Fairfax. Moving to another job and doing it his way would be a massive undertaking.

But Larrañaga has pulled it off, turning another dormant community on to college basketball.

Larrañaga gets support from brother on Suncoast

ABC 7

Don Brennan

April 3, 2013

MANATEE COUNTY - The Final Four is set, and the University of Miami is not in it. But under head coach Jim Larrañaga, the Hurricanes won 29 games in their best season ever. And here on the Suncoast, his biggest supporters had a front row seat.

"If I go down there, I want to spend time with Jim. He's my brother before he's a coach, and so if I can't spend time with him, I have a better seat here, looking at a 52" TV," says John Larrañaga.

He and Jeannie are almost always camped out to watch the 'Canes games. They are always in the same spot, but not always in the same seat for each game. "I sit here, and Jeannie sits here, or vice versa. Souffle is in the middle between us."

The Larrañagas are a close family, and older brother John has watched Jim on the court from the time he was a child, through high school at Archbishop Molloy, through college at Providence, and now up to this 'Canes successful season. "Really exciting; I mean it gives me chills all the time. When he was growing up and played ball in high school, I saw virtually every game he played."

This season, the 'Canes beat a #1 ranked team for the first time ever, they went 29-7 overall, reached the Sweet Sixteen, and won the ACC. "Jim instilled man-to-man, not zone. He instilled defense; keep the other team scoring at 60 points or less. And it became a winning formula. He knows exactly what he wants, and he gets that from our father."

As the younger brother coaches, the two older brothers sit, watch, and dissect.

"We got on the bus to go to the game. He turned around to say to Bob and I: 'I don't want you guys coaching me. You just watch, I'll do the coaching.' I said to Bob, okay we got the message."

Jim Larrañaga has a place near his brother in Lakewood Ranch, but he only gets up here a few times a year.

"We're really proud of him. Win or lose... he's always our brother. We are very proud that he has accomplished what he accomplished."

Feel the Love

Sports on Earth
Chuck CluPPER
March 28, 2013

AUSTIN, Texas -- Twenty-five years in the wacko practice of seeking quotations from athletes at their lockers, and somehow I happened upon my all-time favorite team when I wasn't looking.

It's not my alma mater. It's not a team from a place I have resided (although I wish I had). It's in either my fourth- or fifth-favorite sport to cover, depending on which week you ask. It's unforeseen, objective love, and it hit fast and hard with one night in Miami and February and four hours of access sprinkled across an Austin weekend.

I've seen umpteen teams with camaraderie, collaboration, cohesion, chemistry, heard untold "we-are-a-family" testimonies. Hell, I just got finished swooning three weeks ago as the Washington Nationals extolled their esprit de corps. But this finds a fresh level. In all my quote-scribbling years, I just never heard quotations quite like these.

Come to the Miami Hurricanes' basketball locker room. Feel the love.

Twenty-three-year-old senior big man Julian Gamble: "We love each other so much and that extends so far beyond basketball that it's really hard to put into words."

Twenty-two-year-old senior guard Trey McKinney Jones: "I can honestly say it's something like I've never experienced before. It's relationships we're going to have for the rest of our lives, and we understand that."

Twenty-three-year-old senior big-big man Reggie Johnson: "Now, from the standpoint of people saying, 'College is the best years of your life,' now I really understand what that means."

Twenty-one-year-old junior guard Rion Brown: "Man, this is the funnest thing I've ever been part of in my life."

They're uncommonly engaging. They're unusually aware. They're unquestionably ambassadors. They're bonded in a way you can feel in the air at a level previously unfelt even in all the years. They might remind you why you ever liked sports.

When the starting five goes out for a tense second half against Illinois, somebody says something and they break into a laugh. When they have an on-court issue with each other, they tend to gather in a circle and say it like gentlemen, inaudible to opponents. Nobody feels insulted. When they have an off-court time and they go to wherever teams go after practices or games, they go together. "This morning, everybody just went to Kenny's room," Johnson said last Saturday, referring to the Cameroonian senior big man Kenny Kadji. "He put a beat on. Everyone was just freestyling."

He added: "There's no one who veers off. No one. Not one person. This team has no cliques. It's not Trey and me over here, this other clique over there ..."

They dance as a team, and sometimes 63-year-old head coach Jim Larrañaga dances in front of them, and when that happened after the second-round win over Illinois, their essence seemed to gush right out of the video snippet.

If they lose and this ends, they're going to feel sadness. If they win four more games and this ends, they're going to feel sadness. They want to win to advance, but not as much as they want to win to sustain this time.

Maybe it's simple. Maybe it's bracing because in college basketball anymore, some players stop by for such a short time that entire teams don't get this much time to grow acquainted. "I really think it's having six seniors," Larrañaga said. It also could be having six seniors plus a roster full of guys who weren't humongous recruits jaded with the humongous-recruit process. It also could be having six seniors plus their various travails with injuries such that Larrañaga lists them and says, "That's a lot of knees."

It also could be having six seniors plus a sophomore point guard who fits so agreeably into his gathering stardom.

View the general conditions of Shane Larkin's upbringing, and the forecast might call for entitlement: son of a famous athlete, lucky childhood, days at baseball spring training chasing balls and taking batting practice from stars, nickname ("SugaShane") bestowed by one Deion Sanders, even a story in which a Little League coach opined that whoever had taught Larkin to

hit knew nothing about hitting, when that teacher happened to be Pete Rose.

That forecast, like many, would be wrong. Even as the son of the retired Cincinnati Reds' 12-time All-Star shortstop Barry Larkin came to be the kind of athlete who can make you gasp, who adored being chased at football until he broke his ankle at 14, and even as Larrañaga insists Shane could go right across to big-time baseball -- "tremendous lateral quickness," "tremendous anticipation," "great hand-to-eye coordination," "great speed" -- Shane also brought along his gracious father's tutelage.

"He was always, like, cool," Shane Larkin said of Barry Larkin. "He never showed out. He was a humble guy." The son reels off the advice, for dealing with media and teammates and sports: "'Be friendly. Don't get on anybody's bad side. Always be willing to talk. Don't make predictions. Don't be a bad guy. Be humble.'" And: "'Have fun. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. There's always going to be another game, going to be another season, the next play.'"

"No one was hating on him or not liking him or not trying to accept him," Johnson said. "The first year, we tried to get him to be more vocal, but he didn't want to step on any toes." He played behind former All-ACC point guard Malcolm Grant; he didn't start until late January 2012. "He was the same player last year," Johnson kept going, "and he was just falling back and not trying to step on toes. The fact [is] he didn't come in trying to say, 'I'm the big point guard here.'"

"I'm his big brother," Johnson said. "Most teams don't really have that. This is the first year Miami really has that."

Miami has something else, for sure. My objectively favorite team has something alluring. It's something that makes you picture these guys as older men, maybe at weddings, maybe in their forties, maybe in their fifties, still in each other's lives, still getting together, still talking about 2013, still sitting at tables you'd feel lucky to join.

Bronx-born Larrañaga has Miami flying high

New York Post
Steve Serby
March 27, 2013

On The bus that was about to take him from Coral Gables to the airport for the flight to Washington and a Sweet 16 showdown with Marquette and maybe beyond, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga wasn't only taking a fun bunch of driven college basketball players with him, he was taking the voice of the late Jack Curran, too, a legendary New York voice he will never stop hearing.

"The last time I spoke to him about the team was after the Duke game, I called him, we lost by three points at Duke," Larrañaga said. "He said, 'Larry, you didn't play any defense.' I said, 'Mr. Curran, Duke's pretty good.' He said, 'Didn't you tell your players [Ryan] Kelly can shoot? I was yelling at the TV, 'Kelly can shoot!' Kelly was killing you.' It was a great conversation. He had me laughing the whole time."

WELCOME BACK:

Miami coach Jim Larrañaga returns this week to Washington, where he orchestrated one of the most memorable Cinderella runs in NCAA Tournament history in 2007, leading George Mason to the Final Four. Larrañaga is New York all the way, from 1501 Metropolitan Ave. in the Parkchester section of The Bronx, living out his dream of doing for others in basketball what Curran had done for him, all the way back to Archbishop Molloy High School. Seven years ago, Curran beamed with pride as Larrañaga wrote his Cinderella story, taking George Mason to the Final Four in 2006. "He would say, 'You guys are pretty smart,'" Larrañaga recalled. "'I like smart teams. Smart teams can win.'"

Curran liked this Miami team, too. "He would love the competitiveness of our guards and he liked the size and versatility of our team," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga likes his team plenty, likes how it has overcome injuries and adversity.

"Life is 10 percent what happens to you," he tells you, "and 90 percent how you handle it."

So you ask him: Could this be a Team of Destiny?

"William Jennings Bryan says, 'Destiny is not a matter of chance. It's a matter of choice.' It's not something you wait to have happen. It's something you go out and earn."

They've earned this right to a magical journey and laughed every step of the way. I asked Larrañaga what his wife thought about his Ali Shuffle in the locker room after the 'Canes had survived Illinois.

"My wife watched it repeatedly," he said. "She absolutely loved the players' reaction. She said, 'They're jumping for joy. That's what it's all about.'"

The funniest thing he heard about it came from a grad assistant named Chris Alvarez, who asked Larrañaga: "Coach, did you know it went viral?"

"I said, 'What the hell does that mean?'" Larrañaga said.

"It's all over the Internet," he was told.

"I said, 'You're kidding,'" Larrañaga said. "If you can't find anything more entertaining than me doing the Ali Shuffle..."

Larrañaga, 63 years young, is as fierce a competitor now as he was back in the East Quadrant, where the best basketball could be found, where the opposition could have been Dean Meminger or John Roche or Dave Wohl or Gary Brokaw.

"Parkchester was divided into four quadrants — North, South, East and West," Larrañaga said. "Each one had its own park."

He looks for every edge, whether it be through statistical analysis or seeking advice three times a week from renowned sports psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella. Every

day brings a quote of the day the players have to memorize. What was yesterday's quote of the day?

"Defend the drive, block them out, rebound," Larrañaga said.

Asked why, he said, "Marquette is the No. 1 offensive rebounding team in the Big East."

These are heady times in Miami with the Heat and the Hurricanes. Larrañaga talked about getting texts from Pat Riley and Erik Spoelstra and a tweet from LeBron James after beating Illinois. And Larrañaga reflected back on a talk Chris Bosh gave the 'Canes two summers ago right after Larrañaga took over. Bosh had been working out with some of the team and told Larrañaga: "I'd never get a good workout when we scrimmaged."

So Bosh became the only person outside the program asked by Larrañaga to speak to the team. "He gave the best five-minute, 10-minute talk I ever heard," Larrañaga said. "He talked about how badly he wanted to win a championship, and the regrets he had playing the way he played in the sixth game against Dallas. He wasn't gonna let that happen again. He let it be known to these guys if they want their dreams to come true, they better start working a lot harder."

Larrañaga and his team have made school history and now they are shooting for more. Shooting for the Final Four.

Said Larrañaga, "It would be the culmination of a tremendous amount of hard work, coming together and creating memories that last a lifetime."

Jack Curran would be so proud.

Larrañaga delivering

Toledo Blade
Dave Hackenberg
Feb. 13, 2013

Serving on the staff of the Michael Jordan Fantasy Camp in Las Vegas was a tough ticket. It helped if you coached in the NBA or were in the Basketball Hall of Fame. Then there was the case of Jim Larrañaga and some others who had coached in an NCAA Final Four.

He made that magical trip, a mid-major miracle of sorts, with George Mason University at the end of the 2005-06 season and found himself coaching at Jordan's camp the following summer.

There, he met two Miami businessmen, Jose and Jorge Mas, well-known Cuban-Americans in south Florida. They became friends, especially after learning the ties went even deeper.

You might not guess it from his last name or his Bronx birthplace or his New York City/Eastern seaboard accent, but Larrañaga's paternal grandfather was Cuban and immigrated to Key West in the early 1900s. The coach's father was raised there.

So when the University of Miami coaching job opened in April of 2011, Larrañaga knew what phone numbers to dial. It became a hurry-up process. The George Mason coach was traveling and didn't have a resume at hand. So he cut-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and forwarded it to the selection committee. To make a long story short, including a hearty recommendation from Boston Celtics coach Doc Rivers, he got the job.

Before becoming head coach at Bowling Green State University in 1986, Larrañaga had been an assistant under Terry Holland at Virginia for seven seasons. In four of those years the Cavaliers had, at one time or another, been ranked No. 1 in the country, and twice they went to the Final Four.

From the day he left he had one burning desire — to return to the Atlantic Coast

Conference as a head coach. A quarter of a century later, he owned 470 collegiate victories, had led George Mason to five NCAA tournaments, and in that regard was a hot prospect. He also had celebrated 61 birthdays and in that regard he was not.

For various reasons — storm clouds of an NCAA investigation that would envelop the entire Miami athletic department were brewing, minimal interest in a basketball program that had never been competitive in the ACC — big names weren't exactly lining up for the job. After Coach L used his connections to crack the door, he blew 'em away with an energetic interview. As the school's new athletic director said at the time, age went out the window. He couldn't imagine not hiring Larrañaga.

Today, the Miami Hurricanes will play at rival Florida State as the No. 3 ranked team in the nation. They are 19-3, 10-0 in the ACC, and have made a wild, almost unprecedented climb the last five weeks going from unranked to No. 25 to No. 14 to No. 8 to No. 3. Their power ranking, strength of schedule and RPI are off the charts. Once a ghost town at a football school in a pro-sports town, fans now line up for tickets at the beautiful but fairly small (7,972 seats) BankUnited Center on the campus in Coral Gables. The NCAA tournament is a foregone conclusion; the discussion now is over a No. 1 seed.

Larrañaga said Tuesday he is not the least bit surprised; if not for injuries and suspensions he felt as if last season's team, his first at Miami that won 20 games and posted a first-ever winning record in ACC play, might have done the same.

"It's been great," he said via telephone. "When I took the job people said, 'You're never going to draw fans; you'll never create any interest in the program.' They told me the same thing at Bowling Green and George Mason. By the end, we were packing the place at both schools. This past Saturday, our North Carolina game (a blowout 87-61 win), we had LeBron and

Dwyane Wade sitting courtside. I think people noticed that. I know recruits noticed. I think the nation is noticing now."

When the Miami job opened, coupled with coaching changes at other ACC schools, Larrañaga said he saw a league in transition with Miami sporting a veteran team while sitting in the midst of a fertile recruiting area.

"It's the ACC, the best basketball league in the country, and I saw an opportunity to succeed," he said. "The first meeting I had with players at George Mason in April of '97, I asked them who had the best programs, the role models. The first two places mentioned were Duke and North Carolina. And I tried to build the program at Mason in their image, that ACC image. I loved every minute of my 14 years there, but when [the Miami] opportunity came up I very much wanted to achieve this goal.

"I envisioned success."

Larrañaga has always had a vision, even if it wasn't clear to others. Maybe never fully appreciated at BG — he is the second winningest coach all-time at 170-144 while operating in an antiquated Anderson Arena, but never took the Falcons to the NCAAs — many were surprised when he made what appeared to be a lateral mid-major move.

At George Mason Larrañaga saw a modern, 9,500-seat arena and a chance to make an impact at a school where no resources were siphoned off by football or hockey. Fans saw a lateral move to a fairly anonymous school in a similar, maybe then slightly better league; he saw potentially another Gonzaga or Butler. And, for the most part, he delivered.

Now, Larrañaga's latest vision is coming into focus. And he is delivering big again, finally back home, in the ACC and south Florida.

Larrañaga lands in dream job with Miami Hurri-

Miami Herald
Greg Cote
Feb. 5, 2013

The University of Miami men's basketball team climbed as high as it ever has Monday — to a No. 8 national ranking in The Associated Press poll — and the man who made that magic ladder appear, Jim Larrañaga, had just heard the news when we spoke.

"It feels great. I'm excited," the coach said. "It represents a major step forward."

I asked Larrañaga if he planned to break the news to his team. He smiled.

"Those guys know everything before I do," he said. "By now someone has texted it, tweeted it, Facebooked it or instant messaged it."

Nothing stays a secret for long anymore, and so these Hurricanes haven't.

Less than a month ago they were off the national grid, and barely making South Florida pay attention. Now they are one of the sweet stories in all of college basketball, rocketing up in the polls from nowhere to 25th to 14th to eighth in three heady weeks.

A signature 90-63 pasting of No. 1 Duke on Jan. 23 in Coral Gables made America take notice. Reggie Johnson's miracle last-second tip-in to win at No. 19 North Carolina State on Saturday made you wonder if this team wasn't charmed.

Football is done now. You ready to pay attention to something besides the Heat?

This is your team. This is the time.

Larrañaga's guys have won nine in a row entering Tuesday night's home game vs. Boston College. They are 17-3. They are 8-0 in the mighty Atlantic Coast Conference — the first ACC team other than Duke or North Carolina to do that since 1981.

The only other time the UM men ranked No. 8 was in March 1960, even before Rick Barry arrived. The Canes have never finished a season ranked higher than 10th.

This year, though, you get the idea anything is possible. You get the feeling March Madness

will very much include this team as a major player.

A couple of weeks ago there was speculation about this being a Sweet 16 team. Then came the stunning whipping of Duke. Then came the top 10. Now if you're talking Sweet 16 you seem to under-selling UM's potential.

Elite Eight, anyone? Final Four, even?

This is Larrañaga's problem at the moment. Well, his challenge, at least. The excitement of possibility nourishing this program is all good, but it also raises the stakes on the coach making sure his players keep their focus.

"Our point of view is to get ready for Boston College," he said Monday. "At any time, circumstances can change. We are not looking two weeks or a month down the road. The only thing [being ranked No. 8] does is fire up your opponent. The whole reason we are enjoying success is that we have prepared one day at a time. We do not get too full of ourselves just because somebody else has decided we're good."

The even keel is easier because five of UM's top six scorers are seniors — Johnson, Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, Trey McKinney Jones and Julian Gamble — itself unusual (and pleasantly so) in the one-and-done NCAA.

That is also why this season figures to be Miami's best opportunity, although Larrañaga, 63, in his second season here, has earned the faith that he can recruit and win with his own guys, not just with the talent inherited.

This coach took a long time to get to his dream job, but he has arrived at it.

He is best known for coaching mid-major George Mason to the Final Four in 2006, but that was just part of the climb.

"I'm very goal-oriented. I was an assistant in the ACC at Virginia [1979-86], and when I left I wrote down that one of my goals was to become a head coach in the ACC," Larrañaga said. "So when the Miami job opened up I was very interested."

He did his research. He always loved the talent pool in Florida, and he found more than half the teams in the ACC had changed coaches

recently.

"I saw a league going through a transition period," he said. "If we were able to recruit well, we could do some damage in this conference. It seemed like an opportunity to come in and succeed very quickly."

Larrañaga had a very small inner circle of family and friends he consulted about the Miami job: his wife, two adult sons, Celtics coach Doc Rivers and sports psychologist Bob Rottella.

The conduit for Larrañaga coming here was Jose Mas, whom he had met while coaching at a Michael Jordan fantasy camp. Mas, the son of Jorge Mas Canosa, the former Miami business leader and Cuban exile fixture, called Larrañaga and invited him to forward his résumé to UM.

Larrañaga was traveling and had no access to his résumé so, at a son's suggestion, he copy-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and sent it to UM. An interview was set up. His hiring didn't take long thereafter.

(Speaking of Mas Canosa, it happens that Larrañaga is part Cuban. His father's father was Cuban, emigrating to Key West in the early 1900s.)

Larrañaga knew he was coming here to not just coach a team, but to grow a program in a city that hardly is a college hoops hotbed.

"I want everyone in this community to be dying to get a ticket to watch us play," he said. "At Bowling Green and George Mason everybody also told me we couldn't draw, but by the time I left the place was packed every night."

Coaching in the ACC had been Larrañaga's "ultimate goal to really test yourself." Now he is finding out the league isn't too big for him. He's big enough for the league.

I asked him if the satisfaction he feels is different now.

"Don't know yet. We are still in the process of competing," he said. Then he added something that should make Canes fans smile as much as that No. 8 ranking: "My career here at Miami has really just begun."

Larrañaga, Meier tour campus to rally support

CaneSport.com

Feb. 13, 2012

David Furones

Both the men's and women's basketball programs are hot right now. The women are No. 6 in the nation and have won 11 straight while the men are winners are five of their last six and are currently listed in Joe Lunardi's "last four in" to make the tournament. But neither team can seem to get warm bodies in the seats, especially in the student section.

On Monday night coaches Jim Larrañaga and Katie Meier, along with cheerleaders, Sebastian the Ibis and players from both teams, traveled to four different on-campus housing facilities meeting students and rallying support from the UM student body as part of the Buffalo Wild Wings Coaches Campus Tour.

The team's goal: get students to come out to men's home games Wednesday against No. 8 North Carolina and Saturday versus Wake Forest and the women's game against FSU Sunday.

"We're in the final push here and we just want to get the students out," Meier said. "When they do come, it makes a huge difference."

Members of the teams got on the residence halls' PA systems and called students out of their dorms and down to the lobbies to treat them to wings and pizza while pumping up the fans with a megaphone. They handed out towels and shirts to students who correctly answered trivia questions.

Larrañaga, who dropped by a flag football practice on the intramural fields to rally support, says this is an important event because it builds a bond between the team and the students.

"Students might watch a game on TV, but won't go across campus because they don't know the players that well," Larrañaga said. "Our players are out here trying to talk to the students, get to know them and encourage them to come out and cheer them on."

Larrañaga wants the students to feel as if they're part of the team.

"The most fun you have in college is being a part of something," says Larrañaga. "And if you can be part of a winning program, a team that makes the NCAA Tournament, creates some national news- that's the best, not only for the players and coaches but for the students as well."

Senior guard Malcolm Grant, who busted out the pom-poms to lead cheers at Hecht Residential College, agrees.

"When they come out and they see the players in their dorm and they're trying to get them to come to the game, it makes them feel like they're wanted and that's the whole idea," Grant said. "We want them to come out, we want them to feel the support and understand that we need them to win."

Meier says building relationships with students is critical for support in the long run.

"You can invite a thousand strangers to a game, and they come one time and they don't understand why they're there," Meier said. "Or you can get the students to get real involved, build relationships with them and see the growth of the team."

So, after storming the campus dorms, what kind of a crowd does the men's team expect for the home game against UNC?

"I'm hoping for a big crowd, the biggest

crowd I've ever seen since I've been here," Grant says. "Usually it's always a good crowd when we play [North Carolina], but I want to see it packed, like every seat I want to see somebody in it cheering, going crazy."

Shenise Johnson, who leads a women's team that has won 38 consecutive home games, talked about how helpful it can be to have a hostile environment behind the team.

"It gives us that sixth man, that person off the bench," Johnson said. "It gets us excited and makes us play a lot harder when we have our peers supporting us."

Larrañaga says he will coach until at least 2019

Sun Sentinel
Jan. 27, 2012
Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES – Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga will be 69 years old when his new three-year contract extension, signed Wednesday and announced today, expires on April 30, 2019.

Will he still be coaching then?

"You know, I talked to my son Jay last night and that question kind of was posed in the opposite," Larrañaga recounted. "Jay basically said, 'You're a lifer. You're going to coach until the day you die.'

"That's just what I love to do. So I expect to coach at least that long [2019], if not longer."

At least that long?

"It just proves how much he loves the game and how much passion he has, how much he wants this school to become a great school," freshman point guard Shane Larkin said with a smile. "I know Coach is very passionate, so I think he'll definitely finish the deal, and if he can, he'll sign another extension after that."

Larrañaga joked that his wife, Liz, tells him "I don't do anything else but coach," adding he tries to coach her on driving while she's behind the wheel and on the golf course, even though he knows "nothing about golf."

"[Coaching] has been in my blood for a very long time, and I'll expect I'll be doing it as long as I can," Larrañaga added.

This is, after all, a man who sees his mentor and former high school coach, Jack Curran, still coaching basketball and baseball at 80 years old at Archbishop Molloy

in Queens, N.Y.

The average age of NCAA men's basketball coaches in 2010-11 was 49.65 years old.

The oldest active NCAA men's basketball coach is Jackson State's Tevester Anderson, who'll turn 75 on Feb. 26. The next oldest, Miami (Ohio) coach Charlie Coles, will turn 70 on Feb. 6. Connecticut's John Calhoun will also turn 70 in May. San Diego State's Steve Fisher will be 67 in March, the same age as Syracuse's Jim Boeheim. Florida Atlantic's Mike Jarvis will turn 67 in April.

So Larrañaga finishing his new contract is quite possible. If he does stay at Miami through the 2018-19 season — there's no reason to believe he'll leave, considering his affinity for the ACC and ties in Florida — and doesn't retire, he will not only turn the Hurricanes into a consistent winner, but more importantly an established program a high-profile coach would want to take over.

He knows the game as well as anyone, and he teaches it as well as anyone, which means players will develop — something that too often hasn't been the case here.

Now, it will take time. This isn't a one-year or two-year project, but rather a "long-term project," Larrañaga acknowledged today, adding, "We want to build correctly."

It's hard to have patience if you're a 'Canes fan, considering that was the mantra during Frank Haith's tenure the past seven seasons and the 'Canes made the NCAA Tournament just once — 2007-08.

Unfortunately, it's necessary.

"We want to help develop a brand that the community wants to follow," Larrañaga

said. "People tend to follow winners and we want to build a winning program that people will be excited about. It doesn't happen overnight, but we did it at two other institutions.

UM athletic director Shawn Eichorst made a good move offering Larrañaga an extension and making a commitment to him.

The timing might seem peculiar, considering the 'Canes are just 11-7, 2-3 in the ACC in Larrañaga's first season, but with the injuries and off-field issues he's encountered, he's done an admirable job. And there are signs this team will continue to improve.

When Larrañaga was hired in April, I figured he would need five years to establish this program. Now he has eight years to work with. Retirement? It just got pushed back.

Even without rhythm, Larrañaga in tune with his players

Sun-Sentinel
January 6, 2012
by: Steve Gorten

The man lacks rhythm.

You might expect that from the 62-year-old, gray-haired New Yorker, who's unfamiliar with just about all of the hip-hop songs his players choose to play in the locker room before games.

Miami Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga sure tries, though.

"We're all sitting there and listening to the song, and out of nowhere, he'll just start clapping," forward DeQuan Jones said, grinning. "It's so off-beat to the point where we're just looking around, like..."

"Coach L is a funny guy," center Reggie Johnson said. "That right there lightens the mood."

Added Johnson, "I don't think he knows that he's totally off-beat, but I'll tell him one day."

Players laugh at Larrañaga's lack of rhythm, but are impressed by his effort. It was at George Mason that he started the tradition of having players pick one song to play in the locker room before each game.

"He says music is one of the great motivators," guard Shane Larkin said. "If you play an upbeat song, it can really get you going."

Just as he did in 14 seasons at George Mason, Larrañaga has found a way to relate to his new players.

He has amused them by his quirkiness, endeared himself to them with an act of compassion and intrigued them with his immense desire to teach all things basketball and life with a creative touch.

"I compare him to Phil Jackson," forward Kenny Kadji said of Larrañaga's approach.

"And even on the court, the way he handles himself on the bench," Kadji added. "He never yells. It's like he knows how the game's going to go before the game is even played. He has a lot of knowledge."

Like the Zen Master, Larrañaga is a philosopher. He quotes Confucius and 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, Larrañaga took the team to tour Red Ventures, a highly successful marketing services company.

The day after the Hurricanes played at Memphis in early December — on the way to the airport to fly to their next game at Purdue — he took the team to the Lorraine Motel, the historic site where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968.

Larrañaga has done most of his teaching at UM on the court. He always posts a "Thought of the Day," something he also did at George Mason, on a board in the locker room before practice.

The first one of this season: "Begin with the end in mind."

When the team gathers in a circle on the court, Larrañaga will ask a random player what the quote of the day was. If you don't remember it, you must run sprints.

The same goes for if you curse during practice. Larrañaga doesn't allow it. It's something he says he picked up from his mentor and high school coach at Archbishop (N.Y.) Molloy — Jack Curran.

Larrañaga will stop practice frequently to make a teaching point, something that wasn't the case as much under former coach Frank Haith the past seven seasons.

"Coach Haith would stop things, but I think Coach Haith, he had so much confidence in us that sometimes we'd make a mistake and he would let it go by because he knew we'd make up for it," guard Malcolm Grant said.

"But Coach L, he stops every little thing and he harps on it. He's been to the Final Four, he's been to the tournament almost every year, so he knows what it takes. I think he's trying to ingrain that into us."

"There's always a lot of teaching. The question is: is there a lot of learning?" Larrañaga quipped.

"My high school coach taught from the very first day of practice to the very last day of practice. We never stopped learn-

ing. He told me, 'If you ever stop trying to improve as a coach, you might as well quit.'"

Jones says players took to Larrañaga quickly, noting, "we did our research and his track record speaks for itself. He's a winner."

Added Jones, "It's easy to buy into someone who has a history of winning and being successful. Once we started practicing and he started showing us a lot of different things, it was, like, 'OK, this is our guy right here.'"

It took Johnson perhaps the longest to make the transition from Haith to Larrañaga. Johnson didn't attend Larrañaga's first meeting with UM players — he was home in Winston-Salem, N.C. for spring break. Larrañaga flew up there to meet with him personally.

"It took me a while honestly," Johnson said, noting Haith gave him a chance out of high school when other coaches didn't want to because of his weight issues. "So I was real close to him. It kind of hurt. I still miss him to this day, but Coach L is probably the best thing for us as a program right now."

Johnson, like his teammates, was especially touched by Larrañaga's decision to attend the funeral of Grant's older brother in New York the day before UM played Appalachian State at home Dec. 30. Larrañaga missed a practice for the first time in eight years to do so.

Grant said Larrañaga kept calling to check up on him and wanted to know when and where the funeral would be.

"Just him coming up shows the type of person he is — true class act," Grant said. "My whole family really appreciated it. ... You're at a funeral home, a sad time, and I look over and see my coach. It brightened me up a little bit just to see him there."

Sometimes, just making an effort can leave an impression. And if it makes your players laugh, even better.

Miami Hurricanes' Larrañaga a master motivator

Miami Herald

Nov. 7, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

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

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

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

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

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

Number cruncher

But his favorite thing to talk about is the subtle complexity of the game of basket-

ball. He has dissected it like a Wall Street analyst does the stock market, and compiled hundreds of pages of notes and formulas along the way. He majored in math and economics at Providence, and remains a number cruncher. His staff keeps detailed stats at every practice, and posts them for players to examine.

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

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

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

"Most kids, they're focused on 'How many shots am I getting? How many points am I scoring?' If you ask them the most important thing, they'll say 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

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

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

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

After resurrecting GMU, Larrañaga faces new challenges

Washington Post
October 10, 2011
By Amy Shipley

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other setbacks came on the court: losing star center Reggie Johnson to a knee injury in June that will keep him out until December or January, and for-

ward-center Julian Gamble for the year because of a torn anterior cruciate ligament. Larrañaga said he has tried to respond by leaning on sound work habits honed over 27 years as a head coach, with 11 at Bowling Green before he joined George Mason in 1997 and kicked off 13 straight winning seasons.

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

Planning ahead

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

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

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

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

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

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

George Mason Athletic Director Tom O'Connor disputes the assertion that there was anything slow about the school's response. O'Connor claimed he

had to wait on Larrañaga's own lawyer, but yet pushed the process of getting raises and contract extensions for Larrañaga — who last year earned \$525,000 — and his assistant coaches as fast as he could get approval from above his head.

"I wanted to make sure we were doing the right thing," O'Connor said. "Everyone wanted Jim to stay."

Difficult decision

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

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

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

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

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

"That's something my wife says to me," Larrañaga said. "Can we do it all again?"

Rebuilding The Hurricanes

ESPN.com

July 28, 2011

Andy Katz

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski and North Carolina coach Roy Williams were in attendance, as were Florida State's Leonard Hamilton, Ohio State's Thad Matta and Pitt's Jamie Dixon. Alabama and NC State were represented as well.

Sitting among the headline names at the HP Field House on the campus of the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex was Jim Larrañaga, adorning a freshly acquired bright orange golf shirt with a "U" embroidered on the left chest, the traditional moniker for the University of Miami.

For 14 years as the coach of upstart George Mason, Larrañaga relished his role as the underdog, most notably when the Patriots embarked on a historic run to the 2006 Final Four. He cashed in on that achievement by becoming a successful motivational speaker with a Washington, D.C.-based speakers group.

Larrañaga had carved out his niche. George Mason was a Colonial Athletic Association power and a regular contender for an NCAA tournament berth. The Patriots are expected to be a preseason Top 25 team this season, and one that could possibly go on another magical March run.

He was 61. Yet he wasn't satisfied.

"I loved my 14 years at George Mason, and I know a lot of coaches say this: 'Don't mess with happiness,' and I was very, very happy at George Mason," Larrañaga said. "I'm very goal-oriented and I wanted to take a shot at a league that gives you a chance to win a national championship."

Larrañaga had an opportunity to return to his alma mater, Providence, three years ago when the Friars fired Tim Welsh. He turned them down.

"I've always been driven by the opportunity to succeed in your own league, so when I was being courted by my alma mater, Providence, in the Big East I knew the money was substantially better, but the opportunity to win the Big East for Providence would have been a stretch. To compete with teams like Connecticut, Syracuse, Georgetown and Louisville?" Larrañaga said.

So Larrañaga stayed on at Mason in the CAA. The league put another team in the Final Four in April when Virginia Commonwealth made an improbable run from the inaugural First Four to the Final Four. That means the CAA has put two teams in the Final Four in a five-year period; Miami has four NCAA tournament wins in its history.

And let's be honest: Miami isn't beating North Carolina or Duke for the ACC regular-season title any time soon. But getting access to an NCAA tournament berth should be easier out of what is currently a rather pedestrian ACC once you get past the Blue Devils and Tar Heels.

After former coach Frank Haith was scooped up by Missouri, Miami initially flirted with Harvard's Tommy Amaker, but to no avail. Then Miami president Donna Shalala and her top administrators got word of some interest from Larrañaga and, suddenly,

there was a match few would have predicted.

"Every individual is on their own journey," said Larrañaga, who consistently speaks as though he were giving a motivational speech. "I've never been driven by money, and when other schools came courting everyone thought I would move for the money."

"Right now, the ACC is going through a tremendous transition with eight new coaches [over the past three seasons], and any one of those eight could jump up into the upper echelon and make themselves a national contender," Larrañaga said.

The theory that a coach has to move to a power-six job to compete for a national title seems to have less clout. Larrañaga, in large part, helped start the trend that has since been followed by Butler's Brad Stevens and VCU's Shaka Smart.

But one thing that hasn't changed is access to players. Recruiting at a high level remains difficult, and in most cases out of reach for schools outside the power six.

"The quality of the player that receives our phone calls and shows genuine interest is different," Larrañaga said. "We're now in the battle to get the really good players. Our football team has won five national championships. Our baseball team has won titles. In my mind, and the coaches here feel the same way, there's no reason why we can't compete with the best teams in the country to win a national championship. That's our goal."

Larrañaga is no stranger to the ACC. He was an assistant to Terry Holland at Virginia in the 1980s when Ralph Sampson starred for the Cavaliers. But Duke wasn't Duke then. Now, North Carolina and Duke aren't going anywhere but the top of the ACC. The rest of the league is trying to catch them, with each taking a rotating turn in the chase. Maryland is going through a transition with the departure of Gary Williams and the arrival of Mark Turgeon; Hamilton has made Florida State consistently good; Virginia Tech has been a thorn in the side of all the above teams under Seth Greenberg but hasn't been able to get through to the NCAA tournament; Clemson made a smooth transition from Oliver Purnell to Brad Brownell and should be a regular in the postseason discussion; Virginia appears to be on the verge of a breakthrough under Tony Bennett.

It's too early to judge Steve Donahue at Boston College, but he is facing an overhaul of his roster. Mark Gottfried and Brian Gregory just arrived at their respective schools, NC State and Georgia Tech. Wake Forest is facing a major rebuild under Jeff Bzdelik.

"I love the challenge of now recruiting against the best teams in the country," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga's current team took a major hit when one of the best big men in the ACC, Reggie Johnson, went down with a knee injury (torn meniscus) that will sideline him until January at the earliest. Johnson, a 6-foot-10, 305-pound center, averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds for the Canes as a sophomore.

"Reggie was going to be an impact force for us in the low post and could have been the leading rebounder in the league," Larrañaga said. "Because of the sensitivity of the knee and the decision to

repair the cartilage they need four to five months for it to heal properly. He weighs 300 pounds and that can pound on his knee. So it will take three to four weeks to get him in playing shape.

"The earliest is Jan. 1 for a return, but it's more realistic to think mid-January," Larrañaga said. "There will be a transition when Reggie comes back. He'll have to shed the cobwebs from being out for six months. Then we'll have him hopefully for the close of the ACC season in February, the ACC tournament and hopefully the postseason."

Larrañaga will be counting on Florida transfer Kenny Kadji -- who never realized his potential with the Gators -- senior Julian Gamble and sophomore Raphael Akpejori to fill in for Johnson. All are about 6-10 to 6-11, but none have proved themselves at this level.

Getting shooting guard Bishop Daniels to keep his commitment was one of Larrañaga's most significant coups after he got the job. Daniels will join an experienced roster in the backcourt with Malcolm Grant, Durand Scott and DeQuan Jones, and there's an expectation that UMKC transfer Trey McKinney Jones will have an impact, too.

Miami had the talent a year ago to be an NCAA tournament team, but the guard play wasn't strong in late-game possessions, notably early in the season at Memphis. That contributed to a bizarre season in which the Hurricanes finished ninth in the ACC at 6-10 overall, yet finished 21-15, enough to earn a bid to the NIT, where they lost to Alabama in the quarterfinals.

"Miami did win 21 games last season, but they did finish [ninth] in the ACC, and that concerns me," Larrañaga said. "I think everyone thinks we'll be better this season, but it's a new system and a new philosophy and there will be an adjustment. They played a lot of 2-3 zone, and we'll only play zone in an extreme situation."

Larrañaga said the Hurricanes will have multiple seasons within one -- the nonconference, the early ACC without Johnson, the latter part of the ACC with him and the ACC tournament before possibly the postseason. To reach that postseason goal, the Hurricanes will have to make some noise in the nonconference schedule. The ACC ranked 16th in nonconference scheduling last season. The Big East was No. 1. That was a major issue at the annual spring meetings. The ACC had four NCAA tournament teams. The Big East had 11.

Larrañaga knows about scheduling into the NCAA tournament. He had multiple at-large berths at Mason, including in its 2006 Final Four run.

This season, the Canes will play Purdue, Memphis, West Virginia, Rutgers, Ole Miss and UMass in non-conference play.

"If we can succeed without Reggie in the nonconference then we should be able to set ourselves up to compete for postseason play out of the ACC," Larrañaga said. "I've never had the ambition to retire. I love coaching. I have the passion to keep doing it and see players develop and mature."

Larrañaga ready to put UM on national map

CaneSport.com

April 22, 2011

Jim Larrañaga was introduced today as the Miami Hurricanes' new men's basketball coach. And he has lofty goals for UM's program.

"I am very excited to be here, there ain't no question about that," Larrañaga said. "(This) offers a tremendous opportunity to compete at the highest level of college basketball. The ACC since the day I arrived at Virginia in 1979 is the best basketball league in the country. And it is our opportunity now as coaches, players and a community to get behind the program and do something very, very special. It's going to take a lot of work, but the reason I came here is because of the people.

"We have a lot of hard work in front of us, but I'm excited to get started."

Larrañaga pointed out how his George Mason team was being ranked in the early top 25 for next year and said, "I would not have left that caliber of team if we didn't feel we had that caliber of talent already here at the U, if we had the capability of challenging the very best teams not only in the ACC but also the entire country. Our challenge is to build a program that can (be successful) over an extended period of time so everyone in this community will be dying to get a ticket, get a seat to watch us play. You may say 'that ain't going to happen here.' I heard it at Bowling Green and George Mason (and fans packed the stands there). We want to create that atmosphere here."

Larrañaga also joked that "It didn't take me long to feel part of the program when Malcolm Grant greeted me as I walked into the office and tried to pronounce my name correctly."

Larrañaga addressed trying to get more students show up for games by saying "My staff and I will be in the dormitories recruiting students. We will work with the faculty.

"We need to reach out to the community of Coral Gables, the people who make up the community. My wife is the social director - I guarantee she will know more people in the community in the next year than some people who have lived here their whole lives.

At 61 years old, Larrañaga was asked why he wants to take this job at this point of his career.

"I'm crazy," he said to laughs, adding, "I love a challenge. I thought about my own career, what goals I wasn't able to accomplish in my 40 years. And one was I'd love to coach in the ACC, take a team to Cameron Indoor Stadium or the Dean Dome. At this time in my life I felt once I talked to Shawn Eichorst and could hear the energy in his voice, to find out things about the other basketball program here, the job that Katie Meier has already done - it showed if the women can do it the men should be able to do it. It's a challenge for me, but something that excites me very much. It's like the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be all about. When I first arrived at George Mason I said we wanted to do something very special,

and our run to the Final Four was that moment. But we didn't win the national championship, and quite frankly that irks me. I think being a member of the ACC, with the opportunities to recruit nationally but with a focus locally and regionally, with the talent already on hand, we can be headed in the right direction to challenge the best programs in the conference and the country."

* Larrañaga said that when the UM job opened up he inquired about it through friends that were tied to a Michael Jordan camp "as coaches do - who is going to get the job?" Larrañaga said. "They shared a name with me (who was being looked at), it wasn't me. And then they called me back and said 'Hey, would you be interested.' So I made contact with the University to let them know of my interest."

* Larrañaga addressed the team, which met with him before the press conference and then attended it as he spoke: "The members of the team become our family," Larrañaga said. "We will have the players to my house. My wife will cook for them - you will love her chocolate chip cookies."

- Reggie Johnson wasn't at the press conference - Larrañaga said he remained home in North Carolina.

* Two of Larrañaga's players at George Mason were from Florida, and he made it clear that recruiting Florida is his No. 1 priority.

"We will actively recruit in-state players to try and build our program with a very strong foundation of local recruits," Larrañaga said. "We want to develop the relationship with youth league coaches, high school coaches, AAU coaches."

* Larrañaga addressed leaving George Mason, saying, "The players that I leave behind at George Mason are an incredible group of young men. They just finished the best season in school history in terms of record. I thank those players who made my job so much fun every day. I told those players today that when we met in Fairfax in our locker room that I was going to become the head coach of the U basketball program. Every one of them hugged me and wished me well, and I did the same to them. But this opportunity is very, very special to me. ... I love coaching, helping players be the best that they can be."

* Larrañaga's grandfather on his father's side was from Cuba, and Larrañaga said "I'm very proud of my heritage, of having grown up spending time in Kissimmee and Key West and in the State of Florida, because that's where my father vacationed every year. And now I feel I'm back home at the University of Miami. We're going to put together a fantastic Hurricane team."

* First-year athletic director Shawn Eichorst said of his decision to hire Larrañaga that "I was asked what we were looking for in our next men's basketball coach - we are delighted to say we have found it, and it's Jim Larrañaga. (He) is a fundamentally sound teacher of the game and will positively lead our student-athletes with a tremendous amount of passion, integrity and dedication. Jim is a man of great

character who will be a first-class ambassador for the University of Miami and our basketball program. He has successfully transitioned two other programs at George Mason and Bowling Green. And he is no stranger to the ACC having served as an assistant coach at Virginia - they won three ACC championships and finished in the top five of the AP rankings. Jim is a tremendously gifted speaker and communicator. His players follow his philosophy and play fundamentally sound basketball, take care of the basketball, play fierce defense and are very efficient on the offensive end of the court.

"This is an exciting day for the University of Miami."

* Football coach Al Golden attended today's press conference, giving Larrañaga a hug before it began.

* Of his basketball philosophy, Larrañaga said, "I have two boys - when my wife and I were raising our sons the two things we stressed (were) we wanted them to grow up to be happy and successful. But to accomplish both those goals they had to be great students and use those smarts to advance themselves, enjoy their life. That's the same approach we take as a coaching staff with this team. Basketball is a game, it should be fun. We emphasize attitude, commitment and class. Attitude, we ask our players to have a positive attitude, talk about life being 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it. Second we talk about making a total and unconditional commitment to being the best at everything you do, every aspect of your life. The third is class - we want our players to always behave in a first-class manner.

"As far as basketball is concerned, I'm a big believer that defense wins championships. And we are coming here to compete and win. That means we have to be fundamentally sound on the defensive end of the floor. We have to be able to guard the basketball but also help the guy who guards the basketball. Players will hear me and my coaching staff say 'one man guards the basketball and four men help him guard the basketball.' Our choice is to be an up-tempo team. The defense will create the offense. One part of our offensive opportunity is to create fast-break layups and open threes in transitions. That will not change.

"The scramble defense - I'm hoping to implement that to a degree so it can become a weapon and something the opponent has to prepare for. But it will depend on the work ethic of the team, because it forces the players to play at a high level of intensity for a (long) time. It requires a deep bench. My Bowling Green teams scrambled 70, 80 percent of the time. My George Mason teams of recent years have scrambled less because we were so strong in the half court."

* Larrañaga said he's still in the process of putting together his coaching staff.

* Larrañaga has a home in Sarasota that he purchased from Dick Vitale's daughter (Vitale is a friend of his).

UM embraces new men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga

Palm Beach Post
April 22, 2011
By Jorge Milian

CORAL GABLES — So why would a 61-year-old guy leave a cushy job at a top mid-major college basketball program to coach a team whose history is mostly forgettable?

"I'm crazy," Jim Larrañaga said a couple of questions into a news conference introducing him on Friday night as the University of Miami's men's basketball coach.

Anything but, although Larrañaga certainly has plenty of personality.

During his question-and-answer session with reporters, Larrañaga quoted Confucius, emphasized words by unexpectedly shouting them out and broke out into a little Spanish.

"You can tell he's going to be a lot of fun," said senior guard Malcolm Grant, who was in attendance Friday with most of his teammates.

Judging by his history at George Mason, Larrañaga will do far more than act colorfully. In 14 seasons, Larrañaga coached the Patriots to five NCAA tournaments and famously led his 2006 team to the Final Four before it lost to eventual national champion Florida.

After passing up other intriguing offers during his tenure at George Mason, most expected Larrañaga to remain at the Fairfax, Va., school until he retired.

"I started thinking about my own career, where I am and what goals have I not been able to accomplish during the course of my 40-year career in coaching," said Larrañaga, who also coached at Bowling Green

and Division II American International. "One thing kept coming back in my mind, that I'd love to coach in the ACC.

"It's kind of the last piece of a coaching career"

Larrañaga inherits a team that is expected to return virtually its entire roster, including Grant, an All-ACC third-team selection last season. But, like his predecessors, Larrañaga will also be tasked with selling a program whose existence has been marked by apathy.

The Hurricanes shut down the program from 1971 to 1985 and have ranked last in ACC attendance since joining the league in 2004. UM rarely attracts more than a few hundred students to games even though they are admitted for free and are further enticed by offers like free pizza.

"It's going to be hard," said Sammy Hernandez, a member of George Mason's Final Four team who attended Friday's news conference. "But when I was at George Mason in 2005-06, I was a freshman and our stadium is the way you guys have it now — empty seats. By 2007, there were huge crowds. And not because of the Final Four, but because of him."

Larrañaga, whose father is from Key West and grandfather was from Cuba, promised to build a team in which "everyone in this community is going to be dying to get a ticket and a seat to watch us play."

Larrañaga's signature style is what he calls "scramble defense," a high-intensity, full-court press that demands extreme fitness and a deep bench.

"I'm a tremendous believer that defense wins championships," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga's deal is for five seasons and

will pay him \$1.3 million per season, according to The Washington Post. Last season, Larrañaga earned \$700,000, including incentives, on a contract that ran through the 2015-16 season.

Larrañaga said he made it known through a search firm used by UM that he was interested in replacing Frank Haith as the Hurricanes' coach. Haith resigned earlier this month to become Missouri's coach.

UM athletic director Shawn Eichorst and Larrañaga spoke on Wednesday and a deal was in place by Thursday evening.

Eichorst said he didn't allow Larrañaga's age to concern him.

"For me, age is a number," said Eichorst, named UM's athletic director 10 days ago. "That's not a factor for me. He wanted to be here and we wanted him to be here."

The hiring drew rave reviews around the college basketball world.

ESPN analyst Dick Vitale referred to the move as a "grand slam for Miami."

"Jim is going to bring a certain spark," Vitale said. "He's got a personality. You'll see them playing exciting basketball and, more importantly, with Jim, they'll play winning basketball. You have to get people excited about basketball and, in Miami, they have not been excited about college basketball."

Larrañaga's hiring completes a major overhaul among UM's most prominent positions in the athletic department. Al Golden was hired in December as the school's football coach. Eichorst replaced Kirby Hocutt, who quit in February to become athletic director at Texas Tech.

NCDS: Miami's Eric Konkol on "Roles"

College ChalkTalk
Staff
Jan. 9, 2013

As non-conference play transitions to the conference season, players are settling into a specific role on their respective teams. Over the years, I have found that the teams with the most players who have "fallen in love with their role" have been the most successful. Deciding who plays is the most difficult aspect of game coaching. Putting the best lineups on the floor with buy-in from each member is vital for success. Our staff spends a great amount of time communicating with our players about their role on the team and the level of performance we expect from them. Players typically fall into the following roles:

1. Scorer
2. Defender
3. Rebounder
4. Transporter
5. Energy giver

Of course, the best and most complete players have qualities of each of the five roles, but many players have special skill sets. Some players can really score and others are most gifted as lock down defenders or counted on to clean up the glass. You may have players who are proficient at finding teammates good shots or keeping the ball moving as a transporter. Most of all, you want each player to give energy to one another by being enthusiastic each day no matter what the role and how much or how little they play.

When our staff makes decisions on playing time and role definition there are times we want to educate them on why we make the decisions we do for the benefit of the team. We also want to provide them goals on how to expand their role for the future.

Here is an example: Shots
Everyone wants to score and we had a player who saw himself as a perimeter shooter and wanted more shots even though he was a career 15% three-point shooter. He could score around the basket, was one of the best rebounding guards we ever had, and was a very good defender.

We did a simple exercise with him about his shot attempts and the shot attempts he felt each of his teammates should get per game. We asked him how many fast break layups he should get, half court driving layups or floaters, pull up jump shots, and three point attempts. He also did this for each member of the team. After his calculation, he came up with himself shooting 15 shots per game, our leading scorer 22 shots, and our team attempting over 120 shots per game!

Of course, he was surprised to know that our leading scorer was shooting just 12 times per game and we were averaging close to 55 shots per game as a team.

To show him what he was best at, we calculated each player's rebounds per minute played and he was our leader. He was exceptional at this and we wanted him to love being good at this skill and not focused on being someone he wasn't at this point of his career.

Numbers tell a story and there are times like this where we like to bring players into the coaching world of decision making. We also like to give players something to test themselves on and strive for so they can work daily toward expanding their current role. Players should dream about advancing their game and we want to help them achieve those dreams.

When it comes to shooting the three, we have a simple test to gain the green light to shoot three point shots in games. It is

called 5 Minute Threes.

It requires one shooter, one ball, and one rebounder for five minutes. The shooter can be anywhere on the arc and even stay in one place. They shoot for five minutes and if they can consistently make over 50 threes in five minutes they have the green light to shoot open threes in games. If they are in the 40s they have the yellow light. They can take one wide open three and shoot another if they make it. If a player makes 39 or less consistently in five minutes, they have the red light and that of course means no threes in games. We have had players start in the 40s and are now consistently in the 60s. Last season Malcolm Grant set a record by making 85 threes in 5 minutes. We chart the results for each player over time and post it in the locker room. This helps each player see where they are at as well as their teammates. It's important for each player to know who our best three point shooters are.

Big Picture -

A player "falling in love" with their current role while having goals to expand or change that role down the road is a big part of our player development. Evaluating a player's strengths daily, having them understand what they do well and what they don't do well, will help them recognize how they can help the team succeed. Roles can change during the season. You see teams that have players improve, regress, become injured or healthy, transfer, or become eligible or ineligible mid-year. Constant communication with the players is vital to a team first environment and will help them be ready to step into a new role if the opportunity calls.

Best wishes to you and the team you coach or cheer for.

- Eric Konkol

NCDS: Miami's Eric Konkol on what drives him to coach

College Chalktalk
Editorial Staff
Nov. 17, 2012

Each morning my three and one-year old boys wake me at the crack of dawn, sometimes earlier, and once they are busy playing and ultimately breaking something, I take a few minutes to check emails and plan my day. Quite frequently, I receive an email from someone who is interested in getting into college coaching. When replying to these emails I'm reminded of why I wanted to get into coaching, why I love what I do, and the people that have helped me tremendously along the way.

During the summers before my junior and senior years in college, I worked basketball camps at my school, the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, and several others around the country. For each of those two summers I worked 10 weeks of camp. After my first week I was hooked. I loved working with the kids, talking hoops with the coaches that had been doing it for years, and seeing just a slight improvement in someone during the week was very gratifying. It was also much more fun than the construction and waiter jobs I had the previous summers!

After college, I started as graduate assistant and was fortunate to work with some great people. Looking back, I was so focused on doing whatever I could to help the coaches win games, secure recruits, and not much else. Being focused is important, but it wasn't until a few years into my career that I realized the greatest satisfaction in coaching – helping our players. The impact we have on our players is tremendous and the amount of development between 18 and 22 years old can be life changing. Helping players improve their game, advising them through adversity on and off the floor, watching them graduate,

and staying in touch with them through their adult life is the ultimate for me.

I'm a believer that there is no such thing as a self-made man. You must have help along the way. I have been fortunate to play for and work for great coaches that have helped shape who I am. My high school coach Gregg Jensen, college coaches Bo Ryan and Terry Gibbons, and the head coaches I have worked for in Ed Conroy, Buzz Peterson, Ken Novak, Saul Phillips, and Jim Larrañaga. The camaraderie of a team and the friendship you build with the other coaches on the staff makes the long hours and tough losses seem insignificant. I really can't imagine doing anything else.

Thank you to Chris DiSano for allowing me the opportunity to once again take part in the College Chalktalk NCDS to take a few moments, step back, and think about the big picture. Good luck to everyone this year!

Larrañaga Assistant Talks Scheduling and More

CaneSport.com
Oct. 31, 2011
by Matt Shodell

Men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga, 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 Larrañaga 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 Larrañaga 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."

Chris Caputo Is Living His Hoop Dream

Westfield State Communications Office
Mickey Curtis
Dec. 20, 2012

It is a full court shot from Parenzo Hall Gym to the big time world of college basketball, but Westfield State alumnus Chris Caputo is living his dream as an assistant coach at the University of Miami.

Caputo, a 2002 Westfield State graduate and a four-year letterwinner as a reserve point guard for the Owls, has been in sunny south Florida for the past two years. Prior to that, he was a member of the George Mason University coaching staff in Fairfax, Va., for nine years. The 32-year-old Caputo already has many memorable moments in his short basketball odyssey: Miami's upset victory at Duke last season, George Mason's remarkable run to the NCAA Division I Final Four in 2006, and his four years at Westfield State.

"I've seen a lot of great places like Duke and North Carolina and I have been to the Final Four, but I wouldn't trade those for my time at Westfield; it was special and worthwhile," said Caputo the day before the Miami Hurricanes departed for a Christmas Tournament in Hawaii.

Caputo's passion for coaching began at an early age and continued at Westfield State. As a seldom-used point guard for the Owls, Caputo was a keen observer on the bench as a member of Westfield State head coach Rich Sutter's first recruiting class in 1998. In between classes he was a regular visitor to Sutter's office, peppering him with questions on coaching strategies. Caputo also watched a lot of game tape on Westfield opponents and gave Sutter detailed scouting reports. "I don't know if he used them," said Caputo with a chuckle.

Interestingly, Caputo stresses his academics at Westfield State also played a pivotal role in preparing him for the 24/7 world of big-time college basketball.

"My time at Westfield was really valuable," said Caputo. "It's a place where you cannot get lost because it is a smaller school and a lot of demands are put on you academically. I was a finance and economics major where I had to grind it out and fight through it studying, especially near the end of the semester. That's helped me today."

Caputo's connections (he and Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga both graduated from Archbishop Malloy High School in New York City where they played for the legendary coach Jack Curran), coaching passion and work ethic landed him a job straight out of Westfield State as a volunteer assistant coach for Larrañaga at George Mason. The Elmhurst, N.Y. native toiled as an unpaid assistant for three years before becoming a full-time staff member at George Mason in 2005. He even turned down several full-time paid positions at other colleges to remain at George Mason because it was such a priceless training ground.

"Ten years ago there were not as many NCAA restrictions and I was able to do more things," said Caputo in explaining why he didn't take the money and run. "In addition to breaking down film, I could make calls to recruits, work camps and recruit off campus within 30 miles of the school. Plus coach Larrañaga is a great mentor and a veteran in the business."

Caputo's main duties at the University of Miami are recruiting and scouting opponents. He admits the pay and perks are good; his per diem is a lot more than the \$7.00 meal money he received at Westfield State. But the lifestyle isn't always glamorous and the pressure to win is enormous as Miami is a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"It's more than just two hours in suits coaching basketball," said Caputo. "There are late nights watching film, countless trips to see high school recruits that you are not going to get, and hours of sacrifice and family time missed. It is a tough profession and a very workmanlike job. But being at Miami has been great and the school has such a name brand – five football national titles and four baseball national titles. And the ACC is the best basketball conference in the country. Every night is a moment in this league. It's a great city with great weather and an exciting place to be."

Caputo's first "coaching moment" came when he was a sophomore in high school. In March of 1996, he and a friend went to the Hilton in midtown Manhattan, the headquarters for the NCAA Final Four. Caputo watched in awe as a who's who of coaches roamed the lobby.

"I saw coaches like Mike Krzyzewski and

Jerry Tarkanian and I said this is what I want to do, this is cool," said Caputo. "Then 10 years to the date I was living out my dream of walking around the lobby at the Final Four as a coach."

One day Caputo dreams of strolling the lobby and the sidelines as a Division I head coach. He is realistic that may not happen for some time, if at all, because head coaching positions are scarce and highly sought. But he does point out that that four of Larrañaga's former assistants during the past decade are currently head coaches. A content Caputo just bides his time, works hard, and continues to network and make new friends in the coaching profession. He frequently sends text messages to Erik Spoelstrag, the head coach of the 2012 NBA champion Miami Heat.

"Anyone who is in this business does it to become a head coach," said Caputo. "But if I become a head coach it has to be the right fit for me; I am big on that. I am also big on knowing what the commitment is from a school. But if nothing comes along I will also be happy to work with Coach Larrañaga."

Commitment and loyalty are constants for Caputo. He remains good friends with his

Westfield State teammates, in particular Phil Connors (Class of 2002). And two other Owl teammates – Kris Kachelmeyer (2001) and Jon Mazzone (2001) – visited with Caputo when Miami played at UMass Amherst in early December. Wherever Caputo's coaching odyssey takes him, Westfield State will be of big part of it.

"A lot of nice things happened to me at Westfield State and playing there was a great experience," said Caputo.

Hoops Recruiting: UM wants "State of Miami"

CaneSport.com
Oct. 30, 2011
by Matt Shodell

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With one exception: Center.

"The only thing that's different is the size in the front court (in the ACC) - there's a little

bit more of a need defensively to match up with some of the size," Caputo said. "Like in the CAA, for many years centers in the league were 6-6, 6-7 - they could pass, shoot, score around the basket."

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

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

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

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

"Things like that - you're trying to put your best foot forward," Caputo said.

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

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

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

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

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

And keeping in regular contact with high school coaches also plays a major role for the

coaches. The UM sports information department says hoops coaches send out approximately 1,000 e-mails to high school coaches every day - typically a motivational quote, an offensive set or different ways to do things.

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

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

* The system in place for giving a scholarship offer?

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

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

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

Tonye Jekiri at home on basketball court

CaneSport.com
Staff
Oct. 24, 2012

The culture shock for Hurricane center Tonye Jekiri when he arrived in Miami from Nigeria three years ago?

All it took was the twist of a shower handle.

"I remember I took a shower, was wondering where the water was coming from," the freshman Jekiri said. "In Africa you go fetch it with a bucket, or you see a tank that stores the water at the back of the house. Over here I was asking where the water was coming from. I kept looking because I'd been in the shower for so long and the water just kept coming out, didn't run out. That was one thing I was shocked about it."

Another shock (literally): Nonstop electricity.

"I kept waiting for it to be turned off at some point," Jekiri said. "Certain hours of the day it would come on back home."

Other adjustments: Air conditioning and supermarkets with fresh produce. Jekiri was used to roadside markets and people running up to the family car hawking fruit and vegetables.

"The supermarkets there sell things like cologne, no food," he said, adding that "It was a change in food here. My native food I would normally eat soup ... and the way the rice was made with spices was way different - it was a change. It was difficult for me those first months. I had to adapt to everything.

"Even the roads - in Africa they have potholes, and you only have one major road that will take you to your office and every-

thing is on it; you're stuck in traffic for an hour or two."

Jekiri's road to Miami began at age 16 when one of his soccer coaches said based on his size he could be a basketball player in the States. Arrangements were made for him to be evaluated at an American camp.

"It was because of my height," Jekiri said. "One of my soccer coaches started working with me on fundamental things like catching the ball, dribbling."

Soon after Jekiri packed his 6-foot-11 frame into a coach seat for the 19-hour flight in hopes a high school coach would take a chance on him. On day 1 of the camp he got his first five-on-five real game experience.

"I was just running the floor and getting rebounds, that was it," Jekiri said. "Coaches liked me because of my energy. They said I ran nonstop."

A coach at Hialeah (FL) Champagnat Catholic asked him to attend the school, and Jekiri and his mother agreed.

"It was a small private school, and we liked that," Jekiri said. "The coach was there watching me, said he'd love me to come to their school. When I went back home my mom decided that would be good for me."

When Jekiri moved to Miami for good, he faced a big academic challenge.

"It was difficult - the first months I was struggling with the educational system," Jekiri said. "So many classes I hadn't taken in my country I had to take like history, and I didn't know much about the United States. And I had to take Spanish."

The transition on the basketball court wasn't much easier. Starting out as a junior he struggled.

"I couldn't even make a layup then," he said. "On game time I had butterflies bad, struggled for seven to eight games. After that I had a good season just running the floor and getting rebounds. I had little schools looking at me then, like FIU."

As a senior he made big strides, opening eyes by averaging 20 points, 12 rebounds and five blocked shots. It all started clicking for him, and he wound up rated the nation's No. 17 center prospect by ESPN.

"Miami, they came by during my senior season, watched me play and offered me a scholarship during the season," Jekiri said.

He wound up with 17 scholarship offers and took visits to George Mason, Clemson and Miami before settling on the Canes.

He says he chose UM because "The weather is the same as in Africa, warm. I've never experienced coldness, how that would affect my breathing. That was one reason I love Miami and decided to stay. Miami was my third visit, was the place I wanted to be and play ball."

Now Jekiri is focused on making a sizable impact when he's in games.

"I'll come off the bench, will help the team - I know I'm going to have a big role to play," Jekiri said. "I'll be getting rebounds, blocked shots."

He adds "I'm really happy to be a Hurricane. Putting on the jersey with my name on it, I was really happy. I just thank God for everything."

Jekiri Looking to Fill Role

InsideTheU

Chris Stock

Oct. 12, 2012

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Tonye Jekiri is Miami's lone true freshman and is looking to be a key role player this season.

Jekiri is a 7-foot, 227-pound shot-blocking center and solid rebounder originally from Nigeria before he moved to Miami and played two seasons at Champagnat Catholic.

As a senior, he averaged 20 points, 12 rebounds, and five blocks per game leading his team to a Class 2A state final.

"The biggest adjustment (from high school to college) was going from weightlifting to practice, it's not the same in high school," Jekiri said. "In high school I never lifted weights and went to practice. From weightlifting to practice to class to study hall, it was really tough for me. But I've kind of gotten used to it."

Head coach Jim Larrañaga has been impressed with Jekiri's progress since he arrived in the summer.

"I like the progress Tonye Jekiri is making," Larrañaga said. "We have worked exclusively on him developing a great jump hook because I think that will be his greatest weapon throughout his college career. He's got a nice jump shot, but a guy with his size and versatility in and around the basket, to be able to just jump hook over people would be very, very effective and he's working very hard to develop that shot as his bread and butter move."

Since arriving at UM, Jekiri has been praised Larrañaga and the players for listening to instructions without any questions.

"With me playing basketball I'm still trying to learn because it is my third year playing basketball," Jekiri said. "I'm trying to learn rather than talking. I really believe you learn more when you listen instead of talking more. There's not too much I can say because they have been in the game more."

Jekiri is one of five post players on the team with three—Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadiji, and Julian Gamble—leading the way as seniors.

"They really have showed me what it really takes to be a Hurricane player and how hard it is going to be for me even when I go ahead with more expectations when they leave, the coaches will be looking for me to step up and take that role," Jekiri said. "They have been really pushing me when it comes to practice and weightlifting. They have also told me about their past experiences and how they fought through all of the things, they have been a big help for me."

Jekiri is making sure he's improving daily not just for a role this season, but in the future when he'll have a larger role after the seniors depart.

"I really do think about that right now," he said. "Even when I come off the bench, it's still a big role for me. I always think about when I come into the game and how I'll have to step up. I always think about that and the future too when I'll have a bigger role."

To help Jekiri learn the game more, he spends time watching NBA and college games. In particular, he likes watching Kevin Garnett and Dwight Howard play.

"I like how they play, how they are leaders on their team and have really learned from them," said Jekiri, who also liked watch-

ing Thomas Robinson and Jared Sullinger in college.

Miami hosts St. Leo on Nov. 2 at 7 p.m. in their lone exhibition game. Regular season action begins Nov. 9 as the Hurricanes look to make a run towards an NCAA tournament appearance.

"As a team my expectations is for us to get to the NCAA tournament and the Sweet 16, 8, or 4 and I think we have weapons to get there, we just have to put ourselves together," Jekiri said. "Mostly we want to win back our fans because we need our fans to support us in every game. As a player my expectation is stepping up in every game, filling the roles, and being aggressive in every game."

SG Adams Preparing for Next Season

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 22, 2013

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Adams has been the point guard on the

second unit during practices while his most natural position is shooting guard. Lately, he has been concentrating on a variety areas of his game such as spot-up shooting, creating for his teammates, and working on being a primary ball handler.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

played that role well, scoring, getting to the rim, and getting off picks."

With Miami ranked No. 2 in the nation with a 22-3 record, 13-0 in the ACC and recording wins over perennial powers Michigan State, Duke, and North Carolina (twice), it hasn't been easy to watch from the sidelines.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UM's Brown busts slump with inspiration from father

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Jan. 9, 2013

It's been rough for Rion Brown this year.

Nothing was falling for the Miami sharpshooter. Nothing — as in 14 straight missed 3s over a six-game span. So he switched it up. Before playing in front of 40 hometown friends and family last Saturday at Georgia Tech, Brown hit the gym at 8 a.m.

And something clicked.

Playing on the same floor his father, Tico Brown, starred for the Yellow Jackets a generation ago, Brown nailed 4 of 6 from the perimeter and scored a career-high 22 points. Three of his 3s came in the second half when the Hurricanes pulled away for the 62-49 win. The family connection can't be ignored, coach Jim Larrañaga said.

"That actually inspired him," he said. "When he went by to shoot, he saw that his father was an All-American there. He saw his jersey was retired. His photo was up on display and you get excited about that."

Larrañaga even joked about bringing a wallet-sized photo of Tico Brown everywhere Miami travels to keep the mojo alive. It would be in Chapel Hill, N.C., on Thursday as Miami (10-3, 1-0 ACC) faces North Carolina at 7 p.m. on ESPN.

Brown, who was a 39 percent 3-point shooter last season, said his dad served as more than inspiration during the early season slump. They'd talk regularly on the phone about breaking the streak.

"He really tells me to concentrate on something else," Rion Brown said. "Don't always go into the game thinking about

your shooting. So, going into that game, the first thing I was thinking about was I'm just going to play great defense and get as many rebounds as I can. Next thing I know I hit the first shot."

The slide ended 11 seconds after checking into Saturday's game. By halftime, he had a team-high 11 before making three more 3s in the second half.

With senior center Reggie Brown sidelined for several more weeks with a broken thumb, shooters like Brown could be the key to staying in the ACC race. The team's collective 0-for-15 night from 3-point range against Indiana State led to a 57-55 overtime loss on Christmas Day.

Brown has a good idea what was going wrong at that point.

"It's definitely mental," he said. "Earlier in the season it was getting to me. All I'm thinking about is how many shots I've missed and I can't think like that. I'm a shooter, I have to think 'keep shooting,' and the next one is going in."

Every possible solution was in play. He'd spend 10 minutes before each game silently visualizing making shots. But they weren't falling in reality and it became more of a challenge to keep pulling the trigger.

Could Erik Swoope be another Jimmy Graham?

State of the U.com
Jerry Steinberg
Nov. 18, 2012

We caught up with Miami's talented 6'6 junior forward Erik Swoope and asked him about the current state of the team, his incredible athleticism, his potential to play another sport down the line, and much more.

Much like Jimmy Graham, Swoope is a high energy player who can guard multiple positions, and play above the rim. Swoope had an excellent performance in Miami's win over Jacksonville Friday night providing energy with 7 points, 2 thunderous dunks, and 2 steals. Additionally he is a very good interview.

Here is our full Q&A with Erik Swoope:

SOTU: We talked with Bishop Daniels a few weeks back and asked him who was faster between Shane and him, and your name came up. So among Shane, Bishop, and yourself, who is the fastest?

ES: Oh man, its very close. If we had a footrace Bishop would win by a very small margin and Shane and I would be tied. We did actually get timed earlier in the summer in three-quarter court sprints, and actually I had the fastest time at 2.99 seconds. Shane was right at 3 flat, and Bishop was at 3.01. I wouldn't mind seeing us do a 40 yard sprint and see.

SOTU: It would be cool to see the three of you on the break and see who gets the alley-oop.

ES: Yeah, exactly (laughs)

SOTU: This is a very difficult question, but

we have to ask. What has the team been doing to overcome the slow start? Are there any major adjustments or changes we can expect?

ES: I think we need to just learn what's best for us. We have some new guys in Tanye and Bishop and we're missing Durand as well. Right now we are just trying to build a stronger chemistry. Coach L is doing everything he can to help us understand how important the little things are like winning the free throw battle and boxing out. It is starting to slowly come together. I think between the new guys and all of the seniors we will come together.

SOTU: How do you see your role on this team?

ES: My role is mainly to come in and provide as much energy as possible. I may need to match up with guards, wings, bigs, so I make sure I am prepared to contribute offensively but also guard all 5 positions. I focus on offensive rebounds, and guarding the other team's best guy. Something like a Dennis Rodman,

SOTU: Can you tell fans a little about the mohawk?

ES: Yeah I had never done anything like that before, and I thought would be fun. My family also encouraged me to do something different. I actually just recently cut the mohawk, I'm looking to try some new styles.

SOTU: That's very cool and fits the Dennis Rodman mold just a bit?

ES: Yeah. (laughs).

SOTU: Considering your incredible athleticism, ever consider pulling a Jimmy Gra-

ham, and giving football a shot?

ES: That would just depend on if the opportunity came up. That is something I have contemplated. I'd have to talk to my family, but I haven't had any formal communication with the football staff. But yeah, there's maybe a possibility.

SOTU: Hey maybe we can send a note to Al Golden on your behalf. Although Coach L would probably take care of that?

ES: Yeah I'm sure they would.

SOTU: Any final message for the fans?

ES: Come and support the team. It means a lot. We will do everything we can to give them a great show. Going back to last year, when we played Florida State. It was the first sell out of the year. And the team, and the coaches, we really fed off of it. When an opposing team comes in they feel the energy, and we'd like to get that every night.

Well there you have it Canes fans. Erik Swoope and the Miami Hurricanes are looking for you to come out and support them. We certainly appreciate Erik taking the time to do this Q&A with us, and wish him good luck during the season and in all of his endeavors.

Canes Bringing Style to the Court

**Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 1, 2013**

When you watch the Miami Hurricanes basketball team play, there's one thing that stands out.

Their shoes.

As one of the nation's hottest teams at 16-3 and a perfect 7-0 in ACC competition, the 14th-ranked Hurricanes are also one of the most stylish teams.

Each player brings a unique style to the court with them as the UM coaching staff doesn't restrict the players from only wearing team shoes or even team colors.

Lately, two players—Shane Larkin and Durand Scott—have been rocking a bright neon yellow pair of shoes with Larkin in the Nike Air Zoom Huarache 2K4 and Scott in the Nike Zoom Hyperdunk 2011.

Larkin and Scott first broke out the pair of highlighters two weeks ago in their win over No. 1 Duke.

"I didn't even know coach was going to let them do it, but it looked good out there," McKinney-Jones said.

Larkin spotted his shoes at nearby Sole Fly, a sneaker boutique store specializing in unique shoes and the latest designs. The shoes immediately caught his eye and he took a picture of them to send to assistant coach Michael Huger, who has to approve each shoe. Huger gave the Larkin the go-ahead and Larkin got the bright pair of shoes.

"A lot of people like the bright shoe," Sole Fly store manager Tony Perez said. "So the guys have got them to wear in the games. There's a lot of stuff in here and the guys come in saying they need a shoe for game day."

Not only did Larkin and Scott look good on the court, the backcourt duo combined for 43 points, 16 rebounds, and nine assists in Miami's first ever win over a No. 1 Duke as the Hurricanes blew out the Blue Devils, 90-63.

As Mars Blackmon would say, "It's gotta be the shoes."

Scott was planning on wearing his bright

yellow shoes last season in a game against Memphis, but head coach Jim Larrañaga, who was in his first year at UM, wasn't comfortable with the idea so the staff had Scott change into a different pair before the game.

"We were coming from George Mason so we weren't used to that," Huger said.

Since then, Larrañaga put Huger in charge of which shoes can and cannot be worn. Huger receives plenty of requests and suggestions from the creative group of players looking to lead Miami to its first NCAA tournament appearance in five years.

"I use it as an incentive and say, 'Hey, if we win this game, you guys are allowed to wear the lime green shoe that's how they came into play (against Duke),' Huger said. "We were at Boston College and the guys weren't as sharp in our practice and shoot-around so I gave them a little extra motivation and said, 'Hey if we win this game you guys can wear those lime green shoes that you want to wear so badly. We wound up winning by one point.'"

Larkin and Scott had the brightest shoes on the court that day against Duke, but the other Hurricanes deserve high marks for their style as well.

Most notably, Julian Gamble. While the highlighter shoes might stand out the most, devoted sneakerheads will be proud of Gamble's shoes. Gamble has been wearing a special-edition Solefly x Jordan Spizike shoe. There are only about 60 pairs in the world of the impressive orange, green, black and grey shoe.

Trey McKinney-Jones wore the Air Jordan 11 "Cool Grey" and Kenny Kadji was in a pair of the Nike LeBron X id shoes to round out Miami's starting five against Duke. Then there's Rion Brown, who has been wearing a Nike Kevin Durant orange shoe throughout the season and Erik Swoope has had a unique mix including seen in Kobe's "Christmas" shoe although Huger wouldn't let him wear a "Gym Green" pair of Foamposites.

"Everybody has pretty good style," Larkin said.

McKinney-Jones led the shoe charge in Miami's next game against Florida State wearing a pair of Nike KD 5 "DMV" shoes that pays tribute to Kevin Durant's home-

town. McKinney-Jones scored game-high 15 points in the win over the Seminoles in his orange and blue colorways with a neon logo, which were released in December.

"Me, Shane and a few other guys on the team are real big shoe fanatics so we like to stay up on what is in with Jordans, Nikes, and switch it up for the games, especially the big games that are on TV," McKinney-Jones said. "We like to pull something nice out of our closets."

Larkin switched it up against Florida State as he put on a pair of Nike Air Foamposite One "Polarized Pink" shoes and had the socks to match.

"I like wearing shoes that nobody has and it catches my eye," Larkin said. "Hopefully I keep window shopping and I find some more crazy stuff."

For the majority of the season, Larkin has been wearing a pair of orange Chris Paul's CP3 VI shoes, but has been switching it up lately. He has a pair of highlighter orange shoes in his locker that he'd like to wear at some point, but says he needs time to break them in.

As far as other plans for the future, Larkin has ideas in mind.

"I have tricks up my sleeve that I already have," Larkin said. "I don't want to spoil the secret of the shoes I'm going to wear, but I'm definitely going to be pulling out some crazy stuff down the road."

The players are enjoying being able to show their creative side on the court.

"They're having a lot of fun," Huger said. "Winning solves everything and when you win, the team, coach L, everybody is happy about the program, the university, the students, and everyone is showing up to the games. We just have to continue winning and playing together, that's the key. And then the shoes speak on their personalities on the court and I want to continue with that. I give them some freedom with the shoes and colors. I won't let them go over-the-top, but when we win, I'll give them a little more freedom."

Miami basks in post-Duke glory, hoping for bright future

SportsIllustrated.com

Brian Hamilton

Jan. 25, 2013

First everyone had to wait for the stragglers, the Miami players bobbing in the flume of students on the court. Once they extracted themselves, these Hurricanes caught in the storm, the coach entered the locker room for a post-game chat that was anything but standard. The No. 1 team in the land had been reduced to cinders over the previous couple hours, and Jim Larrañaga told his club to enjoy it before turning their attention to the work ahead. Then he left. Then sophomore guard Shane Larkin arranged a circle of chairs, center Kenny Kadji ratcheted up his African music, and one by one they jumped in the middle to dance.

The celebration was just getting started. By Thursday morning, campus hummed with Miami's ascent to the top of the ACC and the program's newborn relevancy, underwritten by the previous night's mauling of Duke. Larkin walked to a 9:30 a.m. sports management class and fellow students stopped him, repeatedly, for chest bumps. As he made his way to his next class, Larkin estimated a group of 20 to 30 students followed along, talking about the game and asking for pictures all the way. The fans finally showed up. But that required Miami to arrive.

"Every program has to start somewhere," Larkin said. "People are saying it was the biggest game in school history and it could be a program-changing game. Hopefully, with what we did, it put us on the map."

Everything seems on the upswing for the basketball team with the best winning percentage in south Florida. One year after notching its first-ever winning record in ACC play, Miami is 5-0 in the league and thus two games clear of everyone else in the standings after its first victory over a No. 1 team in program history. And the Hurricanes are in position to defend that lead because the Hurricanes generally are in position to defend everything.

Duke scored 63 points on Wednesday night -- itself a manageable total -- and that was the most points Miami had allowed in a game since two days before Christmas. No one has scored 70 points on the Hurricanes since the season opener. Miami is eighth in the country in adjusted defensive efficiency (85.2 points per 100 possessions), one slot behind the Blue Devils team it just vanquished. Opponents shoot just 36.2 percent, the seventh best figure nationally and a "high-priority" number in the staff's mind. The effective field goal percentage defense of 42.4 is still bested by only 13 teams.

In Miami's first team meeting after the Final Four last April, Larrañaga asked his team a

question: Where did all four participants' defenses rank nationally? Not shockingly, his players were clueless. So the coach who just finished his first year on the job gave them one: None of the four clubs finished lower than ninth.

"It's definitely the biggest reason why we've continued to play well," Larrañaga said. "We've gotten better at helping each other. We've gotten better at rebounding at the defensive end of the floor. We've gotten better at communicating, at talking to each other and switching when it's appropriate, showing when it's appropriate, trapping the ball screen when that's called for. Those subtle adjustments, to the common observer, don't really mean much. But to a coach and to a player, when you see the impact it has on your opponent, you recognize it as a key to the game."

Some of it was just a matter of time. Larrañaga arrived after directing George Mason to five NCAA tournaments, including the 2006 Final Four run, and found a group of players making what he called "a major adjustment" to their thinking, especially on the defensive end. The result was acceptable enough in 2011-12 -- 20 wins, that 9-7 finish in the ACC -- but the Hurricanes don't believe they came to grips fully with Larrañaga's philosophy until this year.

"Having another year under coach L has helped, just knowing exactly what he wants," said senior guard Durand Scott, the team's leading scorer. "When he came in, he came with a plan and a vision. He didn't come with the intent of just getting by. We did so-so our first year, and the second year, we came to an understanding of what he wants and what he needs us to do. We just put everything together."

The Hurricanes help each other now, but they are instinctive and aggressive enough to help themselves, too. Early in the second half, Larkin jumped on a simple Duke exchange after a made basket to produce a score that further buried the Blue Devils. He had taken note that, for most of the game, Duke's primary ball-handlers managed inbound duties. After this particular score, he saw point guard Quinn Cook inbound the ball to center Mason Plumlee -- and, in a fraction of a moment, deduced that Plumlee inevitably would return the pass to Cook. In a flash, Miami had the ball back, and after Larkin missed a three-pointer, the ball came back to him for a layup and a 30-point lead.

"I'm always watching, trying to catch a routine or a habit they're doing," Larkin said. "I just saw it, and I knew Mason Plumlee was going to have to pass it back to Quinn. When I saw him catch it, I just made a run for it. And he threw a pretty soft bounce pass, and I was able to pick it up."

Every program needs a moment to compose itself. For Miami, that was Wednesday. The

Hurricanes had cracked the top 25 and Warren Sapp and Jimmy Graham were among those in attendance for the showdown with Duke. Larrañaga even had 20 guests fly into town for the event. The win over the Blue Devils means little if the Hurricanes lose their sense of purpose and thus their place near the apex of the ACC ... but the point is they actually have that problem.

"Experiencing this together has given them a lot of confidence and quite frankly had given them a lot of joy," Larrañaga said. "To go through a winning streak like the one we're on right now to start conference play, for the first time in school's history, is very special to these players. They know they're blazing a trail that's never been blazed before."

The Hurricanes' second-year coach had dinner with his phalanx of friends and relatives as Wednesday's delirium became Thursday's, returning home after midnight. He had 96 text messages and 50 emails and responded to those until 1:30 a.m. He then re-watched the Duke game. He went to sleep at 3 a.m., then awoke 75 minutes later to drive his son to the airport.

In a matter of hours after what he deemed the biggest regular-season win of his coaching career, though, Larrañaga dispatched a text message to the team that arrived on Larkin's phone precisely at 7:41 a.m. It read: Great job last night. Enjoy the day, be ready for practice tomorrow. We must prepare for Florida State. Coach L.

"Right to the point," Larkin said.

Memo delivered, but it was impossible to ignore the deliverance that preceded it. Scott, the 6-foot-5-inch senior from the Bronx, was stopped for pictures as he walked to his car. He received congratulatory text messages, about 15 he guessed, from numbers he didn't recognize. He thanked them, then added: Who is this? After the senders identified themselves, Scott still didn't know who they were. He pulled up for a late-night meal at The Cheesecake Factory and continued to hear echoes of applause dissolve into the late-night air. Cars stopped and honked their horns at him as he crossed the street. He was steps away from the restaurant when he passed by a police officer, sitting outside another eatery, who had but one question for him.

"How'd the 'Canes do tonight?" the officer asked, plainly oblivious. "Did they win?"

For the first time in a night of revelation, and maybe for the last time in a while, somebody had no idea who Durand Scott was or what Miami basketball had just done.

"The 'Canes won tonight," Scott assured the officer. "They did a good job."